

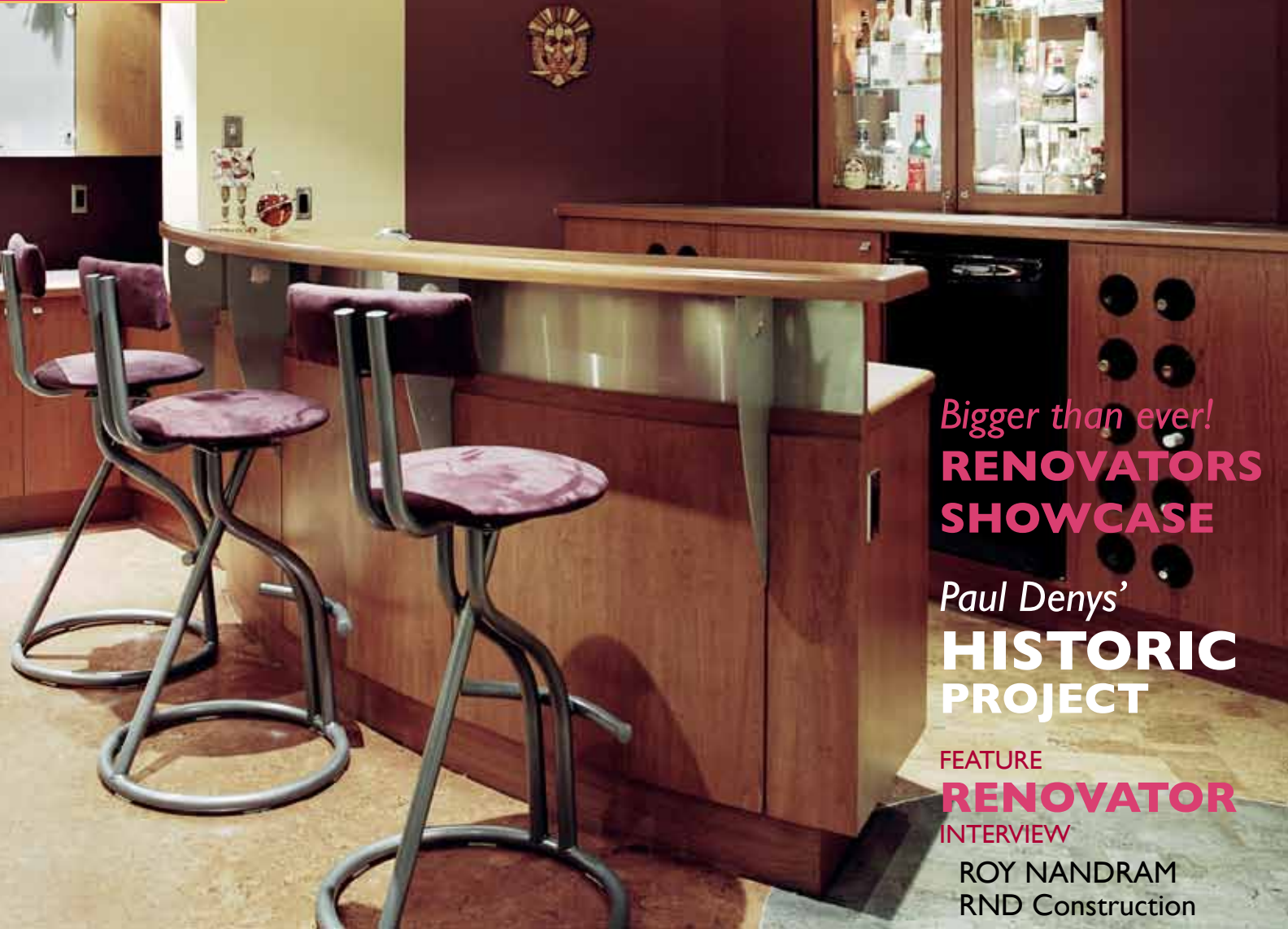
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By
Francie Healy

**PAUL DENYS WORKS WITH HIS HANDS,
BUT HE THINKS LIKE AN ARTIST.**

His skills are impressive: he's a master carpenter, award-winning designer-renovator and owner of Denys Builds Designs. His great love is restoration.

He is especially enthused by the marriage of past with present: heritage with technology.

And so, when Jean Claude Bergeron of Ottawa approached him about restoring a unique two-storey porch on his St. Patrick Street house to the 1898 original, he must have known he was talking to the right person for the job.

The thing is, the porch was way beyond "restoration". It was nothing but a ghost.

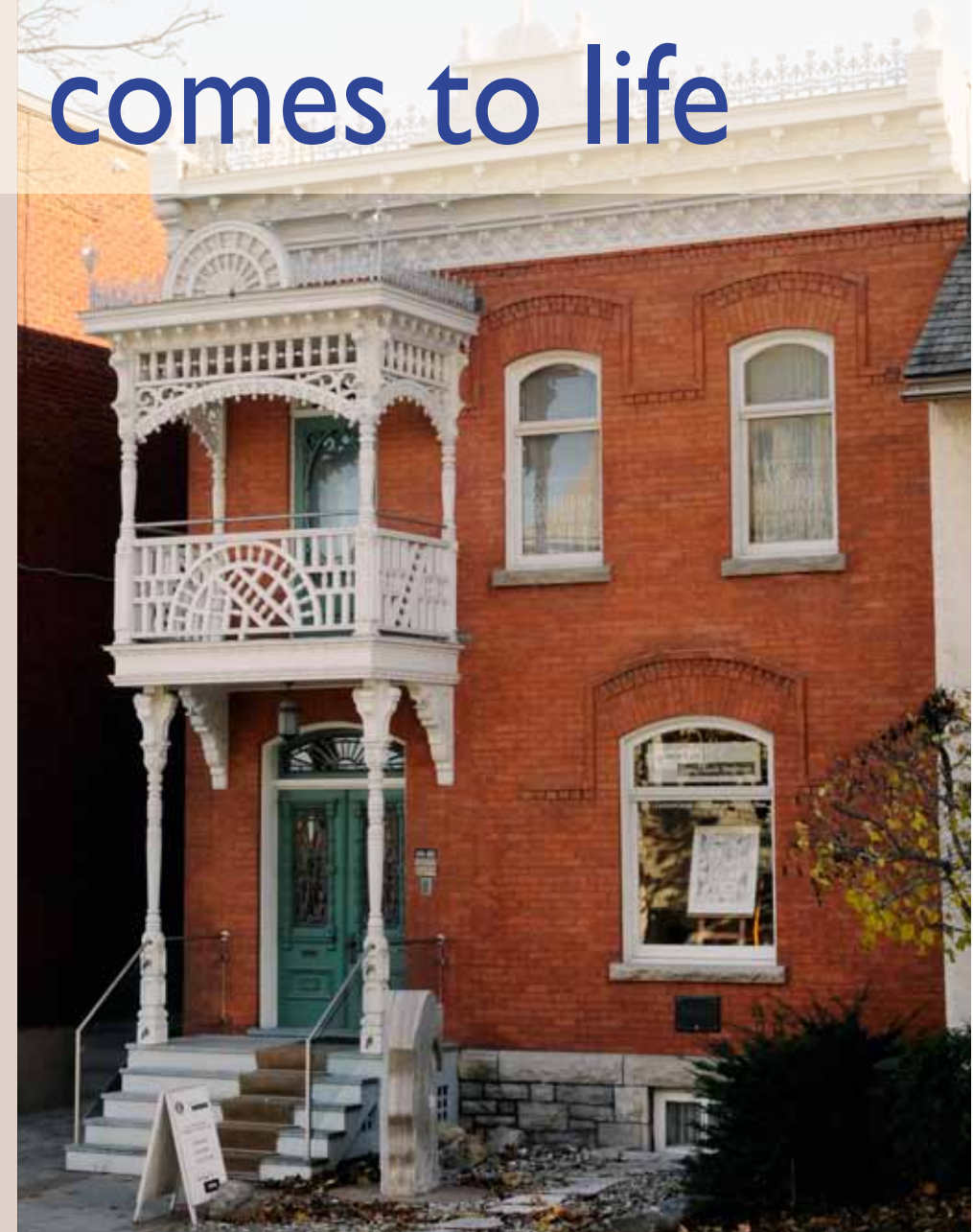
It had been removed sometime in the mid 1900s; the magnificent wood carvings were replaced with wrought iron. There was nothing left of the original. It had to be re-created from scratch.

There was, thankfully, a photo of the ghost: a clear, detailed black and white photo taken about 100 years ago by W. Charron (460 Sussex St., Ottawa), likely with an old-fashioned large-format "view" camera.

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Present Day Photos
Gordon King
Gordon King Photography

Beautiful ghost comes to life



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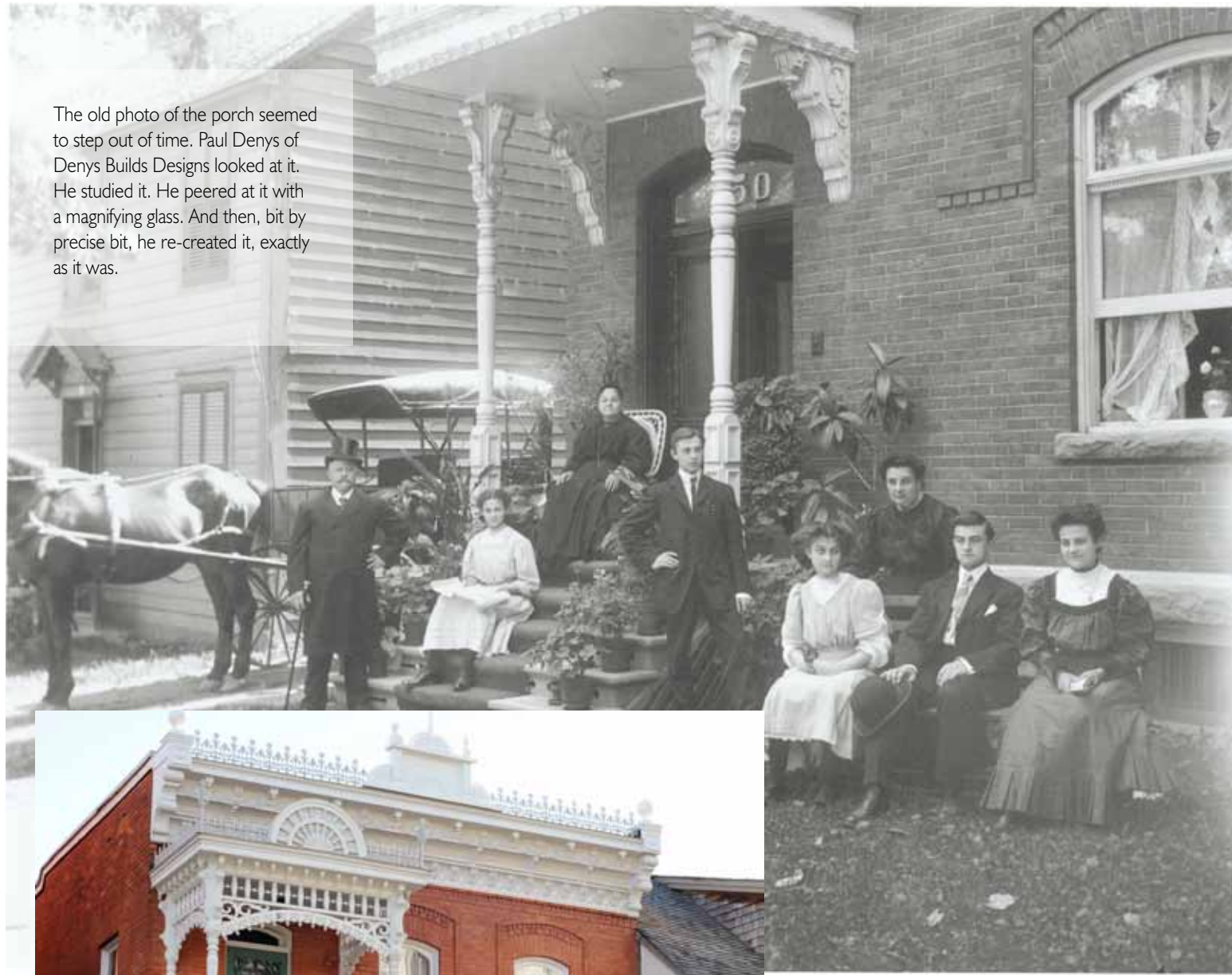
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The old photo of the porch seemed to step out of time. Paul Denys of Denys Builds Designs looked at it. He studied it. He peered at it with a magnifying glass. And then, bit by precise bit, he re-created it, exactly as it was.



If it were not for the photo, no one would remember exactly what the porch looked like. Most people wouldn't even know it existed.

The house itself was almost untouched over the years because it had had few owners. All the original woodwork and stained glass were in pristine condition. It just needed its beautiful porch.

Paul Denys says he'll never run across anything like it again.

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Beautiful ghost comes to life

continued



“Who else would have a photo in such detail of a unique and ornate porch [taken more than 100 years ago]?” he asks. “It was very, very rare.”

Denys took it on and created an exact replica of the porch that Alphonse Rochon carved when he bought his house in 1898.

Alphonse and his father, Fliven Rochon, were renowned woodcarvers of the time. You can still see their exquisite work at the parliament buildings and in the Basilica of Notre Dame, just across from the house.

But the design of the porch (or at least the design influence) may be to the credit of Canon Georges Bouillon, a priest-architect whose architectural decoration of the late 1800s graces the Basilica and other remarkable works throughout Ottawa and Gatineau-Hull.

According to Michel Prévost, Chief Archivist at the University of Ottawa and president of the Historical Society of Ottawa, Canon Bouillon travelled extensively in Europe, Turkey, Palestine, Morocco and Algeria to study Christian monuments (see article by M. Prévost, www.histoirequebec.qc.ca). This probably accounts for Canon Bouillon’s unique designs, including the Rochon House

porch.

The structure was re-created in stages starting in 2000 with the porch itself. About five years later the starburst went on top with a cresting (small decorative metal fence) along the parapet edge. In another four or five years, the deep-bracketed cornice went up. And finally, in 2010, Denys capped off the cornice and erected the flagpole on a carved stand precisely like the original.

Denys had some idea of the history of the house, but he needed to know more. Even though the picture was clear and precise, you can’t look around corners in a photograph; there were parts no one could see.

Denys and Bergeron did some in-depth studying of heritage structures and of the work of Alphonse Rochon. They went looking for similar porches in Perth, Smiths Falls and Montreal – but none were like this.

And so Denys used the photo – up close, magnified. He studied it, an intricate puzzle, and tried to understand the proportions. Finally, he created drawings to scale. He held his breath, hoping the proportions would work. They did. He had created an exact replica.

There were many challenges along the way. Thousands of pieces of wood had to

be hand-crafted. Denys had to find exactly the right materials. And there was the lengthy process of getting permits and approval from the City of Ottawa. Because it is designated a heritage property, all work had to be approved by the Heritage Advisory Committee in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act. The porch had to be brought up to code with a handrail, so Denys built it from glass and stainless steel. It’s there for safety, but you hardly notice it.

The house with the extraordinary porch, itself a work of art, is now Galerie D’art Jean-Claude-Bergeron (www.galeriejeanclaudebergeron.ca) and a memorable landmark at the heart of Ottawa, just on the edge of the Byward Market.

It was a project of a lifetime for Paul Denys, who says restoration (which he loves) is less than 1 per cent of construction work and a treasure from that standpoint alone. But to be able to re-create history so exactly?

“IT WAS ONE OF THOSE RARE OPPORTUNITIES THAT MAY NEVER COME IN A LIFETIME,” HE SAYS. “I DOUBT THAT I’LL EVER EXPERIENCE SUCH A THING AGAIN.”



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