

# Focus on Rental Housing

*Swansea Coach House, Society Hill, Philadelphia*

## Complex has security, history, pl

By Sheila Dyan  
FOR THE INQUIRER

Now you don't see it . . . now you do!

Owner/manager Al Shapiro has worked a kind of magic at Swansea Coach House, turning an empty space (an alley, really) between two attached buildings into a charming little European-style courtyard.

An ornate wrought-iron gate and arch form the entrance to the courtyard, where light fixtures line the walls, lush green plants hang down from wall planters, and a bright trompe l'oeil mural on the back wall suggests a colorful garden and fountain beyond an open doorway.

The courtyard serves as an entrance to the complex of 15 rental apartments. The iron gate is secured with an intercom/buzzer system connected to each unit, as are the doors leading from the courtyard to the buildings' quarry-tile-floored vestibules. The inner doors, too, are locked.

Located on Lombard Street, between 3d and 4th Streets, Swansea Coach House is in Society Hill.

"It's one block from South Street, and walking distance from Penn's Landing," resident Rod Bain, 28, said. "I like being so close to everything."

Originally from Atlanta, and working in physical therapy at Temple University, Bain has lived at Swansea with Emily Tsuboi, 26, a product-flow coordinator, for about a year.

"I feel really safe here. Even as a female, I feel I can walk around late at night," Tsuboi said. "The apartment is old, and charming, and it's on a historic landmark."

The three brick buildings of Swansea Coach House were constructed in 1923 on the site of the former home of James Forten, who was — according to a sign in front of the building — a wealthy sailmaker who employed craftsmen of various races. He became a leader of the African American community in Philadelphia, and organized the American Antislavery Society in his home in 1833.

In 1969, Alvin N. Shapiro & Co. purchased the buildings. The company rehabilitated the apartments,



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**A trompe l'oeil painting on the back wall of the courtyard suggests an open door looking onto a garden and fountain.**

installing new plumbing, heating, air-conditioning, electrical wiring, flooring, roofs, kitchens and baths. Shapiro still owns and manages the buildings.

"Management is great," Bain said. "They're very responsive. And the fellow who does the maintenance is very friendly."

Steve Bailey, who has been "the fellow who does the maintenance"

for 14 years, said, "I've worked for a lot of other landlords, and many keep putting stuff off. Al likes to keep up . . . he doesn't wait for things to break."

"Nothing corrects itself," Shapiro explained. "I've been doing this for 30 years, and I like to keep my tenants happy."

Apartments at Swansea Coach House offer 325 to 850 square feet of



**A small wood-burning stove is featured in the living room of this unit. All apartments have hardwood floors.**

# ayfulness

living space. Studio units rent from \$520 to \$650; one-bedroom units, \$700 to \$775; and two-bedroom units, \$1,095 to \$1,125. Each has a full, eat-in kitchen, its own central air-conditioning and gas heating system, and hardwood floors.

About half of the units have a wood-burning Franklin stove-type fireplace. Some units have walled-in patios.

A coin-operated laundry is in the basement, as are individual storage closets (with solid walls) for each unit.

Allen Gomez, 33, a program officer at the William Penn Foundation, moved from New York to the Rittenhouse Square area seven years ago. Last year he moved to Swansea Court.

"I like the location," he said. "I'm single, I work long hours, and its close proximity to South Street was an attraction. There are lots of restaurants in the area that are easy to find."

"I think management is just fine — responsive, but, at the same time, not on your back," Gomez said. "I haven't had any problems other than a small leak. One phone call, and it was fixed. And I like the courtyard, with the secure gate in front. I feel the building is safe ... and it's really quiet."

## The details

**Name:** Swansea Coach House.

**Address:** 334-6-8 Lombard St.

**Phone:** 215-732-9169.

**Type of housing:** Rental apartments in townhouse-style buildings on historic site.

**Number of units:** 15.

**Rental range:** \$520 to \$1,125.

**Owner/Manager:** Alvin N. Shapiro & Co.

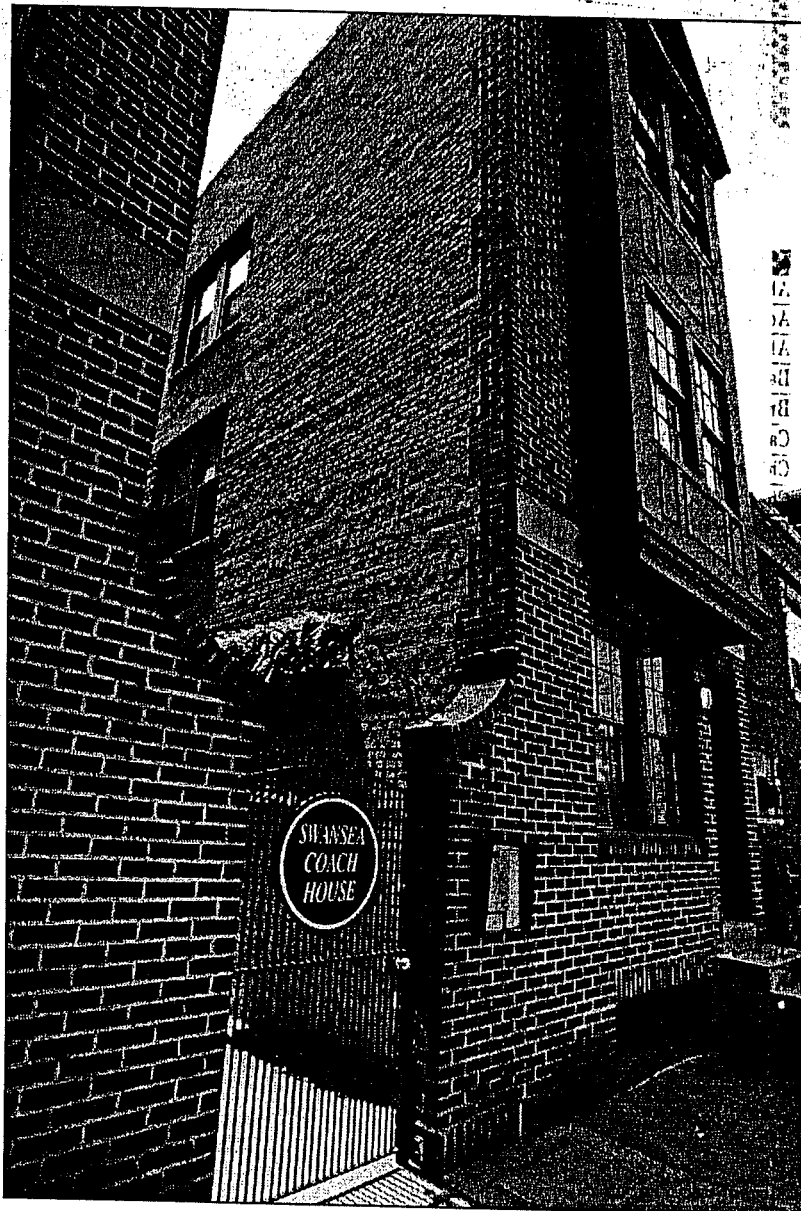
**Amenities:** Individually controlled heat and central air-conditioning; locked gate to courtyard, building entrances, and vestibule door; closed-circuit TV and buzz-in/intercom system at entrances; hardwood floors; coin-op laundry facilities; wood-burning stove in many units;

**Pets:** No dogs; cats (declawed and neutered), \$15 per month per cat.

**Shopping:** Food and other shopping walking distance.

**Public transportation:** SEPTA bus and subway, walking distance.

**Directions:** On Lombard Street, between 3d and 4th Streets.



A wrought-iron gate leads into the courtyard and entryway on Lombard Street, above. The gate and doors are all locked and feature an intercom/buzzer system. Below, natural light fills the living room of one of the 15 apartments in the complex.

