

THE BROWNSTONE HOUSE OF NERO WOLFE

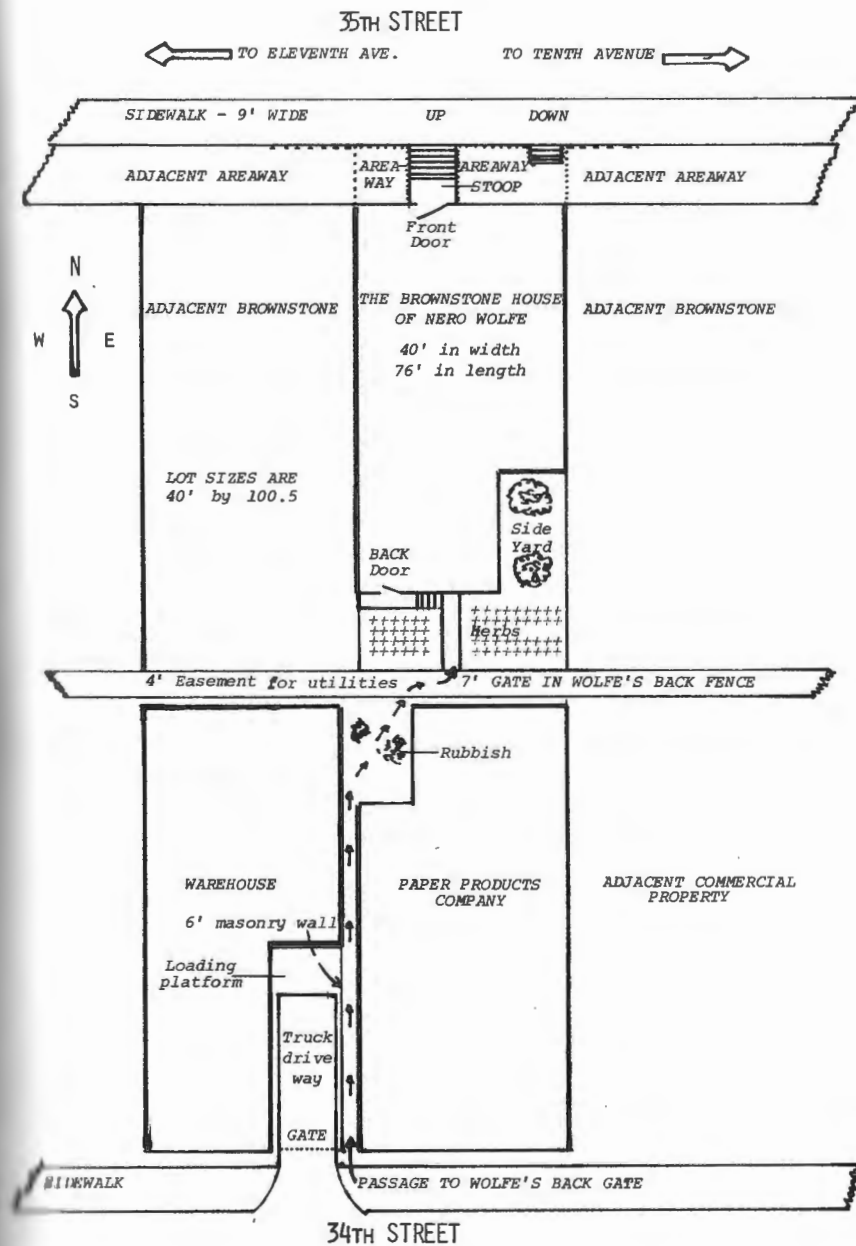
desk, and handed him the note. He got it at a glance. . . .

(*The Silent Speaker* [1946], chapter 18)

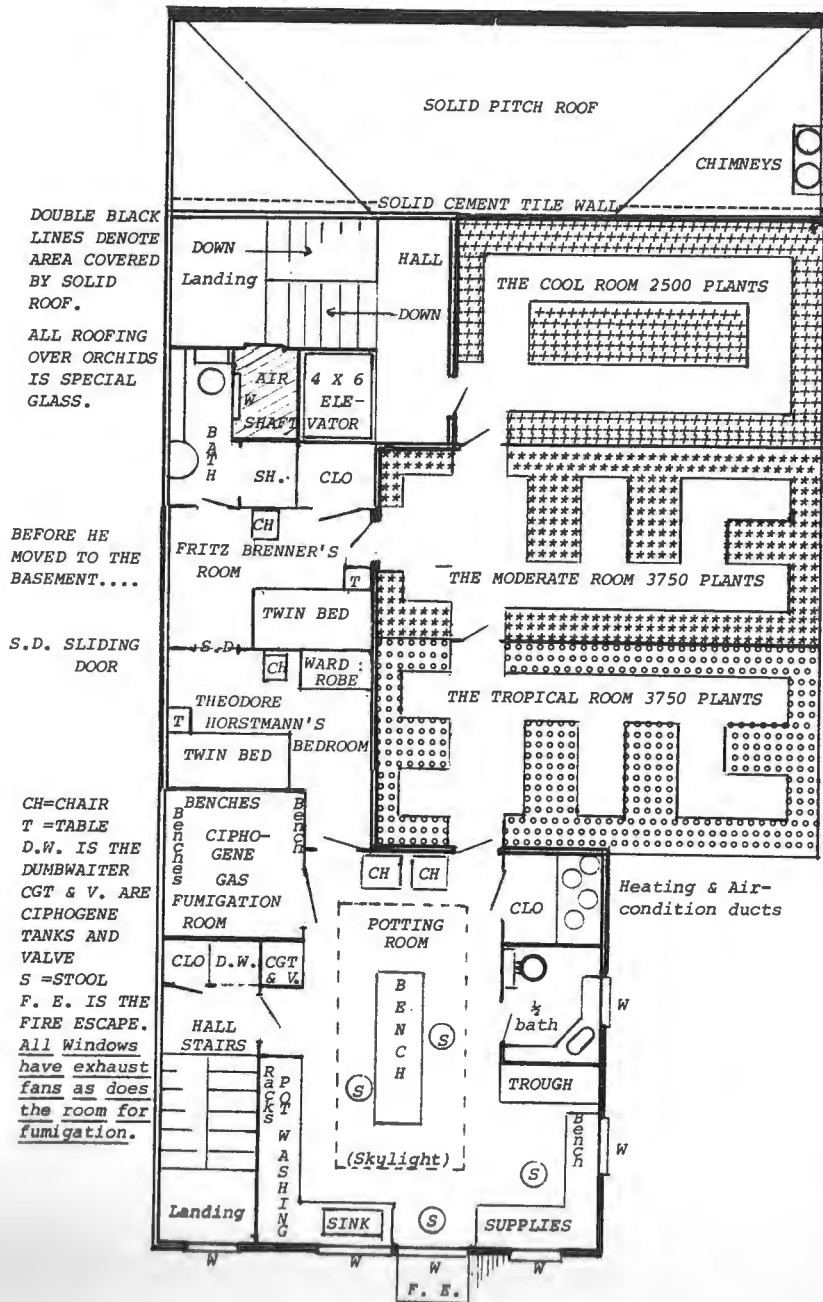
What happened after that I remember only too vividly. Before midnight, our areaway had been floodlit, photographed by forensics and all the newspapers, dusted for prints, and cordoned off by the police to hold back the biggest mob we ever drew, and there was a dick, or an FBI man, or an assistant district attorney, one each, for everybody in the house, including Fritz, who, still shuddering occasionally, was valiantly doing his thing in the kitchen, making sandwiches and coffee for all the living, while seeing in his mind's eye the victim of violent death he had discovered in our areaway.

That about covers it from the outside, but for those of you who think I'm a lousy describer I've drawn up a plot plan of the house and environs that may present a better picture.

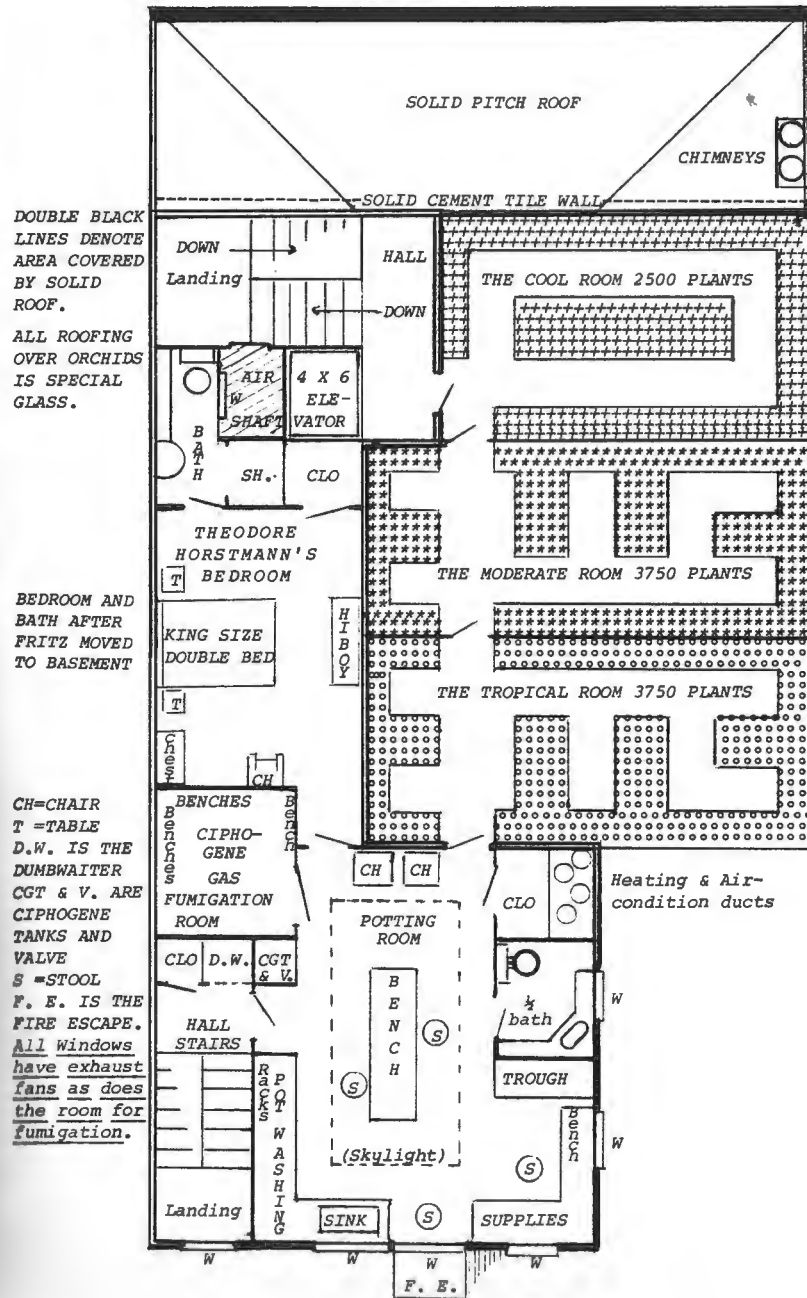
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THE ORCHID ROOMS OF NERO WOLFE — ROOF GARDEN



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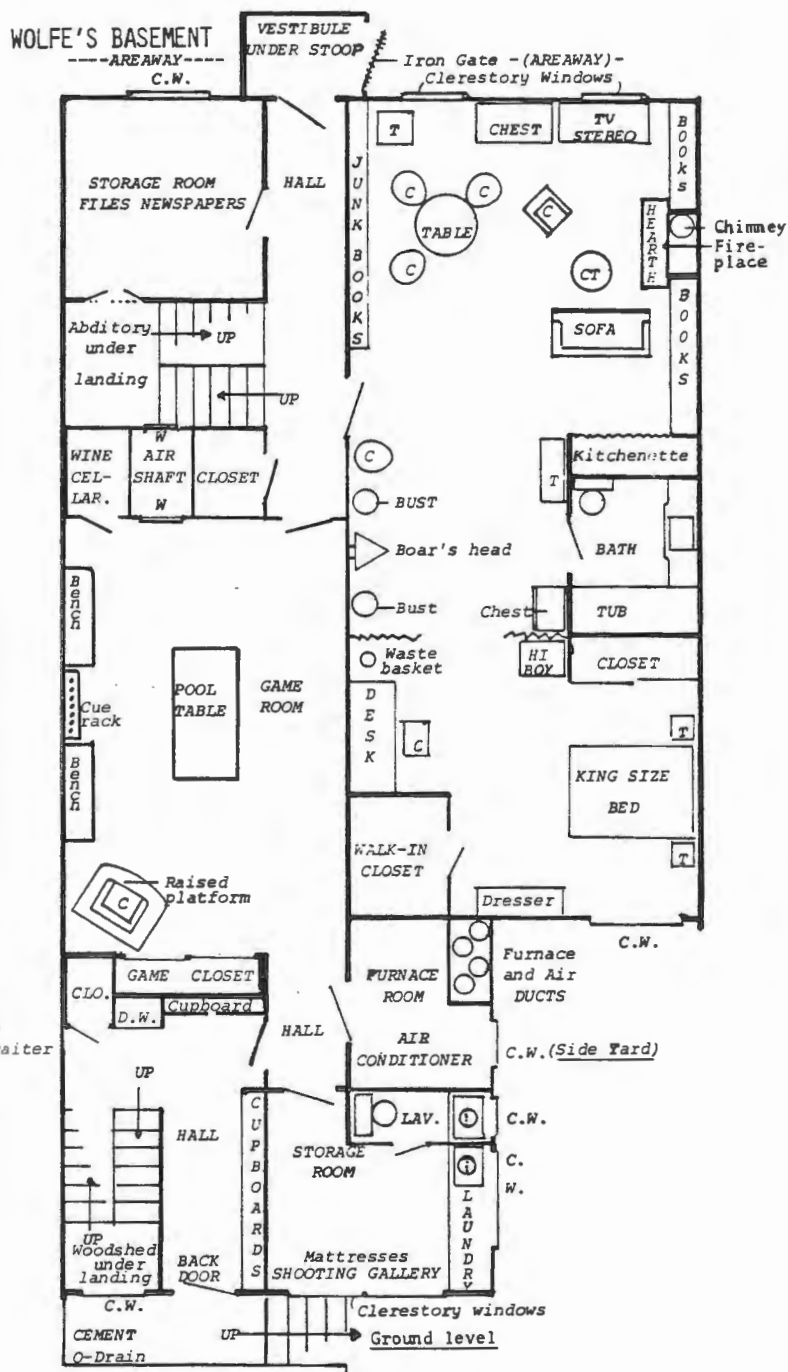
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hands. I said, "Go ahead and don't drop it," and he started down the hall to the rear, where the stair to the basement was, and at the door to the office Orrie joined him.

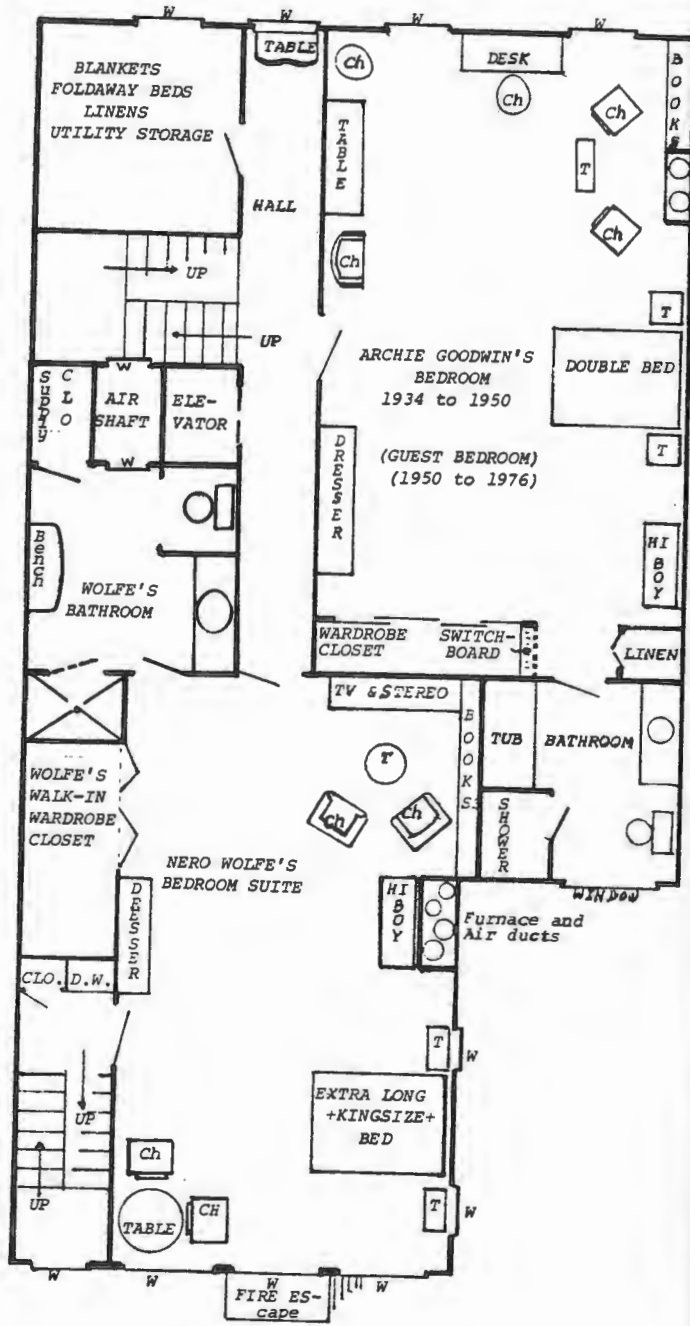
(Ibid., chapter 19)

Remembering things like that puts me in a homesick mood, and memory is a fink. Lily just caught me looking out of the window, read my face (and my mind), and said, "Come on, chum, I'll shoot you a game of pool."

Interesting woman, Lily. She not only dances like Fred Astaire, she handles a cue like he does, and I have a helluva time beating her. So, while I go take on the champ, you can examine my drawing of the basement. It's on the next page.

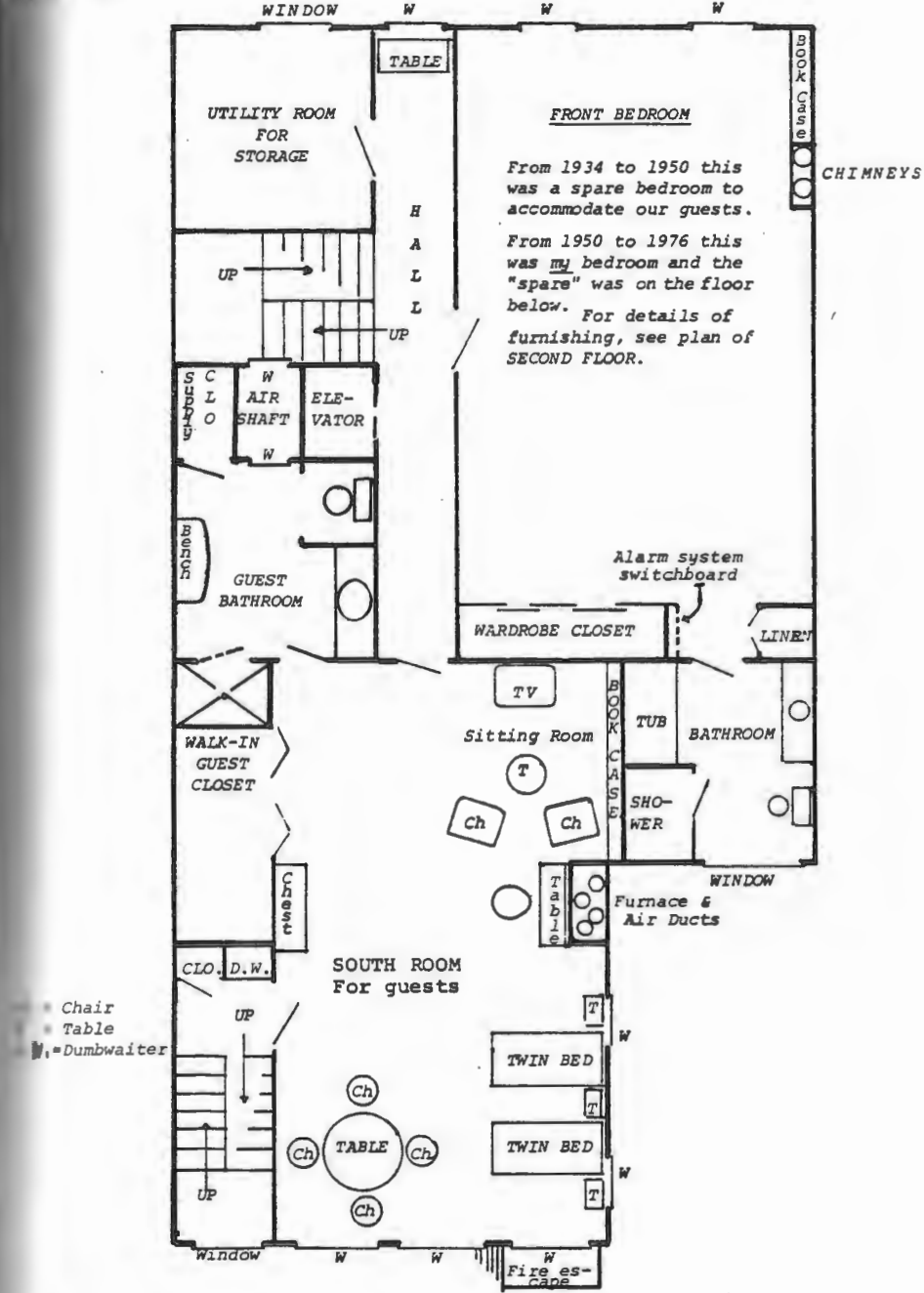


SECOND FLOOR



Ch = Chair
 T = Table
 D.W. = Dumbwaiter

1ST FLOOR



• Chair
 • Table
 W = Dumbwaiter

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don't understand it. They were all here yesterday when I cleaned in here."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, sir. Positive."

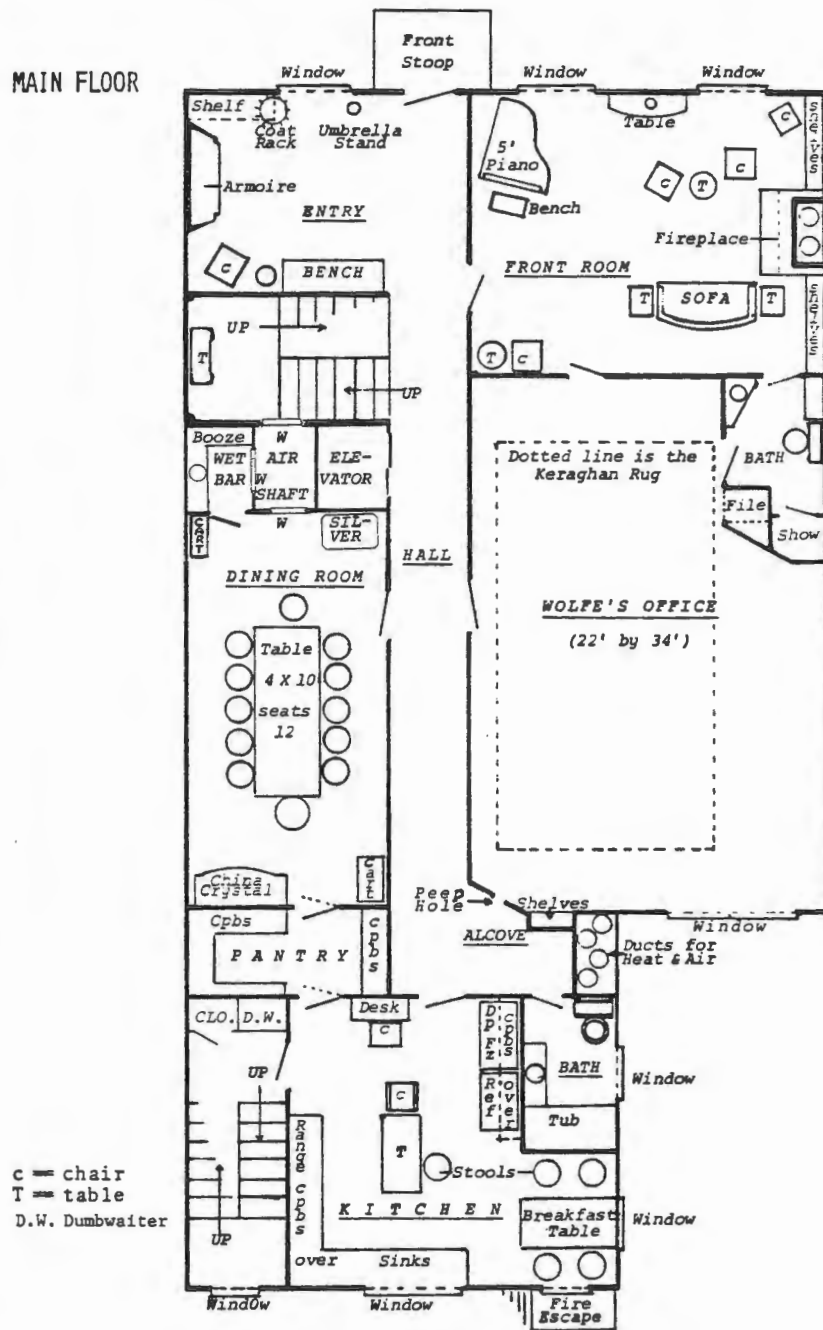
"Look for it. Archie, help him. I want to know if that cushion is in this room."

(Ibid.)

For the exciting conclusion to that "front room" episode, get a copy of "Help Wanted, Male." It's in a book entitled *Trouble in Triplicate* (1949). You'll be glad you did — and so will I. I still get the royalties. Better yet, buy two!

In the plan of the main floor that follows, you'll see most of the furnishings penciled in, except for Wolfe's office. That requires a chapter all of its own.

MAIN FLOOR



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There is only one other office experience I want to mention before this chapter ends. It happened on a Sunday morning, in preparation for one of Wolfe's most elaborate charades.

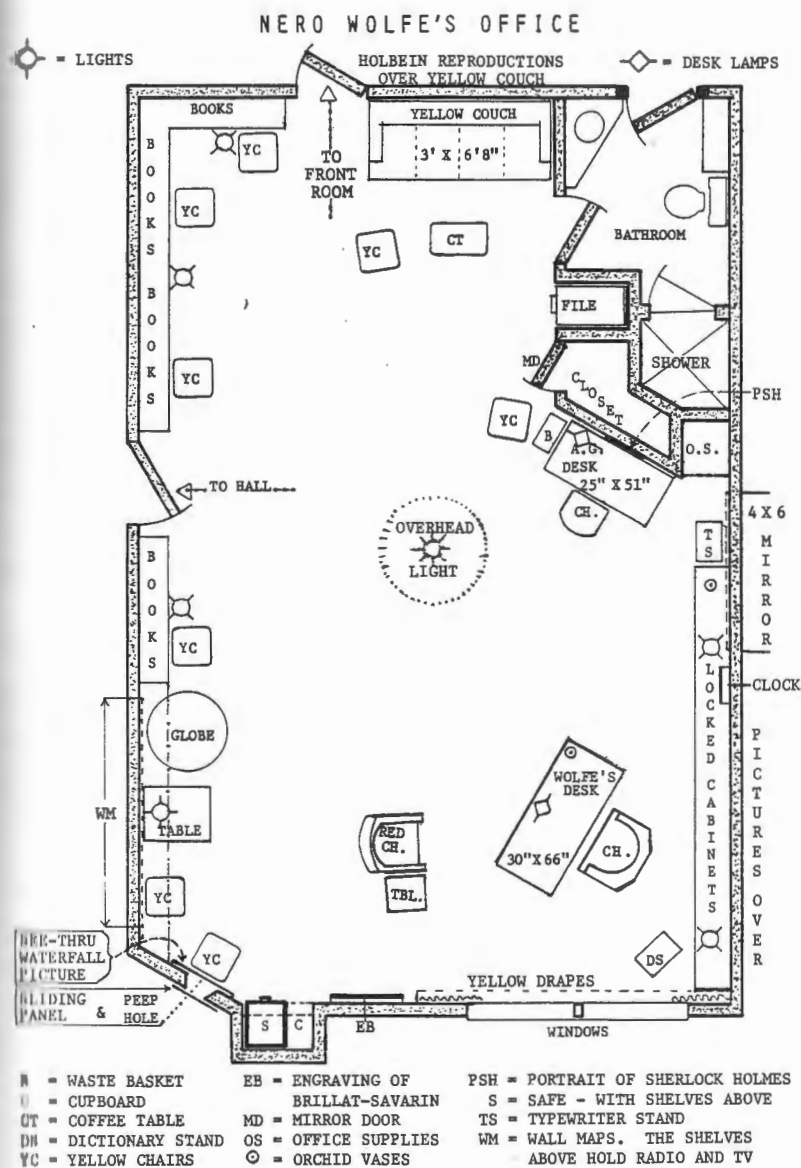
. . . Fritz and I worked like beavers, setting the stage. The idea was — that is, Wolfe's idea — to reproduce as nearly as possible the scene of the crime, and it was a damn silly idea, since you could put seven or eight of that office [a gross exaggeration] into Mrs. Robilotti's drawing room [which was the scene of the crime]. Taking the globe and the couch and the television cabinet and a few other items to the dining room helped a little, but it was still hopeless. . . . To get fourteen chairs we had to bring some down from upstairs, and then it developed later that some of them weren't really necessary. The bar was a table in the far corner [from which the couch had been moved] but it couldn't be up against the wall because there had to be room for Hackett [who tended bar] behind it. One small satisfaction I got was that the red leather chair had been taken to the dining room with the other stuff, and Cramer wouldn't like that a bit. [and he didn't.]

(*Champagne for One* [1958], chapter 15)

It would have been much easier to take the principals, all eighteen of us, back to Mrs. Robilotti's drawing room, but Wolfe absolutely refused to leave the house! Fritz and I had to put all the furniture back again on Monday. Wolfe helped. He carried a yellow couch cushion!

You are now in possession of all the documented evidence

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needed to support my drawing of the office on the preceding page. Looking at it again is an experience in nostalgia.

There were many things in the office that are indicated only by abbreviations or symbols on the floorplan. To help you get a handle on them, here is a roadmap:

- YC = YELLOW CHAIR. There were eight of them.
MD = MIRROR DOOR. It added class to the closet.
OS = OFFICE SUPPLIES. Paper, carbons, and junk.
TS = TYPEWRITER STAND. I could hide it in the OS.
DS = DICTIONARY STAND. Wolfe used it every day.
B = WASTE BASKET. Cramer threw his cigars at it and missed.
C = CUPBOARD. With shelves built around the safe, it was used as storage for big books, mementos, and a hand grenade! And a stack of Bibles.
⊙ = VASE. On Wolfe's desk for daily display of orchids. Also a wall-bracket vase.
S = SAFE. It was an old one, but sometimes "old" is better. Shelves were all around and above it.
◇ = LAMPS. Wolfe had one on his desk, I had one on mine.
⊕ = LIGHTS. Turned on by wall switches just inside the door to the hall. Doubled at the entrance to the front room.

Over the couch were hung the Holbein reproductions. Over my desk was a dignified picture of Sherlock Holmes. On the wall behind Wolfe's desk were four maps, including the

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Brillat-Savarin. The Peephole is labeled. On the office side was the waterfall picture, on the alcove side a sliding panel. On the wall behind the globe and the table were Gouchard maps. Over my typewriter stand, and extending over the cabinets behind Wolfe's desk, was the four-by-six-foot mirror.

For further information take nearest detour to next page.

That solid row of cabinets behind Wolfe's desk held encyclopedias in four languages, reference books pertaining to his latest interest, a dictophone and related paraphernalia, some rare first editions that he wanted to protect from light and dust, several bottles of quite choice brandy (sampled by our now departed Charley), and a collapsible stepstool for reaching tomes in high places.

The windows were draped from floor to ceiling beneath an elegant valance. Yes, they were yellow.

The bookshelves started at the door to the front room — also floor to ceiling — and ended at the door to the hall; then picked up again on the other side of the door for five and a half feet, continuing at the six-foot-eight height above the globe, table, and chair, making a nice reveal for the Gouchard maps.

It was in those high shelves over the globe that we put the radio and early black-and-white television sets. When TV went to color, Wolfe had Fritz and me move the globe to the other side of the table and bought a twenty-seven-inch console with remote control. Anything to keep from getting out of his chair.

That fuzzy circle you see in the middle of the floorplan