

If there's one thing Evelyn Sprott can't tolerate, it's negativism.

"What downtown people need to do is stop complaining, roll up their sleeves and start working."

And that's exactly what Mrs. Sprott, her husband, Buster, and their entire family have been doing the past few years. Three years ago, the Sprotts were faced with a major decision. For 30 years, they operated an office supply business at 213 Madison. Faced with finding a new location when they decided they had had enough of renting, their friends told them to desert downtown and head for east Memphis.

But the Sprotts weren't so sure. They found a building at 238-240 Poplar Avenue that interested them. From the outside, it was an undistinguished row building of rust-colored brick. The downstairs had been a warehouse and workshop for electrical parts. There were two apartments upstairs, one of them occupied by an elderly woman, the owner. It didn't take the Sprotts long to make up their minds. Besides, they reasoned, they always liked working downtown.

"The owner hadn't decided to sell because she was afraid of living downtown, or any of that nonsense," Evelyn Sprott said emphatically. "It was because she didn't like climbing those steep stairs to her apartment."

It was those upstairs apartments that intrigued Mrs. Sprott.

During those last years at the Madison address, she developed an interest in antiques, reading everything on the subject she could get her hands on and making a few purchases. She even persuaded Mr. Sprott to set aside one section of the store for her antique "business." As her interest in antiques grew, so did her allotted space in the office supply store.

So when the opportunity to move to a new address came about, Evelyn Sprott wanted to make sure there was enough room for her rapidly-growing

Center City

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A BUILDING, OR TWO, OF THEIR OWN

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY BUSINESS

JIM ROPER

business. The two apartments above the main floor suited her purposes.

Quickly, the Sprotts set about cleaning and refurbishing their building. The downstairs floor had so many layers of grease that a hoe actually was needed to clean it. The family learned quickly they had to rely on their own taste and judgment rather than trust the ideas on "updating" the building that some construction people had.

Early in the refurbishing, a construction man took a look at the ornate, embossed tin ceiling

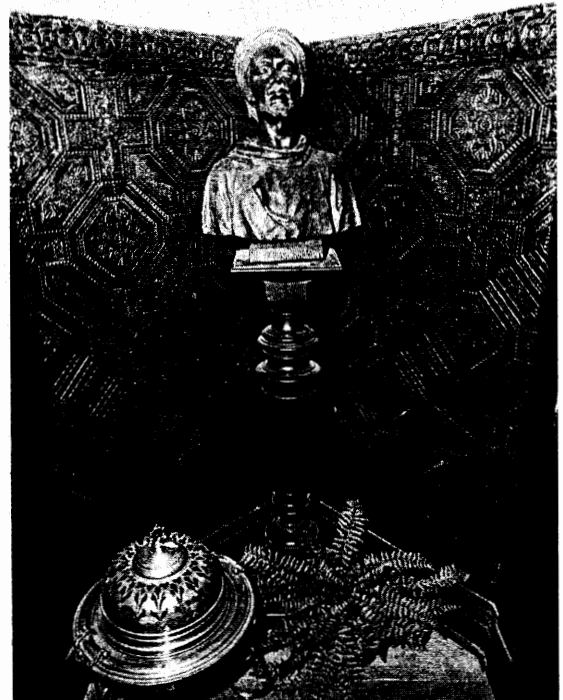


Photo by Alan Copeland: Wainscoting at the Sprotts'

above the lower floor.

"Well, the first thing you've got to do is lower that ceiling. Cover it up with some nice acoustic tile."

Fat chance, thought Evelyn Sprott as she listened patiently and then politely showed the man the front door.

Armed with a roller, the 5-foot-two-inch Mrs. Sprott painted the entire ceiling herself. A warm, gold color has transformed it into one of the many sights that dazzle visitors to the building.

A leather-like wainscoting on the stairway walls is the first hint that the visitor is in for a treat upstairs. He quickly finds himself in what might have been a typical, upper middle-class Memphis home in 1909, the year the building was completed. It is as though the apartments are occupied. Furniture, carefully arranged, fills each of the ten rooms. Clocks tick. Tables in the dining room and kitchen are filled with dishes, as though company was expected. Modern heaters have replaced the coal burners that once occupied fireplaces in the apartments. So the rooms are warm and cheerful.



Photo by Alan Copeland: Upstairs at the Sprotts.

Closer inspection shows that those rooms actually are filled with European and American antiques, porcelain and glass from France and the United States, as well as some Oriental antiques.

Mrs. Sprott has begun to label some of the rooms according to their contents. In one, the Oriental Room, most of the objects were purchased on a trip to the Far East. There are hand-painted screens from Japan and Hong Kong, carved ebony figures from Bali, a dry ink pot from China.

Much of the furniture has been found on trips in the rural South, especially Alabama. In each room, the visitor finds some reminder of another era: cabinets for spools and needles, a pine blanket chest, a wicker baby buggy, a rare tin plate warmer (on which plates were set after being brought into the house from an outside kitchen).

"We all love this building and what we've put into it because it has so much individuality," Evelyn Sprott said. "It tickles me when some of my friends say, 'Aren't you afraid to work downtown?' I just tell them I'm as safe, maybe safer, than they are in the suburbs. And statistics prove me right."

The Sprotts are still working. A patio area behind the building, highlighted by a huge, wrought-iron gate, is used for eating lunch during warmer months. The family has just purchased the building next door with the hope of expanding their business. The Sprotts' two sons, Bill, a chemical engineer, and John, who has a master's degree in music, have joined the family business because of their increasing involvement and interest. The family has a lot of work ahead of them, but it doesn't seem to bother them a bit.

"We'll tackle anything," Evelyn Sprott said proudly.

CENTER STAGE

French fun - a sporting affair

A REVIEW

PAT WATERS

"A Shot in the Dark" is an English adaptation by Harry Kurnitz of Marcel Achard's "L'Idiote." Achard was a "Boulevard" playwright of Paris in the first half of this century, i.e. he wrote for the popular theatre not the avant garde. The play provides the plot, if not the realization, of Blake Edwards' film "A Shot in the Dark." Inspector Clousseau was an Edwards' inclusion created specifically for Peter Sellers.

The play is a who-done-it. Who shot the chauffeur in the maid's bedroom? Why does the maid confess so readily? Why are Monsieur and Madame so eager to have her confession believed? A silly plot to be unravelled by the audience before the investigating magistrate can ask the proper ques-

tions and figure out who's been sleeping in whose bed? But no matter, for the players attack the play with *panache*. The timing is excellent, the accents remarkably accurate. The confidence of the players carries the play, for they do not take themselves or it very seriously. It is enough to intrigue with personality and to make the audience laugh — in short to entertain.

Ellen Tolleson plays Josefa, the maid, an incurable child of love. John Dunavent is Paul Sevigne, the young magistrate who finds his integrity challenged by a *cause celebre*. The charming sensuality of the maid is played to and offset by the stern attractiveness of the young lawyer. Mike



John Dunavent coaxing a confession from Ellen Tolleson—"A Shot in the Dark"

Jeter is the chain-smoking, harrassed civil servant who is responsible for Sevignes' errors; his nervous little body accentuates the subplot involving Sevignes' career. Beverly Baxter has the supporting role of Sevignes' wife, Antoinette, who has her own reasons for wanting the case appropriately solved. Larry Riley carries a standard comedic figure, the bumbling, yet arch, law clerk. Mike Darling is the casually amorous Monsieur and Leigh Warden has the right touch of *hauteur* for Madame.

The Playhouse on the Square delivers what it promises: professional theatre. The setting is attractive and versatile. The price is right — \$3.00. "A Shot in the Dark" will appear through January 18. "Tobacco Road" will commence its run on January 21. See you there.

For two years Center City has been distributed free of charge. We were able to do this because we had financial support from First Presbyterian Church and the Memphis Presbytery, a group made up of Presbyterian churches in West Tennessee, eastern Arkansas, and southwest Missouri.

Partial, but not total, funding will be available to the paper this year. This means we have to ask for funds from other sources to continue publishing. We hope our readers can help. If you are able to contribute, fill out the coupon below and send it, along with a \$5 subscription fee, for a year's subscription to the paper.

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Help us make 1976 our best year yet. Send in your subscription fee today.

SPECIAL NOTE—As of Volume III, No. 1, CENTER CITY will cease to be a weekly; it will be published bi-monthly instead.

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LINC: New Referral System

from Carolyn Luck of
the Library Information Center

Have you ever needed some information or a service, but you didn't know where to begin to find it? For people in Memphis and Shelby County, the place to begin is the Public Library and Information Center. The library is offering a new information and referral service in an effort to function more fully as an information center. The service is called LINC (Library Information Center); it will link you and your problem with the agency, group or individual who can help you.

For example, if you want to find out where to donate an old hearing aid or old eye glasses, or if you have a low income and need to know where you can get a hearing aid or glasses that you can afford, LINC can help you. If you think your child may have a learning disability or emotional problem, but you don't know where to seek testing and evaluation, LINC can put you in touch with the proper agency. If you want to locate interest groups or local chapters of national organizations, call LINC. If you have a beehive you need help in getting rid of safely or clothing you want to give away, LINC can link you with someone who has the help you need — or who needs what you have to give.

The library has information on approximately 300 agencies, organizations and groups in Memphis and Shelby County which do things for people. In addition to the LINC file, the many back-up resources of the entire library system (reference materials in subject departments, back issues of newspapers and periodicals, government publications, Memphis history files, out-of-town phone directories, etc.) are available to provide you with the information you seek.

In short, when you need information which can help you solve everyday problems or find services, the library is the place to start. LINC service is available in the downtown area starting January 19th at Cossitt-Goodwyn (528-2984) 33 South Front Street and at the Learning Resources Center at Shelby State Community College (528-6743) 737 Union. The LINC number at the Main Library is 528-2999. Call or stop in at your nearest branch of the MSCPLIC and use your information center.

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DOWNTOWN EXHIBITS

Sterick Building (Lobby)

January—work by Winston Stringfield*

FILM

Center Film Society

January 16—"Amarcord"—UT Student
Activity Center Auditorium—7:30 p.m.

Brooks Gallery

January 18—"Jane Eyre"—2:30 p.m.*

THEATRE

Circuit Playhouse

Through February 1—"Ruling Class"