

Fine furniture stirs longing for dancing pair

I remember, as a child, being grateful to the people in their warm, cozy houses who left their curtains open at night.

I counted heads bent over jigsaw puzzles, watched women carrying mugs of cocoa, saw people laugh together. Two children tussled on a hearth rug. A very fat man and a very thin woman danced together.

Now I make the rounds of dark, suburban streets and admire beautiful, empty rooms. In one, a brass container of grasses overflows on the glowing lid of a grand piano. In another, a telescope aims its lens into the dark. Chairs are gathered in careful arrangements, ornamentally-bound books are marshalled on shelves.

These vistas seem as cold as an empty stage before the actors arrive. These rooms are all style and no substance.

Tonight, in only one of 16 well-lit, drapes-not-yet-drawn rooms, I saw only one person, and she quickly disappeared through the shadows to be swallowed up by the space beyond. Perhaps it was Martha Stewart; surely only she would dare to enter this pristine place. And then, only to rearrange a fallen petal on a table, to dust a mantel ornament, to replace a blanket along the back of a couch.

If I were to walk up any pathway and knock on the front door, I imagine I could wait all night before anyone an-

VOICES

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swered. The lights are on, the blinds are up, but nobody's home.

By the way we display our possessions, our society implies that they are more important than we are. On many streets, two people live in

houses big enough for seven. Family rooms are set aside for families that come once a year. Mahogany dining room furniture gets polished more than it's used. Spare beds are draped with country quilts to warm guests who may never arrive.

Perhaps so many people leave the lights on and the blinds open because of their need to show off such well-appointed, hard-won rooms and lovely possessions. There may be no one drinking cocoa or searching for the edges of a jigsaw puzzle or reading a book in a comfortable chair, but beautiful things seem to animate these rooms better than their occupants ever could.

Sometimes I want to stand in the shadows under the rhododendrons

and play a tune to these lovely rooms. Then, like the toys in the fairy tale, perhaps the pictures, ornaments and country furnishings will all rise up and dance together, and for a moment I'll glimpse the life that could be lived in these houses.

Sometimes I like to think I might be able to summon the occupants of these lovely homes, the owners of these fine possessions, if I played loudly enough. I might rouse them from their study of the accounts they carefully balance in order to sustain such a lifestyle. They might be momentarily distracted from whatever it is they must do to keep the household afloat. The kids, lulled by the cold blue glare of the TV or the pulsing glimmer of the computer screen, hearing the unfamiliar sound on the air, might be drawn to investigate its source.

Even though I know there's nothing I can do to bring life to these lovely rooms, I can't help looking — and hoping, Hoping, just once, to see a couple dance, children play, a family so absorbed in each other that they're unaware that a passing stranger watches from the darkness.

Lois Peterson lives and walks in Delta.

We'd like to hear your voice — in about 550 words. Mail to Voices, Linda Bates, *The Vancouver Sun*, 2250 Granville St., Vancouver, B.C. V6H 3G2 or fax 732-2323.