

Author takes readers on thrilling road trip across Texas in 'Paper Ghosts.'

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Section D ★★



Courtesy of Hilary Bellew
Lawrence and Marie Simon pose outside their Montrose home in 1909. Grandson Hilary Bellew recently restored the home.

Rejuvenating a Montrose bungalow

Couple brings 109-year-old family home into 21st century with thoughtful update



Diane Cowen / Houston Chronicle

Hilary and JoAnn Bellew re-create a photo taken of Hilary's grandparents when they built this Montrose home in 1909.

By Diane Cowen

Lawrence and Marie Simon stood side by side at the corner of their humble white bungalow in 1909, posing for a photographer who'd seal their images in a black-and-white photo for later generations to see. Lawrence wore an austere, dark suit and Marie had her hair pinned up high, her skirt hanging to just above the ground.

They were on what then was Baker Street in Montrose, a dirt road just off of Lincoln Street.

Now it's West Drew, and it's accessed by a bigger, newer Montrose Boulevard, and the couple re-creating the scene for a new photographer is Hilary and JoAnn Bellew. Hilary, the Simons' grandson, grew up not far away on Jackson Street. Hilary, 74 and retired from

a career in the medical device industry, remembers using an upstairs bedroom to study with his friends when they were students at the University of St. Thomas.

While the Bellews have lived in other parts of the Houston area, Hilary's roots are here on West Drew in this home that his family has owned since it was built 109 years ago. Marie Simon lived in it until she died in 1971; after that, Hilary's mother, Emma Bellew, lived in it until her own death in 2005 at the age of 95.

The Bellews recently lived on the corner, keeping this little bungalow as their guest house until they decided it was time to give this slice of family history some contractor TLC and turn it back into their primary residence.



Michael Hart

In 1920, stairs to a new second floor were added at the back of the living room.

Home continues on D6

THEATER REVIEW

'Ma Rainey' has contemporary feel

By Wei-Huan Chen

The key difference between an August Wilson production and a standard white or European period piece is that the Wilson play doesn't sound antiquated.

In a Russian or British-origin play, actors love to adopt faux European accents that make them sound both sophisticated and ridiculous. This happens in 20th-century American works, like Tennessee Williams, as well. But good actors in good

Wilson productions don't sound like they're in a historical re-enactment.

That's partly because actors of color don't have the same expansive canon of affect and pretension — of white queens and white squires and white star-crossed balcony lovers — to draw from. It's also because Wilson was a master of the vernacular, whose themes surrounding black identity remain, unfortunately, timeless. His verbal rhythms carry an every-
Struggles continues on D2

Turn your pet into an Instagram star



TobyLittleDude on Instagram

TobyLittleDude, from Canada, is a 12-year-old Maltese that gets thousands of likes on Instagram.

Trick to fetching followers is to have good story

By Craig Hlavaty

Pretty much right after I adopted my elderly shih tzu kid Prince, people told me he should be an Instagram-famous dog. His kind eyes, relaxed stoner demeanor, babe-magnet underbite and small limp with his front right leg make him almost overqualified.

Quite simply, he's got a double-tap friendly look. Any photo or video of Prince, either at the beach, at the dog park, or asleep on a pile of my

clean clothes, deserves a like — and receives several.

Anyone on Instagram probably follows at least a handful of celebrity dogs with names like TobyLittleDude, Ollie, Marnie, Jiff the Pom and Norbert, my own personal favorite. They have more followers than everyone you will ever know combined, but not as many as a stray Kardashian.

There is a rescued stray in Los Angeles named Popeye the Foodie Dog that poses with food and wears cute clothes. That's literally all he does. He has more

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STAR

Home has been in the same family since 1909

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Back in 1909, the home had just four rooms — a living room and dining room, kitchen and a single bedroom — in 1,000 square feet. They had electricity but no indoor plumbing. A lean-to on the side of the house was their ice house, with a French drain — essentially a rock-covered hole — where water from the ice drained into the ground. In the backyard was a small barn where the Simons kept their horse and buggy — Henry Ford had just introduced his Model T's, so few people owned automobiles then.

In 1920, after the Simons had children, they added a narrow staircase to the back of the living room, leading to two bedrooms and a tiny half bathroom upstairs. And indoor plumbing was added, too, in an 8-foot room at the back of the house.

Hilary jokes that the upstairs bathroom was so small that you had to open its window to lean forward to wash your face, and when you bent over, your backside went out to the hallway.

But that was life in Houston in the early years of the 20th century.

Hilary and JoAnn Bellew wanted to save his family's historic home but live in it on their own modern terms. They started work in the summer of 2016, and on Aug. 1, 2017, they spent the first night in their renovated and expanded home.

While Hilary started some of the work himself — removing layers of wallpaper and cheesecloth revealed the home's original shiplap — he knew he needed a professional. Not only was a full-home restoration a big job, but the home also needed to be completely rewired and re-plumbed.

Rob Hellyer of Premier Remodeling was called in, and after getting through the design phase and a tricky permitting phase — because the home was built 109 years ago and had never been sold, it lacked a certain kind of deed they needed for the permits — they got to work.

The original front door was on the side of the home and entered directly into the living room. They moved that door to the front of the home and, in the process, created a foyer. The kitchen got a complete makeover, and space once devoted to a bedroom allowed for a laundry room and new downstairs powder room.

At the back of the home is a new 27-foot-by-27-foot space that includes a master bedroom and bathroom and a morning room that has a wet bar, built in storage cabinets and room for a small, round walnut table that once belonged to Hilary's great-grandfather, Joseph H. Schnell, who was a physician in Comfort and who lived in the home after he retired.

The home's old-growth pine floors were covered in layers of



Michael Hart photos

Contractor Rob Hellyer of Premier Remodeling found reclaimed old-growth pine flooring for the bedroom, matching what was in the original part of the home.



A whole new kitchen gives a contemporary update to this 109-year-old Montrose home.

paint, and the goal was to re-finish them to their original luster, then add matching reclaimed pine to the new part of the home.

Hellyer said his fingers were crossed on that one, since they

really had no idea what was under all of that paint and the floors had never been refinished. In fact, the flooring is glorious, with the wood's strong grain showing through on the floors and in other mill-

work throughout the home.

"Hilary's a somewhat rare bird in that he was so committed to salvaging and reusing windows, millwork and other features of the home," Hellyer said.

An old bathtub that was original to the home but sat in the backyard for at least 15 years was restored and re-enameled for the master bathroom.

Upstairs, the two guest rooms finally got a nice, new bathroom that runs along the roof line on the east side of the home. And the second-floor space was extended on top of the new addition, adding square footage to the back bedroom and creating finished storage space, too.

It's nostalgia that brought Hilary and his wife, JoAnn, 75, back to this home. It's full of good memories and family history.

One day, he opened a trunk that was stored upstairs to find nearly crumbling Houston Chronicle clippings with blaring headlines about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. There were old family photos, too, one showing Lawrence Simon at work at the Texas New Orleans Railroad and another showing Schnell and his beloved horse, Blaze, along the Guadalupe River with a group

of cowboys.

There were boxes of his great-grandfather's old medical equipment, leading Hilary to speculate that he might have treated patients while he lived here.

Life was hard when this home was built, and the Belles are grateful it's easier today.

Hilary recalls that his grandmother used an old-fashioned iron on everything in the home and every piece of clothing that anyone wore. Sheets, pillowcases, every inch of fabric was ironed.

"I remember in the 1950s when the canned biscuits — the kind that pop out of the can — came out. Oh, my grandmother loved those. Before that, she got up and made biscuits every day. Then the instant coffee, oh, she loved it, too," Hilary said.

When the home was built, closets were small, mostly because people didn't have extensive wardrobes like we have today. Hilary's grandmother sewed everything her children wore and many things her grandchildren wore — and she made it by hand, not with a sewing machine.

"My grandmother could make anything. When I was in grade school, she made my shirts," he said. "And the flour sacks, they were made into things. When you came home with your new school books, she sewed flour sack cloths into book covers to keep the books nice. They didn't have much money, and they were very thrifty."

It's not just the structure that's part of the Simon-Bellew family history. It's also filled with things that three generations have used on a daily basis.

In the foyer, there's an old chair with legs, arms and back rimmed with animal horns. Pure Texana, you'll spot it on the porch in a sepia-toned photo of Dr. Schnell's home in Comfort, likely taken in the late 1800s. There are other pieces of furniture that his grandparents owned, and family photos that span five generations, from Schnell to the Simons to Hilary and JoAnn and their two children, daughter Renee and son Ryan, as well as Ryan's two young sons, Joseph and Henry.

The dining room table was purchased when the Belles first married and at least a couple of chandeliers have followed the couple from home to home.

Hilary Bellew said that he and his wife expect to live here until they die, just as his parents and grandparents did. "If anybody doesn't understand how much I put into doing this and getting it done, the amount of time, effort and drawings to get it right," he said, smiling and shaking his head at the same time. "It was a house that hadn't really been touched in almost 100 years."

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Pets need good backstory — cute photos — to earn celebrity status

Pets from page D1

than 315,000 followers.

Come to think of it, that's what most Instagram human "models" do anyway.

TobyLittleDude's owner, Joyce, tells me that the origin of the 12-year-old Canadian hipster dog's internet fame is rather simple.

"Toby and I were sitting at Starbucks on a sunny day. I put my sunglasses on Toby for fun and noticed he didn't mind wearing them," she says. "I took a photo and posted it to my Instagram page."

This was before Toby had his own Instagram, she notes, and that photo got more likes than any other photo she had posted of herself. He now has over 156,000 followers for his own account.

"He's been recognized a few times in public, but it doesn't happen that often," she says. "I think people are used to seeing him in his dark-framed glasses."

But how does one go



Craig Hlavaty / Houston Chronicle

Prince Hlavaty uses his cute underbite and a slight limp to charm those around him.

about making a dog a celebrity? How do I turn my 13-pound roommate into a celebrity so we can get invited to hot parties at bars in Midtown and Chick-Fil-A store openings? How do Prince and I become millionaires for the rest of his life?

Believe it or not, there is an expert, of sorts, on how to make a dog Instagram famous.

Richard Wong, vice president of marketing and creator relations at influencer marketing platform #paid, tells me that the key to setting a dog apart from other IG dogs is personality.

"Your dog should represent more than just a cute photo. Help convey what your dog loves to do, create a central theme around what your dog



Jiff Pom on Instagram

JiffPom, one of the most popular pups on Instagram, has an ever-changing wardrobe.

does, eats and where it travels to," Wong says.

Prince sleeps, pees on trees and tires, listens to Grateful Dead bootlegs, eats carrot sticks and Beggin' Strips, and usually travels abroad to such exotic locales as Pearland and Friendswood.

Can we get some sort of dog food/Nike/Red Bull thing going? Maybe a

line of toys that look like him?

"Sponsorships can work in many different ways, although the most successful campaigns are both monetary and product," Wong says. "The team behind every account should have the product to try, test and include in the content, but monetary compensation ensures they're com-

pensated fairly for their work and ensures there's a contractual agreement in place."

What sort of dogs do the best on Instagram? Should they be palm-size or at least purse-size?

"The type of dogs don't matter as much as the storytelling behind it," Wong says. "Aside from that, unique-looking dogs are some of the top-performing pet accounts on Instagram."

Unique? Like an elderly toy shih tzu with a prominent underbite being lead around by a tattooed bald guy typically dressed like a roadie for Keith Urban?

To steal a line from Pastor Joel Osteen, I think Prince and I are about to start living our best lives now.

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