



FILL 'ER UP!



In Chandler, Oklahoma, preservationist Bill Fernau pieces history together at his classic service station.

by Jim Ross

Oklahoma. Where hawks make lazy circles in the sky and the earth is the color of clay pots. Where Will Rogers grew to be America's favorite son and Bud Wilkinson remains a deity to some. Where Charles Arthur Floyd stalked small-town banks, where Woody Guthrie sang the heartache of hard times, and where Route 66 was brewed and brought to life.

Oklahoma. Where in 1905 Frank Phillips helped himself to a jumbo slice of black-gold pie.



The gusher Anna Anderson #1 near Bartlesville could have been strike three for the enterprising son of a Nebraska farmer. But the young Mr. Phillips had a flair for making money. In fact, his interest in oil followed, of all things, successful ownership of three Creston, Iowa, barbershops. And so, after two dry holes that sent investors scattering like frightened prairie dogs, he did “what came natural.” He tried again, and the plume of crude that spewed from the Anna lease became the first of 82 consecutive producing wells.

In the mid-1920s, Phillips Petroleum expanded into the refining and marketing business. Already figuring to use US 66 as the cornerstone for their retail outlets, “Phillips 66” was batted about but initially rejected as a name for their refined gasoline, even as dozens of other ideas careened around the boardroom, only to fall flat. With time growing short, the day was unexpectedly saved when a company official, riding

in a car used to road test their new product commented, “This car goes like sixty on our new gas.” The driver, glancing at the speedometer, exclaimed, “Sixty nothing, we’re doing sixty-six!” When this was recounted to company executives and it was learned they had been on Route 66, the coincidences were deemed too great to ignore and “Phillips 66” was declared winner of the name game without further discussion.

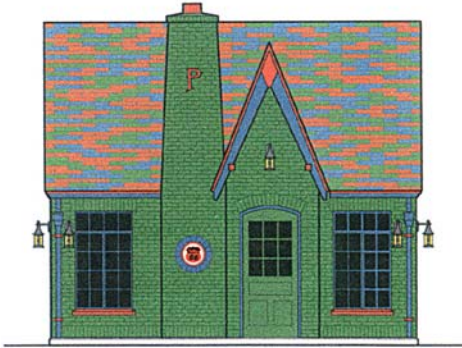
To appear neighborly and fit comfortably into residential areas, the company chose a cottage-style design for their stations, featuring a steep gabled roof with a brick chimney next to the front door. Thirsty tanks were first quenched in Wichita, Kansas in 1927. Three years later, a sibling of this flagship station sprouted in the heart of Chandler, Oklahoma, right on Route 66. While it counted itself among the first generation, it was by no means one of a few. In a whirlwind reminiscent of the 1897 tornado that had smacked this gritty

PIECE BY PIECE: Fernau’s treasures include a collection of Phillips Petroleum Ps—produced by the petroleum giant to adorn chimneys and station facades.

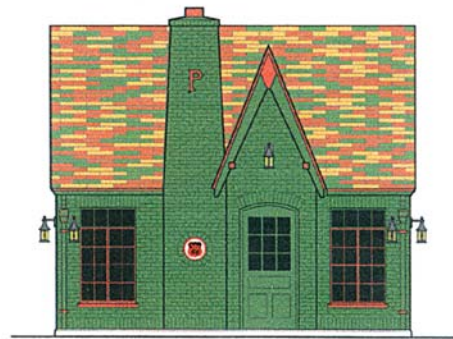
central Oklahoma town flat, the company’s acquisition and construction program, begun in 1927, delivered to the roadside 1,800 stations by the end of 1928 and more than 6,000 by the beginning of 1930.

Owner Bill Fernau isn’t the Chandler station’s first proprietor, but he may be its most important. He and sidekick Maxxwel, a mixed-breed mutt with an obsession for fetching anything thrown, took possession of the landmark in January of 1999. Since then, Bill has become a self-taught expert on both its design and its restoration needs.

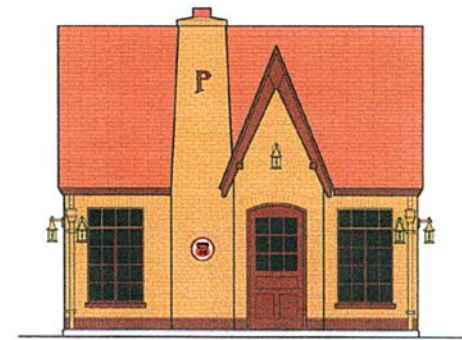
“This is station No. 1423,” Bill says proudly. He is careful to point out that they were not built in numerical order, and he doesn’t know the rationale behind the numbering.



1930 color scheme



1943 color scheme



1947 color scheme

COLOR ME CLASSIC: [Above] In painting their stations, Phillips purposely chose attention-getting color schemes. [Right] Fernau consults original Phillips drawings during his hunt, including this drawing that dictates the colors of the restroom.

It's one of the few things he can't explain in detail. "It's a Type B Tudor plan, thirteen by twenty feet. Construction began on August 30, 1930, and it opened for business on October 10th. Total cost was \$6,047.78." Other facts stand ready to roll off his tongue with the same enthusiasm apparent in Maxxwel at the prospect of a tossed stick. Just ask.

By occupation, Fernau is a Hazardous Materials Specialist for the Federal Railroad Administration. By calling, he is a preservationist. "I'm a hands-on type, and I've always had a project of some kind. I like to make ugly things pretty, make them the best they can be. Mostly, I've restored old cars, but I've also done a motorcycle, a house, even a boat. I believe in doing it right—everything to original specifications."

Early on, Fernau huddled up with Phillips Petroleum officials and began mining their archives for ore. It proved a rich vein. Vintage blueprints, material specification sheets, equipment catalogs, and a diverse collection of other documents now consume his desktop and other flat surfaces in the living quarters attached to the station's service bays. He has spent hundreds of hours searching and finding correct materials and fixtures, right down to the paint codes and the color scheme of the shingles. Always within reach is a dulled 1930s black & white glossy that came

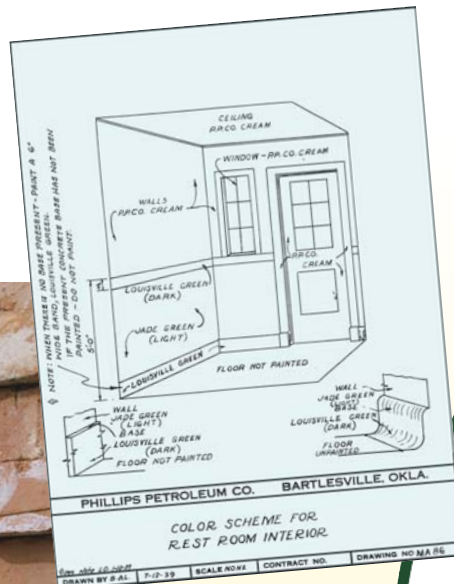
with the property. "My goal is to put everything back the way it is in that photo, inside and out."

Originally from Spokane, Washington, Fernau came to Oklahoma from New Orleans in 1997. "With a whole state to cover, I wanted a central location, so I drove from Oklahoma City toward Tulsa, looking for a town. I've always been a fan of 66, and when I realized I was driving on it, I started to feel as if I had come home. I ended up leasing a farm in Stroud, about fifteen miles from Chandler."

Station No. 1423 operated as a Phillips 66 until 1967, when it became a Skelly. In 1983, it was under the Getty Oil banner, and when last operating sold Texaco products. Fernau first laid nostalgic eyes on it in 1997. It was for sale, and had been since 1993. "Each time I came through town, I'd see it just sitting there, vacant. I finally got motivated in 1998 when an old house nearby was torn down, and I worried that it could meet the same fate."

His original plan was to buy a house, but he couldn't afford both. "I bought the station instead, even though it meant having to live on-site. I did it to make sure it survived."

And survive it will. Progress has been made. A Phillips 66 shield from the era now hangs brightly from a vintage pole, correct light fixtures have been acquired, the roof has been stabilized, and gravity-





THE OLDEST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH of the Chandler Phillips 66 Service Station shows attendants Roger Hicks [left] and Eul McMichael [right] posing proudly by the pumps. The photo is believed to date from 1934. The photographer is unknown.

fed pumps await restoration. One of two service bays, which were added circa 1957, will be dismantled, allowing the station to once again stand alone. An authentic oil can rack and tire holder will accent the driveway, flanked by an exterior lift cradling a classic car. When completed, it will be what he calls a “historical site,” a place where tourists can experience a blast from the past.

“I found the signpost for the shield in Warwick, Oklahoma and the frame for it in Guthrie. Porcelain lampshades for the yard lamps came from the Oklahoma City Stockyards, but I had to have the ‘shepherd’s hooks’ for them made.”

Parts for the gas pumps can be traced to Chicago and Nebraska. Fernau also tracked down the company that manufactured the light fixtures, only to discover they didn’t know they had been the maker. “I ended up finding used originals. I got two from a Tulsa company and located two more in Missouri.”

A Quincy air compressor specified by Phillips has already been obtained and

refurbished. He has not located an ECO Model 26 Automatic Air Station yet, but smart money says he will. “Those were known as a ‘Column Tireflator.’ They were made by Western Manufacturing out of Iowa. You can see it in the photo between the two attendants.”

Fernau’s devotion to the rebirth of Station No. 1423 has not gone unnoticed outside of Chandler. In 2002, at a ceremony in Springfield, Illinois, he was awarded the prestigious Cyrus Avery Award for preservation, named for the Father of Route 66 and presented by the National Historic Route 66 Federation. He was also recently awarded a matching funds grant from the Route 66 Corridor Act preservation program, which will ease the painstaking and costly burden of restoration. “It does take a lot of money, but I believe that people today, especially the kids, should be able to see what it was like.”

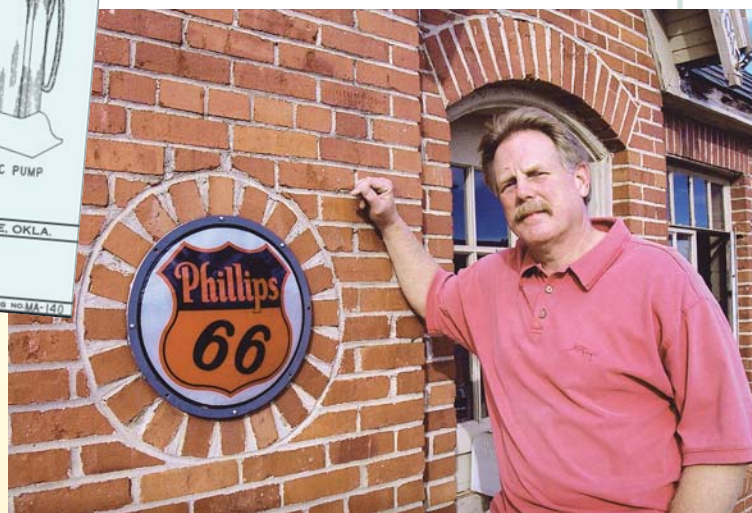
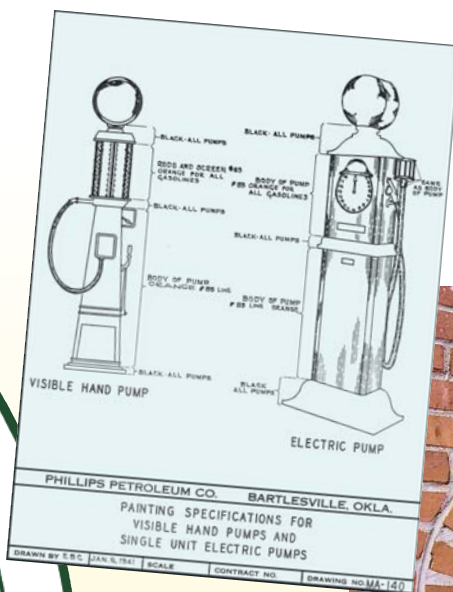
Locals have watched Fernau’s labor of love keenly and now share both his excitement and sense of pride. Many of

them have emotional ties to the little station at 7th and Manvel—like the young lady who met her husband there years ago. Or the Westfall family, scarred by a tragic accident in the early 1980s when station owner Bill Westfall was killed by an exploding tire.

Like it or not, Fernau has found himself a steward of the hopes and memories of others, including those who have supplied artifacts or materials or contributed in another way. All of them have a stake in the outcome.

His commitment goes deeper than simply resuscitating an endangered icon for display to tourists and those with a personal connection, however. Bill Fernau is a disabled Vietnam veteran, something he seldom talks about. “This may sound sappy, but I set aside my disability check for this every month. It’s my way of returning something for posterity—using that money to preserve America. It’s what I fought for.”

Some might call it sappy. Others would call it noble. One thing is certain—his unrelenting infusion of time and dollars and sweat will pay dividends for generations to come.



JIM ROSS is the author of *Oklahoma Route 66* and co-creator of *Route 66: The Map Series*.

PHOTO CREDITS: Photo of vintage telephone atop Coca-Cola cooler and photo of Bill Fernau by the author. All other modern photos by Kathy Anderson. Phillips Petroleum archival material courtesy Patina Properties and Bill Fernau. Historic photo of Chandler Phillips 66 Station courtesy Keith Crall.

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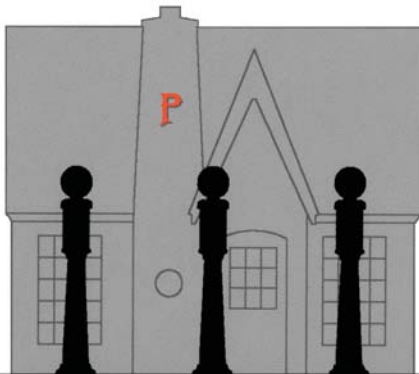


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