

Neighborhoods

Places to live, people to see in Colorado Neighborhoods

Story: Jon Goldberg

BONNIE BRAE

THE ESSENTIALS:

WHERE IT IS – THE HEART OF SOUTHEAST DENVER. The street boundaries of Bonnie Brae are Exposition Avenue south to Mississippi Avenue, and from Steele Street west to University Boulevard.

WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL? – A VILLAGE IN THE CITY. Master designed as a cohesive residential neighborhood with winding streets around a central oval park, Bonnie Brae retains a unique village-like character and a strong sense of community combined with beautiful homes and local business in a central Denver location.

THE HOMES – CLASSIC TUDORS OR NEW MANSIONS. Original homes, mainly built in the '30's and '40's, are mostly charming Tudor ranches, in addition to several notable international-style houses. The new homes – constructed on the scraped off lots of older houses – are spacious and luxurious two stories in a range of mainly traditional styles. Many of the older homes have been extensively remodeled and often expanded with an addition or pop-top.

HISTORY: A SCOTTISH VISION IN DENVER. Bonnie Brae was conceived in the early 1920's by prominent Denver businessman and landowner George W. Olinger, who sought to create the ambience of a quiet, Scottish village in Denver. Modeling the area after a Kansas City neighborhood known as Bonnie Brae – or “pleasant hill” in Gaelic – Olinger retained famed landscape architect Saco DeBoer to design the subdivision. DeBoer created a community of gently

curving streets, a departure from Denver's traditional grid system, centered around the elliptical Bonnie Brae Park.

After the first homes in Bonnie Brae were built in the mid-1920's, Olinger sold his interests in the development company, which then fell into bankruptcy and receivership, causing an extended delay in the build-out of the subdivision. When steady construction began again in the late 1930's and again after World War II, numerous traditional Tudor-style homes were built, but Bonnie Brae also became a Denver centerpiece for the emerging International and Art Modern styles of architecture, offshoots of the Bauhaus School with its emphasis on utilitarian, contemporary design. The International / Art Modern-style homes departed from traditional architecture and featured open floor plans, flat roofs, curved corners and asymmetrical angles. Today, these “modern” homes of an earlier time remain hot commodities.

WHY IT'S HOT...UNIQUE ATMOSPHERE, COMMUNITY FEEL, GREAT LOCATION. Bonnie Brae's special attributes and excellent central location make it one of Denver's most desirable neighborhoods. The winding off-the-grid streets are rare for an older subdivision, and the elliptical design creates the welcoming, serene ambience that is perfect for walking and meeting your neighbors. For an urban neighborhood, it has an exceptionally friendly feel and a tight-knit sense of community and history.

One of the most alluring aspects of the neighborhood is the thriving Bonnie Brae Business District, a surprisingly diverse collection of quaint local business along University Boulevard between Exposition and Ohio. The Bonnie Brae Tavern, which opened in 1934, still serves cheap pizza and beer to its loyal customers. Bonnie Brae Flowers opened in the '40's, and the Saucy Noodle Ristorante and the Campus Lounge date from the early '60's. Other great local spots include Bonnie Brae Ice Cream, Seven 30 South and Capuvino.

WHO LIVES HERE...SOCIAL FAMILIES. Bonnie Brae is essentially a family neighborhood, but it

is also surprisingly diverse. Residents are typically high-earning professionals and their grade school or middle school children, but there is also a solid mix of older empty-nester couples, as well as younger singles or couples with no children.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY...\$750K OR MORE. Bonnie Brae is a desirable area that commands premium prices. The original, older homes sell for an average of about \$600k while the new builds are in the \$1.5 million range. Prices per square foot are also on the upper end for central Denver, with an average of about \$350 and upwards of \$500.

SCHOOLS. Denver Public School's Cory Elementary, a highly regarded school with excellent CSAP rating, is a strong draw for Bonnie Brae families.

AN EVOLVING NEIGHBORHOOD. Like many other central Denver neighborhoods with older homes, Bonnie Brae has seen a wave of scrape-off and rebuild activity in recent years. Lavish, large homes are rapidly replacing many of the original, more modest ranches. While the new homes feature traditional styles that generally blend in, some purists look askance at these McMansions, featuring the loss of special history and community feel that exemplifies Bonnie Brae. Others are more sanguine on the evolution of Bonnie Brae, such as Gretchen Faber of Kentwood Company—Cherry Creek, who sells real estate in neighborhood and is also a longtime resident. In Faber's view, "There is certainly a tough balance between development and preserving the integrity of the neighborhood, but ultimately we need to embrace change and celebrate the diversity of emerging home styles as Bonnie Brae progresses into the 21st century."

Thanks to Gretchen Faber of the Kentwood Company, Cherry Creek for her generous assistance with this story.

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-Jon Goldberg, a former attorney, puts his 20 years of experience in real estate and law to work for you.

-A contributing writer to *Colorado Expression* magazine, Jon knows Colorado. You can read his "Neighborhoods" article feature in this issue.

Call Jon today to discuss the details of your real estate needs.

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