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Trends

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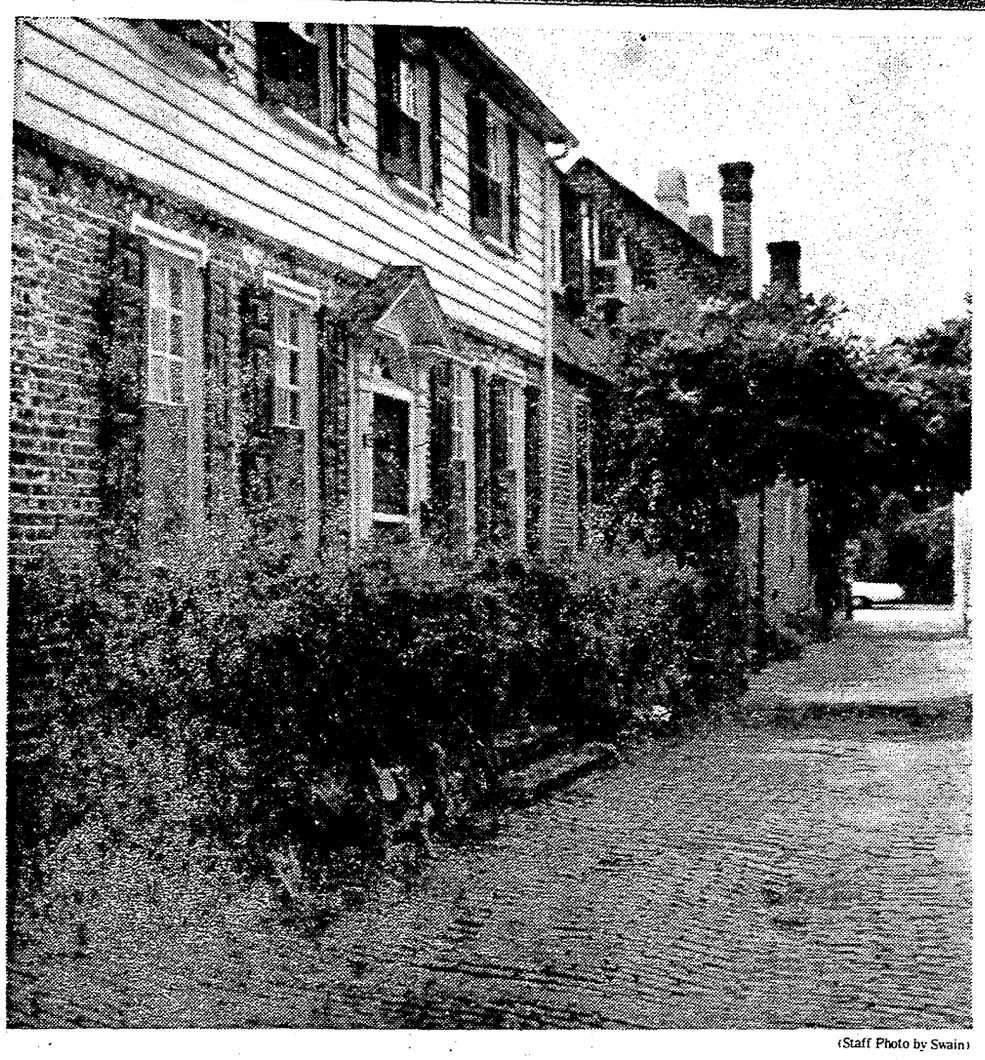
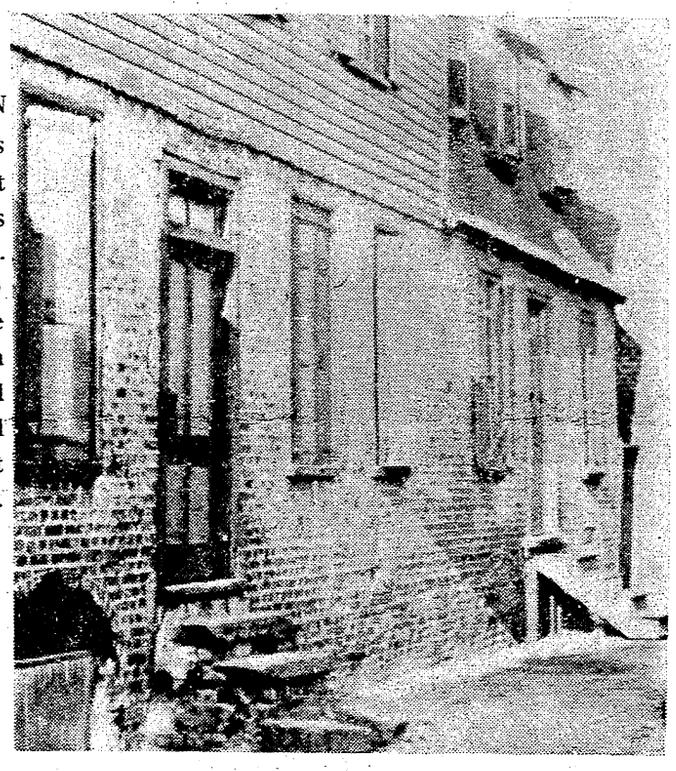


(Staff Photo by Swain)



TRANSITION
Today, Stoll's Alley (above) is a quiet shaded group of homes located off Church Street. In 1927, the alley (right) was unpaved and the houses in poor condition until Mrs. George Canfield began her single-handed restoration project which ended in 1935.

Stoll's Alley Reflects History Of The South

By KAREN AMRHINE
Staff Reporter

Stoll's Alley could serve as a barometer of the fortunes of the South—its good and bad days mirror history.

And until Mrs. George Canfield began her single-handed restoration of the lane in the 1920s, it seemed the alley would never again see good days.

But Mrs. Canfield's house at 50 Church St. had no garden, and with her decision to get a yard came the rebirth of Stoll's Alley.

In 1927 she bought the property at No. 9 Stoll's Alley, intending to tear down the building and use the land to expand her yard.

"But Mother got so carried away with the house at No. 9 that we never got our yard," recalls her daughter, Mrs. Warwick P. Bonsal.

Mrs. Canfield's friends and family scoffed at the idea of restoring the old house. "The man from whom she bought the property said, 'You must be crazy. You can't do anything with any of these buildings,' " Mrs. Bonsal points out.

"And I thought she was crazy, too," another daughter, Mrs. Joseph S. Hanahan, remembers.

But she proved them wrong. First, Mrs. Canfield got the city to brick the muddy lane. Then she hired Charleston contractor Tom Pinckney, a carpenter experienced in restoration.

Without the services of an architect, Mrs. Canfield designed plans for woodwork—doorways, mantles, stairs and moulding—which Pinckney carried out.

While working on the house, Mrs. Canfield was in the alley when a woman in No. 5 opened an upper story window to throw out a bucket of dirty water. Mrs. Bonsal says. "Mother had a quick glance at the attractive woodwork inside, then tipped the woman 50 cents for permission to come in and have a closer look."

She purchased No. 5. Eventually Mrs. Canfield bought and restored all the houses except No. 11, which was unavailable for purchase.

The earliest official record of the lane is found in 1759, when a Mary Smith sold the property to Justinius Stoll, a blacksmith. Until 1762, it was a private alley. By 1778 it was known as Stoll's Alley, Stoll having completed the alley by extending the passage to the bay.

Another resident of the alley was Peter Trezevant, whose family came to America in 1786. The "Carolina and Georgia Almanac for 1803" listed him as a discount and transfer clerk for the South Carolina Bank. According to tradition, Trezevant, a bon vivant, lived in ungentile poverty until his wife inherited a fortune and the two moved to England.

When a friend and distant relative, Capt. Tom Jervey, visited him in London, tradition also relates, Trezevant slapped Jervey on the back, saying, "Not much like Stoll's Alley, eh! Tom, old boy?"

In 1810, No. 4 caught fire. Officials believed the fire had been set, as part of plans to set the city afire.

During the Civil War, the alley was shelled from Fort Johnson. Mrs. Canfield removed several small cannon balls from the beam of No. 9 when she began restoration.

By the late 1800s the alley had deteriorated further. And on Jan. 15, 1894, The News and Courier reprinted an article from The New York Times describing Stoll's Alley as "a narrow, dirty little lane in the lower part of the city, connecting Church Street and East Bay."

Today Stoll's Alley, with its graceful gambrelled roofs, shaded brick lane and pretty gardens, belies its difficult, ugly period. For visitors walking down Church Street, the pleasant, unexpected entrance to the alley beckons.

For residents, the alley is just another aspect of Charleston's charm.

ALLEY PEOPLE
Miss Alida Canfield Hanahan (above) sits on the step of No. 9, the first house her grandmother restored. Gibbes Art Gallery director Russell MacBeth (left) lives in Mrs. Canfield's first "save", and says he enjoys the quietness of the small block.

Staff Photos

By Swain

Innovative Decorator Discards Accessories

Every room in the New York duplex apartment of interior designer Angelo Donghia can be used for sleeping, sitting and dancing. He recommends the idea to fall decorators.

But to accomplish a multiroom one must discard a lot of old decorating notions, he explains. For one thing, accessories.

Donghia is known for his elegant taste and wide swathe of design in interiors, furniture and bed linens.

"The home must become more simple in this era. I have even eliminated curtains, draperies and rugs wherever I can. Window treatment is anyway the most expensive part of decorating, and the hardest to do and to maintain."

He finally did put blinds on the window of his ground floor kitchen, but only after passersby were attracted to the open window, peering in to inquire where he had gotten the small black and white floor tiles, the black curtains or some culinary objects. Some continue to peer through the blinds.

"In the '60s a trend began to accessories. Etageres were bought to hold collections of junk — little pots without handles, chipped vases and the like from flea markets. We must get rid of such things. There should be only major accessories — a jar for flowers, an ashtray, books, records, some art, things that are vital to our living."

Some things should be stored for the future. He has stored his collection of little and big mercury glass wig stands, but he has given away his shell collection. As for art, he prefers now more personal things — the art efforts of friends. He has tacked their paintings and drawings all over his apartment.

At the moment he will not part with his 9-foot-6-inch Coromandel screen that formerly belonged to Coco Chanel. He has eight of the original 12 panels. But if it becomes extraneous that, too, will go.

His decorating ideas began to change, he says, when he was a guest of a well-known decorator who had invited maybe 150 people to his home. The party was held outdoors — no one was invited indoors. Donghia peered through locked glass doors to observe a dining table set beautifully with hors d'oeuvres, centerpiece, candles, fruit, the works.

"It was a pseudo-set and I learned a lesson. It suddenly hit me that decorating should be for living, not for looking at..."

In his apartment he has contrived comfortable seating by the use of box springs, down-layered mattresses, down-filled pillows.

One bed is set at an angle toward the center of the floor (and can seat four people). There is a seating arrangement on the floor with cushions propped against the wall. The white ottoman covering the mattress of the bed is laced underneath for easy removal. And there are a lot of big, plump white ottoman-covered pillows.

At the dining end of his kitchen, a banquette around two sides of a butcher block dining table is covered in machine-washable white seersucker that costs less than $2 a yard. It is also used on big, squishy downfilled pillows. If one plans to use white, as he does, one should use zippers and make two sets of everything, he suggests.

In the living room "a core of foam covered with a sleeve of down" makes a big cushy mattress that is used over a box spring covered in the same white satiny material. Oversized down pillows are used.

If a living room is done well with the proper background, he says, "it would not look undecorated even if it has only two ottomans in it." His living room could pass that test.

Walls are jade green, white moldings include a dentile one at the ceiling which he put up himself, along with the arch pediment above the door. Ceilings are done with silver tea papers, the rugless floor is bleached white mahogany. He has irreverently, too, painted an old American pine fireplace, white.