



HOMES • RESALE & RENTAL

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RESTORED GLORY

Once sad and sagging, this elaborate Italianate porch on Rochester Street is testimony to life 100 years ago



KATHRYN YOUNG
RENO SMARTS

When Lynn Griffiths was choosing new paint colours for her restored Victorian Italianate front porch, she kept coming back to a bluey-green shade.

She wasn't sure why the colour was so compelling, but she soon found out from restoration expert Paul Denys.

The owner of Denys Builds Design pulled a piece of old tin off the porch and uncovered an original piece of wood. It was that exact colour, she recalls. "It was just very, very spooky that there was this 100-year-old piece of wood with the exact colour."

The square porch with balcony and uniquely curved arches has been nominated for a City of Ottawa Heritage Renovation award. Ms. Griffiths wanted to restore the porch for more than a decade, but job changes and economics stalled the project.

Meanwhile, she researched to find out what the porch looked like in its glory years of the early 20th century and before it declined to the sad state it was in when she bought the Rochester Street home.

The solid brick house was built by Michael Joseph Doherty, a CPR railway engineer, in 1896 on land he bought in LeBreton Flats for \$400. Four years later, the Great Fire of 1900 swept through and levelled the entire neighbourhood. Instead of following his neighbours and moving to the suburban Glebe, the father of six used \$3,750 in fire insurance money and rebuilt the house.

When Ms. Griffiths and her sons were digging around the foundation during a landscaping project, they found old, charred wood, melted glass and lots of hand-cut square nails.

The house stayed in the Doherty family until 1950 when it changed hands, eventually becoming three apartments before Ms. Griffiths bought in 1980. By then the porch was sagging, supports were rotten and the house was bedraggled and sad looking.

"I was determined to fix it, but not put a new porch on it," she says. "I wanted to restore it. I'm really passionate about this, if you're going



CHRIS MIKULA, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Owner Lynn Griffiths worked with Paul Denys to restore the porch on the front of her Rochester Street home, bringing back the glory days of 100 years ago.

to do something, do it right."

As with similar historical projects, Mr. Denys discovered more problems once he started digging. There were no proper footings — just big stones. The porch had to be propped up while a solid foundation was laid underneath. He also had to square up and stabilize the top balcony.

But this renovator is used to saving unique porches. The award-winning builder and designer has been honoured for restoring several heritage porches in Ottawa. The big curved arches on Ms. Griffiths' porch are unique — a reminder that houses were once built one at a time, with everything cut by hand. They weren't mass-produced until the 1940s and '50s.

"I've never come across a porch that looks like this," says Mr. Denys. "There's no two alike. A lot of these houses are works of art." The top pediment on the house displays what appears to be a train wheel with spokes — a testament to Mr. Doherty's profession. "There's a lot of history in the building."

Some of the original porch was saved, including the tongue-and-groove roofing, but much was replaced with parts copied from the originals: the handrails, the 80 pregnant-lady

The top pediment on the house displays what appears to be a train wheel with spokes — a testament to Michael Doherty's ties to the CPR.

square-cut balusters and some of the columns. Mr. Denys designed the new curved front stairs to complement the bowed front of the porch floor.

Ms. Griffiths paid about \$15,000 for the custom millwork and paint, and about the same again for labour. In a bid to save some money, she and her sons then tackled the painting, using Mr. Denys's tips and equipment. The landscaping was done to show off the porch, with a flagstone walkway, raised beds and new bushes.

"The landscaping is a labour of love," says Ms. Griffiths. "My neighbours Alain Pineau and Jean Gregoire donated their time and expertise. They offered to lay the flagstone and build the gardens. They said it was because they live across the street and it is their view."

Everyone — neighbours and passersby included — loves the restoration except her cat, who used to hide under the porch and now cannot.

"I'm thrilled," says Ms. Griffiths. "It cost more than we both anticipated because more needed to be replaced. But I'd do it again."

And she'll have to, since there's a back porch that also needs restoration. "But not this year."

KATHRYN YOUNG is an Ottawa writer. Share your renovation stories with her at rensmart@magnum.ca.

A royal makeover

The view is magnificent, and now the interior of the 18th-floor condo at the Queen Elizabeth Towers has a regal gleam, writes KATHRYN YOUNG.

They fell in love with the 18th-floor view of downtown Ottawa, but behind their backs, the bland 1970s condo needed updating.

John Ayres and his wife Eliane Leclerc liked the cabinets, ceramic floors and granite counters the previous owners had installed in the kitchen and bathrooms, but the rest of the 1,637-square-foot apartment cried out for help.

"When you cast your eyes to the rest of the apartment, it looked very tacky," says Mr. Ayres. "We had this brand new section going down the middle and everything else was 1976 Queen Elizabeth Towers."

So, they rolled up their sleeves and got to work, with much pivotal help from Frank Johnston-Main of Main Renovations.

"He had very high standards of craftsmanship," says Mr. Ayres.

They added crown moulding and wooden windowsills throughout the apartment, and stripped and repainted all the window trim that framed their spectacular views of the Ottawa River and Gatineau. They removed the swinging doors to the two bathrooms and installed quality pocket doors, which necessitated thickening the narrow apartment walls so they could take the pocket-door frames. That was a particularly tricky project since they didn't want to affect the ceramic tile already on the bathroom walls.

"I was on pins and needles for awhile because I didn't want to have to redo tiles," he says.

They tore down the wall separating the two smaller bedrooms to create one large office. But the two closets are still there, one large enough to hold a 12-cubic-foot freezer.

"We have a huge amount of storage," says Mr. Ayres, opening the doors to the linen closet they built in to the former doorway to



John Ayres and his wife Eliane Leclerc liked the cabinets, ceramic floors and granite counters the previous owners had installed in the kitchen and bathrooms, but the rest of the condo needed help. Refinishing all the parquet hardwood floors and adding crown mouldings were a few projects.

the third bedroom. They also added shelving to all the existing closets to improve their capacity.

They replaced ABS pipes with copper, added sleek stainless-steel towel bars, and changed the two toilets to elongated bowls from round. The master toilet also has the Toto personal hygiene system, which turns it into somewhat of a bidet with an adjustable-temperature seat, among other treats.

"This was a good alternative rather than removing one sink to create the space (for a separate bidet)," explains Ms. Leclerc.

They refinished all the parquet hardwood floors. The painted louvers that cover the ventilation system were stripped to reveal brushed aluminum underneath that now matches the stainless-steel appliances in the kitchen.



JANA CHYTILOVA, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

"The cabinets and granite give this a very contemporary and smart look," Mr. Ayres says, gesturing to the good quality rust-coloured smooth cabinets. There's a rusty fleck in the dark granite counters and backsplash that co-ordinates beautifully with the cabinets. Other refinements include an undermount sink and ceramic tile floor.

The contemporary flair they've added has even opened neighbours' eyes to what's possible in an essentially staid old dowager of a building, says Mr. Ayres.

"People are quite surprised," he says.

Unfortunately, they're leaving all their hard work behind. They had been toying for years with the idea of moving to Victoria and they've finally decided to do so. But they're confident that the money they've put into the apartment will give it the updated look it

needs to attract a buyer.

Although they didn't keep strict track of the money they spent, they estimate it to be between \$52,000 and \$57,000.

For now, they can enjoy the impressive view without worrying about what's behind them. From the far west end of Laurier Street, they look out over the new War Museum construction, the railway bridge to Lemieux Island, and some striking sunsets. With binoculars, they can even see the falcons nesting on the Crown Plaza Hotel.

"We also watched the courtship in the spring," says Ms. Leclerc. "We're not official (birdwatchers). It's always been an interest in watching birds, but John was a pilot so he's interested in the aerobatics."

"We're sort of like voyeurs," confides Mr. Ayres with a chuckle.