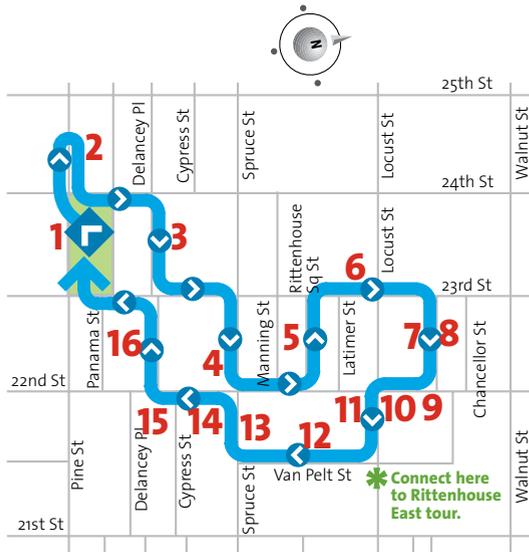


Rittenhouse West

Rittenhouse West is located in Center City Philadelphia.



The tour starts at Fidler Square, bounded by 23rd and 24th, Pine and Panama Sts. To get there to begin the tour, take the #7 or #12 buses, which run north on 22nd Street and south on 23rd Street and stop at Fidler Square. The Square is a short walk north from the #40 bus, which runs west on Lombard Street and east on South Street. For more details, visit www.septa.org

Please note that most of the properties on the tour are private residences and not open to the public, unless indicated with (OP).

Text by Paula Spilner. Photo #4 by Tom Crane; all other photos by James B. Abbott.

The western portion of the Rittenhouse Fidler Historic District is one of the most varied residential areas in the city, with housing types from grand mansions of some of Philadelphia's wealthiest 19th-century entrepreneurs to tiny "trinitities," the vernacular houses thrown up by the hundreds to house the humbler classes.

The oldest houses in this district are survivors of the working-class neighborhood that grew westward from the Schuylkill River beginning in the 1820s. Notorious for its shallow rapids, the Schuylkill only became navigable for commerce with the completion of the Schuylkill Navigation System in 1825. The riverbank on the western edge of Philadelphia was soon lined with wharves and yards where coal and other commodities were unloaded and stored. These sites drew mostly unskilled workers and their families, who settled close to their places of work. The main streets and narrow alleys cut through larger blocks were lined with small brick houses rented to the mostly poor, mostly Irish immigrants who made up the majority of the population. Once known as "Ramcat," the neighborhood remained for decades an Irish enclave whose men did backbreaking labor and whose women served as maids and housekeepers in the fashionable households further east.

From the oldest part of the city east of Broad Street, residential development crept westward beginning in the 1840s and intensified dramatically after the Civil War. During this boom period, developers undertook large-scale speculative projects in which rows of identical houses were offered for sale to the growing middle and managerial classes. Some of these projects, like the 2300 block of Delancey Place and the 2200 block of St. James Street, were exceptional in the quality of their design. In the later-19th and early-20th centuries, some grand houses were custom designed for wealthy clients by the most prestigious architects in the city.

Eventually, the working-class neighborhood to the west and the upper-class neighborhood to the east met and merged. The stylish mansions on the main thoroughfares backed up to tiny houses on what local residents call the "little streets." As the Schuylkill waterfront gradually lost its industrial role in the first half of the 20th century, Ramcat became an early focus of rehabilitation. But even as apartment buildings began to replace mansions further to the east, the western portion of the district remained relatively unaffected. To this day, many of the blocks look more or less as they did at the turn of the 20th century. The physical fabric of the neighborhood, various in origin, style and scale, continues to provide the setting for a thriving 21st-century community. Along with the blocks surrounding Rittenhouse Square to the east, the neighborhood was designated by the Philadelphia Historical Commission as the Rittenhouse Fidler Historic District in 1995.

The tour begins at Fitler Square, between 23rd, 24th, Pine and Panama streets.

1

Fitler Square (OP)

Bounded by 23rd and 24th, Pine and Panama Sts.

1896, established; 1953, redesigned, Norman Rice



Fitler Square was created by city ordinance from a former brickyard in 1896 in honor of Edward Fitler (d. 1896), a mayor of Philadelphia (1887–91). He was an inventor and manufacturer as well as a noted philanthropist. In 1953, the one-half-acre park was redesigned by local architect Norman Rice. The Victorian-era cast iron fountain and pool in the center were added in 1976. Animal sculptures much loved by local children were installed in the 1980s after a major restoration. The park today is a leafy oasis, cared for by the Fitler Square Improvement Association.

Leave the Square at 24th and Pine Sts. and go right onto Pine.

2

2401–2425 Pine St.

c. 1835, Vernacular rowhouses



These two-and-one-half-story rowhouses are among the oldest surviving structures in the district. Conforming to a type nearly as old as the city itself, they are brick with marble sills and steps. On the upper stories, single dormers project from the pitched roofs. Most have been updated in detail, but all retain the basic form of working-class housing, modest and without decorative flourishes. They are the remnants of the neighborhood of workers who settled near the Schuylkill to work at the wharves and other industrial sites only a short walk to the west.

Return to 24th St. and turn left to Delancey. Turn right onto Delancey.

3

2300 block Delancey Place

Kaighn Development
c. 1876, Attributed to Frank Furness



Many of the blocks west of Broad Street were constructed by speculative developers, most of whom were content with rows of identical houses. This block is a notable exception. Twelve townhouses on each side form an integrated, symmetrical composition. Each row is framed by brick and brownstone houses at the corners. From the next group of three, the roof-lines rise in three steps in an architectural crescendo to the tallest pair at the center. The choice of materials introduces variety and color. On the north side, brownstone predominates; on the south side stippled Pennsylvania blue marble. Unifying elements are the steeply pitched mansard roofs with hexagonal slates and shallow dormers trimmed with wooden cross bracing as well as courses of turned brick and semi-hexagonal bays on the three-story houses. Many of the doors are original.

Continue on Delancey to 23rd St. Turn left on 23rd St. and continue to Spruce St. Turn right onto Spruce St. and continue to 22nd St.

4

2200 Spruce St., Trinity Memorial Church

1874–1875, Henry Augustus Sims and James Peacock Sims; 1994–97, renovations and restoration, Atkin Olshin Lawson-Bell



One of Trinity's founders was real estate developer Lemuel Coffin, who recognized that churches were an essential ingredient in the successful establishment of a new neighborhood. The Gothic Revival exterior is rusticated brownstone laid in irregular courses. Henry Sims had trained as a civil engineer and worked on railroad construction, which may account for a unique aspect of the design: the skeletal iron flying buttresses that brace the upper wall of the nave. These contributions of the industrial age allow for a diaphanous curtain of stained glass windows in the clerestory. In 1994, a disastrous fire gutted most of the interior, but restoration and renovation have reclaimed the structure, now managed by the nonprofit Trinity Center for Urban Life.

Turn left on 22nd St. and continue to Rittenhouse St. Turn left onto Rittenhouse St.

5

2206–2222 Rittenhouse St.

Greek Revival rowhouses,
c. 1850



This block illustrates the hierarchical distribution of housing types in the district. Narrow streets were opened through the larger blocks between major streets to provide building lots for unprepossessing houses. Even these modest brick homes, however, reflect the popularity of the Greek Revival style in Antebellum Philadelphia. Pennsylvania blue marble is used for the water tables, steps, lintels and window sills, lending a touch of elegance to houses that otherwise belong to a long-standing vernacular type. Here clerks and shopkeepers, tradesmen and mechanics lived, if not side by side, then back-to-back with their well-to-do neighbors.

Continue on Rittenhouse to 23rd St. and turn right.

6

236–44 S. 23rd St.

Dr. Joseph S. Neff House
1891/94, Charles
Balderston



This three-and-a-half-story, brick-and-brownstone house is a significant example of the Queen Anne Style. This style is well suited to corner locations, where the many and various forms typical of Queen Anne can be fully appreciated. At the Neff House, an oblique view makes visible the four different types of bay windows, including triangular and rectangular on the east face, semi-hexagonal on the north, and the two-story cylindrical bay dramatically projected from the corner, its conical roof silhouetted against the sky. The corner site also offered the opportunity to magnify the apparent size of the house by placing the entry on the long side facing 23rd St. Dr. Neff was on the staff of the Jefferson Medical College Hospital.

Continue on 23rd St. Turn right onto St. James Place.

7

2208–10 St. James Place

1898, Wilson Eyre



The contrast of dark-red brick and white-marble detailing makes the facades of these Victorian Gothic townhouses sparkle. The pointed brick arches of the tall narrow windows rest on marble impost blocks and are framed by marble drip moldings terminating in floral ornaments. The third-floor windows are especially elaborate: paired lancets subsumed under a single arch of alternating brick and marble voussoirs inside a marble molding. The inspiration here is not ecclesiastical, but the late medieval domestic and civic architecture of northern Italy so much admired by John Ruskin in his influential book *The Stones of Venice*.

8

2203–2203-1/2 St. James Place

1878, Attributed to Frank Furness



This pair of narrow houses, shoehorned into one-and-a-half lots, is a Victorian variation on Gothic forms. Each has a stone-face ground floor with a center entrance with hood moldings. The door of 2203 is flanked by stained glass windows, while 2203-1/2 has decorative panels with precisely carved flowering plants framed by crisp geometrical borders. On the second floor of each, a rectangular wooden bay window is supported on paired brackets. The tall narrow windows are framed by pilasters with inset panels of diagonally laid boards. The gables of the matching mansards are shaped, as if responding to the square frames of the windows jutting up from below.

From St. James Place at 22nd St., view the next site across the street.

9

**South 22nd St. at
St. James St.**

English Village

1928, *Spencer Roberts*

Opportunities for new development in Rittenhouse-Fitler sometimes arose when institutions departed for larger or more modern quarters. Children's Hospital moved from a large parcel on S. 22nd St. in 1923. In its place, Spencer Roberts built English Village, a mews of cottages in the Cotswold mode. When completed, this housing development was hailed as "A Bit of Olde England" in Philadelphia. Facing a common garden with winding path, the two- and two-and-a-half-story houses are unornamented stucco, but the massing of advancing and retreating facades and alternating gables and dormered slate roofs creates a uniquely picturesque enclave.

Turn right on 22nd St., and continue to Locust St. to view the next two sites, across the street at the northeast and southeast corners.

10

**229 S. 22nd / 2145
Locust St.**

John C. Bell House

1906, *Horace Trumbauer*

One of Horace Trumbauer's specialties was designing impressive town and country houses in whatever style his well-to-do clients required. The Bell House epitomizes the early-20th century Colonial or Georgian Revival, stimulated in part by the glorification of America's colonial past at the 1876 Centennial in Fairmount Park. Like the 18th-century townhouses of Society Hill, this house is brick trimmed with marble. On the second floor of both the main and side facades, the principal ornaments to this relatively restrained composition are the sets of tall double-hung windows which create the appearance of French doors framed with delicate iron balconies. Above each window is a segmental arch enclosing a relief medallion on a plain marble field. When he commissioned this house, John C. Bell was serving as district attorney of Philadelphia County and in 1911 he was appointed attorney general of the state.

7

11

231-49 S. 22nd St.

Frank Samuel House

1899, *Theophilus Parsons
Chandler*

T. P. Chandler set the standard for Georgian Revival taste in this house for iron merchant Frank Samuel. Traditional Philadelphia brick is laid in Flemish bond with burnt headers, a pattern found in many 18th-century Philadelphia houses. Also traditional are the marble water table and belt courses and the classical cornice with dentil frieze and modillions. No surviving Georgian city house, however, matches the grandeur of this seven-bay facade or the elegance of the entry, where stone columns supporting a Doric entablature frame a rusticated arch.

Cross 22nd St., and continue on Locust. Turn right onto Van Pelt St. or continue on Locust to join the route of the Rittenhouse East self-guided tour at 21st and Locust Sts.

12

256 Van Pelt St.

Stable

c. 1910



This narrow alley was cut through the larger block by about 1860 to provide building lots for modest vernacular houses and utility structures such as stables. In the 20th century, many of the stables were remodeled as residences while retaining evidence of their original function. No. 256 is a particularly handsome and well-preserved example. The brick is laid in Flemish bond with limestone trim. The third floor is capped by a wall gable.

Continue to Spruce St. and turn right.

8

13**2129 Spruce St.**
c. 1860, 1913, refacing

Presumably 2129 was originally identical to the Second Empire townhouses on either side, with which it shares the same mansard roof. Early in the 20th century it was transformed by the application of Mercer tile, manufactured at the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Doylestown, Bucks County. Henry Chapman Mercer, a leader in the turn-of-the-century Arts and Crafts movement, founded the Works in 1898 in an effort to recreate early Pennsylvania pottery manufacturing techniques. Particularly striking is the treatment of the upper stories with muted yellow tiles laid in a diamond pattern. The arched entrance is framed by tiles forming a curving ribbon punctuated by colorful rosettes.

Continue to 22nd St.

14**2132–34 Spruce St.**
c. 1889, Attributed to Frank Furness

The looming pile at the southeast corner of Spruce and 22nd is actually a pair of townhouses. The impression of a single mansion is created by the large brownstone entrance arch, Richardsonian in scale, which serves two separate doors. Otherwise the houses are essentially identical: brick with brownstone trim differentiated mainly by fenestration. The bay on the left facade appears on the 22nd St. face of the adjoining house. The corner house has a steeply pitched cross-gable roof, and each of the three shaped gables is trimmed in pressed metal.

Turn left onto 22nd St.

15**315–17 S. 22nd St.**
Neill and Mauran Houses*1890–91, Wilson Eyre*

Wilson Eyre drew on both medieval and colonial sources for this pair of brick townhouses. Most striking is the gambrel roof which embraces the 3rd and 4th stories, making a single composition of these two narrow houses. The main facade is picturesquely asymmetrical, but anchored by the double doorway on the central axis. Eyre paid special attention to the entry, which is framed in brownstone. Above the buttress that separates the two Dutch doors is a medieval female figure. She holds a garland which extends over both entrances and displays the house numbers over the keystones of the arches. The houses are named for John Neill and his partner in Pemberton Real Estate Co., which built them as a speculative investment.

Turn right onto Delancey Place.

16**2210 Delancey Place**
Dr. F. William Sunderman House
c. 1879; 1930, remodeled, Harry Sternfeld

This is one of 32 townhouses developed by William Weightman, partner in the chemical manufacturing company, Powers and Weightman, who, like other wealthy industrialists, turned to the lucrative business of real estate development. Most of the houses on the block retain their original appearance, but 2210 was remodeled to reflect a dramatic change in architectural taste. The style is sleek, minimalist Moderne. On the ground floor, refaced in pink stone, a large central window, matching doors, steps and porthole windows form a precisely symmetrical composition. Only a discreet bronze arrow below the silver house number identifies the main entrance; the other door leads to the kitchen. The casement windows, shiny aluminum trim and stair rails and the chevron-patterned grill in the basement window are all favorite elements of Moderne.

Continue to 23rd St. and turn left to return to Fidler Square.