

EXPERIENCE WESTFIELD ON FOOT; IT'S AN ARCHITECTURAL FEAST FOR THE EYE

BY ROBERT ALGARIN AND CARRIE HAYES

Westfield is a stunning example of what an American suburban town of its size should be. It is a melting pot of styles, which vividly reflects the character of our society. Experience our town on foot. It is a feast for the eyes.

If you arrive on the train from New York City, you can stop at Xocolatz, order a snack, and while you wait, take a look at the old photographs. Try to identify the buildings still standing from the pictures of the downtown district taken a hundred years ago.

Part of Westfield's beauty and grace is the happy accident of free market chaos combined with good luck. The organic development over a long period of time with little or no government intervention is this quintessential monument to the free enterprise system.

People have done their own thing and wanted a nice place to live at the same time. It is our good fortune that these people had style and knew a great location when they found one!

Every architectural period is represented in the commercial zone. The Fire House (1890s) is Romanesque and The Bank of America on Elm Street is contemporary. Both masonry, one brick, one stone.

If you wander up Elm Street, there on the corner of East Broad is Arcanum Hall (1894) with its splendid Queen Anne turret on the third floor. Look all the way down to the right and there is the Rialto Theatre (1922), which is across from the Presbyterian Church (1862). Standing in front of Arcanum Hall, look all the way to the left, one sees the 1950s classic Vickie's Diner,

then the War Memorial (1923) and the stately Methodist Church (1859).

Stroll up Elm Street and make a right opposite the graceful white Federalist House with the elegant porch and mansard roof. Walking down Kimball Avenue, you can enjoy one beautiful home and architectural movement after the next.

Residential styles run the gamut – the most predominant being the Victorian houses, which pull various architectural elements from various periods: Georgian revival, Gothic, Colonial, Federalist, Queen Anne and Neo Jacobean. Check out 237 Kimball (1897) 242 Kimball (1895), 265 Kimball (1885) and 266 Kimball (1890). What we typically classify as Victorian is in fact, distinctly American, particularly Northeastern. The houses' different architectural characteristics exemplify the eclectic vernacular design prevalent throughout Westfield, particularly in its older neighborhoods.

Along any number of streets, one can enjoy beautiful examples of America's architectural history. 120 Wychwood Ave, otherwise known as the South Gate, is a whimsical example of the American Tudor style.

Enter Wychwood by the gate house (1920s) across the street from the Temple (1953) on East Broad Street. This part of town is a beautiful development, filled with small modest homes from the early 19th Century, Check out 38 and 40 Canterbury Lane, which are lovingly restored alongside exquisite Tudors (837 Kimball Avenue and 921 Kimball Avenue) and landed gentry type estates (10 and 12 Kimball Circle).

An interesting renovation can be found at



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280 Canterbury Road, where every detail possible is at work to give back this Tudor's distinctive detailing.

Like the rest of Westfield, Wychwood has its fair share of knockdowns. They are being replaced by spectacular examples of the eclectic vernacular, which make up the majority of homes in town. There are approximately 10,000 homes in Westfield.

That a Tudor can peacefully co-exist down the street from a split ranch is one of the remarkable charms of this town.

The constantly changing and evolving landscape of Westfield's neighborhoods reflects the vitality of its community and the folks who live here.

Even as older homes are torn down and new ones erected, the eclectic vernacular style continues to remain a vital characteristic of even new houses being built in Westfield.

We concentrate on these external elements because they define the environment. Yet, people live inside.

Even the most austere, traditional homes are being treated to new rooms that are open and airy, with lots of glass, high ceilings and kitchens which are less formal and open to the rear yards, tucked away behind those windows, where one so often thinks, "I wonder what it's like inside. What would it be like to live there?"

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