Couple make their home a living history lesson

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Brunswig and Jessie Sholars live on Royal Street in a Queen Anne Victorian house named The Rex House.

Once a four-room Italian Tuscan design, it stands today a two-storied, 10-room, 4-bath home with 12-foot high ceilings. Painted blue, with white gingerbread, it looks like a big house of confection.

The Sholars are participating in 174 years of Baton Rouge history. The book of documents that Sholars, an attorney, get together carries the property history from the May 8, 1812, succession of Elias Beauregard, to his son, Bartholomew T. Beauregard, original subdivider of Beauregard's Plantation, to today. The thick collection of abstracts rests on a table in the parlor. It took six months on-and-off work to get the papers together, finding all the missing links. Among the property transfers is one to a "true woman of color" named Constance de Terrebonne, who lived there in 1821. The Sholars bought the house built between 1849 and 1849, in November 1969, dubbing it The Rex House for owner Frank Rex who lived there longer than any previous owner, (1904 to 1919). They then restored it to picture book perfection.

"We like to save modest dwellings that were part of the history of the community and return them to useful life for ordinary people to live in," says Mrs. Sholars. They've done this more than once.

The Rex House was listed as a separate entry on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, close behind the subdivision listing in 1980. It is a repository of heirlooms and antiques, pre-Colombian artifacts, new ideas and an old look.

"We have a lot of house," says Sholars, and they do — light plates, water faucets and candlesticks. Unexpected surprises such as gingerbread above a modern glass shower stall or a stained glass window matching splashboard to the kitchen are found alongside such items as a French clock that strikes twice on the hour and a painting of Reconstruction days depicting two of Sholars' great-uncles when they were arrested by Yankee troops in West Monroe. Adding interest are the spa on the enclosed patio and the tree-top balcony with just enough room for a table and two chairs.

"We have our morning coffee out here," says Mrs. Sholars, leading the way from the couple's upstairs three-room suite onto the balcony. "It's like being in a tree house." Days the Mississippi Queen or the Delta Queen is docked at the river, they hear the calliope play. Protected from the rain or blazing sun, they enjoy an upstairs view of the area of Baton Rouge they wanted to live in long before they did — Beauregard Town.

"We had friends looking out for us for a house in Beauregard for years," Sholars says.

Restoring homes is avocation, pleasure and beautification work for this pair, who in Chapala, Mexico, in 1955. After their marriage they restored a large home on Bayou Lacorne near Mandeville. Later they restored dwellings in California, (Mrs. Sholars' home state), an 1800 Acadian cottage in Clinton and a building on famed Lawyer's Row in Clinton.

"While we lived in California, we always had a home in Clinton," says Sholars. From 1974 to 1980 Clinton was their main residence.

Mrs. Sholars likes to design homes and did design a house on June Street in 1968, later sold. Through the years she became adept at drawing plans, taking a ruler and legal pad and putting down on paper what she wanted and the way she wanted it. This went to a house planning business to be drawn.

They continued their learning process wherever they went.

The Sholars traveled in and out of Baton Rouge, Clinton and California, to Central America, Spain, France, Italy, Mexico and other parts of the world. He was first an Army lawyer, then a lawyer with the Louisiana Highway Department and is a member of the state bar associations of Louisiana and California.

In 1954 Sholars was retired as totally disabled by the Army as a result of wounds received in combat, having served in Europe during World War II and in Korea. His medals include the Silver Star, three Bronze Stars, five Presidential Citations and three Purple Hearts.

Retirement meant more work and old homes. Mrs. Sholars' interest came naturally. "Mother and I bought distressed houses, fixed them up and sold them on the side when I was a child," says Mrs. Sholars.

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from her comfortable corner in the Victorian sofa. "Mother," she continues, "was a minister just like my father was. In fact, women's lib is nothing new to me, as my mother always did as much professionally as my father. All the women in our family did."

The foyer features a large hearth, library table, and chairs that came from the family's early home. The late Rev. Mose Patterson, Davis, and upstairs in a bedroom are a marble-topped chest of drawers and a mirror made of historic cross-country train trip to California years ago. For almost every historic piece, the Sholars have a tale to spin.

"We asked questions, clipped out of the paper, bought books, read journals — and just kept on looking," says Mrs. Sholars.

"We are conscious of color combinations always. Mrs. Sholars was the coordinator for the redecoration. She hung the wallpaper in several bath and bedrooms at The Rex House. The bathrooms are papered in metallic patterns, which she says "were very hard to hang." She makes draperies, reupholsters furniture, does needlepoint and sews.

The foyer has earth tone floral wallpaper put in by their previous owner, Kevin Clough of Ashland Plantation. Rose waistcoat and pale gold draperies, Oriental rugs, an original map of

Jessie Sholars at work in kitchen she helped design

The brass Victorian doorknocker comes from Spain

Inside a Queen Anne Victorian house are many styles of furniture

Fred Fenn, who was Dorothy Rex, daughter of Frank Rex, for whom the house is named.

"1920s at the second floor and put on the Victorian front," says Sholars. "It was the boy window in the living room too."

"Every generation that lived in a house has added something to the dwelling of the period they lived in," says Mrs. Sholars. "This makes the spirit of the home."

"We have everything from pre-Colombian artifacts that antedate the house to 1950 microwave oven." In the house's evolution from Italian Tuscan to Queen Anne Victorian, each owner left a mark. Today, redone, its interior features diverse collections from years of acquisition by the owners.

"Furniture is a Spanish colonial suite of handcarved mahogany with handtooled leather chairs, and a matching buffet." Of special interest is the room's china cabinet given to the Sholars by the late Mrs.

Bellew, a Victorian rabbit and two great-grandchildren. The children are scattered throughout the country, with one son, Davis Loret, and his family in Zachary. While they had access to land in Clinton, they have a postage stamp yard here in the form of an intimate garden alongside the house. By most important achievement was to buy the last of five buildings in Lawyer's Row, which had not been properly restored. It's a National Historic Landmark," says Mrs. Sholars.

"It was tough to redo," says Sholars. "Sensitive brickwork was put together with mortar that had no cement in it, lime and sand came filtering out of the walls. We restored it to scale requirements, and restored original 13-foot ceilings."

While in Clinton, the Sholars took part in the cultural rebirth of old homes. They still bustle around.

"Restoring buildings is a good way to keep people around," says Sholars.