

## Renaissance man

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Chicago Tribune (1997-); Jan 12, 2003; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune

pg. SM7

# IN THE LOOP

SIDEWALKS/BRIDGEPORT BY RICK KOGAN PHOTO BY CHARLES OSGOOD

## Renaissance man

**B**is for Bridgeport but it could also stand for "Boss," the late Mike Royko's definitive portrait of the late Mayor Richard J. Daley. In that 1971 book, Royko describes Daley's native neighborhood as a place where, "in the early days, the people grew cabbage on vacant land in their yards, and it was known for a time as the Cabbage Patch. But by the time Daley was born, most people had stopped raising cabbage and had taken to raising politicians. Daley was to become the third consecutive mayor produced by Bridgeport. It would also produce an extraordinary number of lesser officeholders, appointed officials and, legend says, even more votes than it had voters."

Bill Lavicka now describes Bridgeport as "a place where people living in it always knew it was a great place and now the rest of the city is finally discovering that."

This Near Southwest Side neighborhood—getting "hot, as they say in the real estate biz—is where Lavicka made a new home.

A builder, preservationist and urban pioneer in the best sense of that often misused phrase, Lavicka has for 30 years been making and remaking homes and apartments in all parts of the city. He is not going to move to Bridgeport. He is happy in the house in which he lives with his wife on the once shabby, now resplendent 1500 block of West Jackson Boulevard.

But he says, with considerable pride, "In more than 100 units of housing, this Bridgeport thing is the best thing I've ever done."

Two years ago, he bought a building at 3106 S. Racine Ave. It was built in the 1860s and first used as a church, Lavicka says. Later it functioned as a beer hall and then a stable. Lavicka and his crew gutted the place and transformed it into one of the city's most unusual and distinctive living spaces. He calls it the Chapel House, and it is a 3,600-square-foot, single-family home with three bedrooms, 2½ baths and all sorts of interesting elements.

In the Osgood photo, Lavicka is standing under what used to be a trap door through which bartenders tossed beer bottles into the basement. He transformed that with a tin ceiling and lights.

He is proud to show off other things in the house: sugar pine doors that date from the 1860s; a marble mosaic that recreates Vincent van Gogh's painting "Starry Night"; a winding oak staircase; skylights; a chandelier scavenged from the old Northwestern Station; heating ducts built to resemble organ pipes.

Lavicka eventually wants to sell the building but for the time being is renting it to a couple who has moved to Chicago from Minnesota.

"Buildings are a lot like children," Lavicka says. "Sometimes it's just hard to let them go." □

