

ORCHESTRA IN A BOX

Bingham-Waggoner Estate music room, 313 W. Pacific Ave., Independence

Back before the iPod, by about a century or so, music rooms were all the rage among the well-heeled. Musical instruments and players were pieces of furniture, not something you could stick in your pocket. And there were no headphones, so the enjoyment was to be shared.

Music rooms are always a clue that bliss might be near.

Thank goodness the family of William H. Waggoner liked to keep up with the times. Their music room was the dining room back when painter George Caleb Bingham owned the house in the 1860s. But the Waggoners could afford the space for a music room after they added on to the house in 1895 — to the tune of 20 rooms.

A Steinway piano, a 1920s electric Victor Victrola and an ornate pump organ provided the accouterments necessary to create the appearance of refinement for the flour-mill barons.

But it was their purchase in the 1890s that moves the room from pomp to bliss. For \$1,500, they bought a Swiss cylinder orchestral music box. Most boxes would have cost between \$50 and \$150.

"If they didn't have someone to play piano, or if they just wanted to impress guests with their gorgeous music box, it would have been played," says Jim Austin, a board member of the Bingham-Waggoner Historical Society.

So what makes it so special? First, it's more than 2 feet long — the cylinders that play the box are 20 inches long. Each cylinder holds eight tunes — and the Waggoners owned eight of the cylinders. The selection far exceeds "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Mendelssohn, Wagner, Verdi, Rossini — those are the composers represented.

The songs are hardly plucked out on metal combs. A 30-key reed organ, six tuned bells, drums and wood blocks and castanets played by three figurines make a full and rich sound.

An heir took the music box as his inheritance in 1979. Three years ago he called Austin to see if the house might be interested in the box again.

He offered a reasonable price, based on the appraisal — \$35,000.

"I said, whatever it takes — we need that box back in this house," Austin says.

After a vigorous fundraising campaign, now it is. Happily.



Bliss in a box? That's what you'll hear from the Swiss cylinder orchestral music box at the Bingham-Waggoner Estate. Jim Austin, a board member of the Bingham-Waggoner Historical Society, is happy to have the box back where it belongs.

ART OF THE DEAL

Overland Park Sheraton lobby, 6100 College Blvd.

Can there be bliss in the business deal? Maybe it depends on your surroundings. A new favorite among corporate movers and shakers is the lobby of the Sheraton hotel connected to the Overland Park Convention Center.

The main entrance of the hotel boasts shiny marble and friendly desk personnel. OK, everybody expects that. But keep walking past the desk — you'll know you are headed in the right direction if you spot opulence.

Deep leather chairs, sofas filled with cushy pillows, leather coffee tables or foot rests. It all says, "Have a seat, chap, let's talk merger." (Reread that in a British accent if you didn't the first time.)

Comfortable seating is all well and good, but bliss is achieved with nooks set off by brass-studded, leather room dividers that promise privacy, comfort and warmth.

It works well, too. My attempts to eavesdrop on a business deal near the fireplace were futile.

The look is completed with rich mahogany paneling, thick brown accents and molding, bookshelves decorated with old typewriters, black-and-white photographs of clocks and watches. It's all saying, "Oh, yeah, it's business time."

But maybe business hours are over and you need to relax. That's when the cocktail servers come around. An early-evening drink with friends in sumptuous surroundings doesn't sound all that unhappy, does it?

But if you need some alone time, there are four reading chairs with wingbacks more than four feet high, finished in soft houndstooth upholstery.

Not what you expect of a conference hotel? Sometimes pleasant surprises are bliss.

And you might be surprised by the conference center, too. Balking at bare walls or cheesy decor, the city chose to buy more than 100 original sculptures and paintings from local artists. ★

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Cushy pillows and artistic expression beckon visitors to linger in the lobby of the Overland Park Sheraton.

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