

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2007

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the before & after ISSUE



17 remodeling tips
to stay true to
your home's era

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17 TIPS FOR YOUR HOUSE'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION

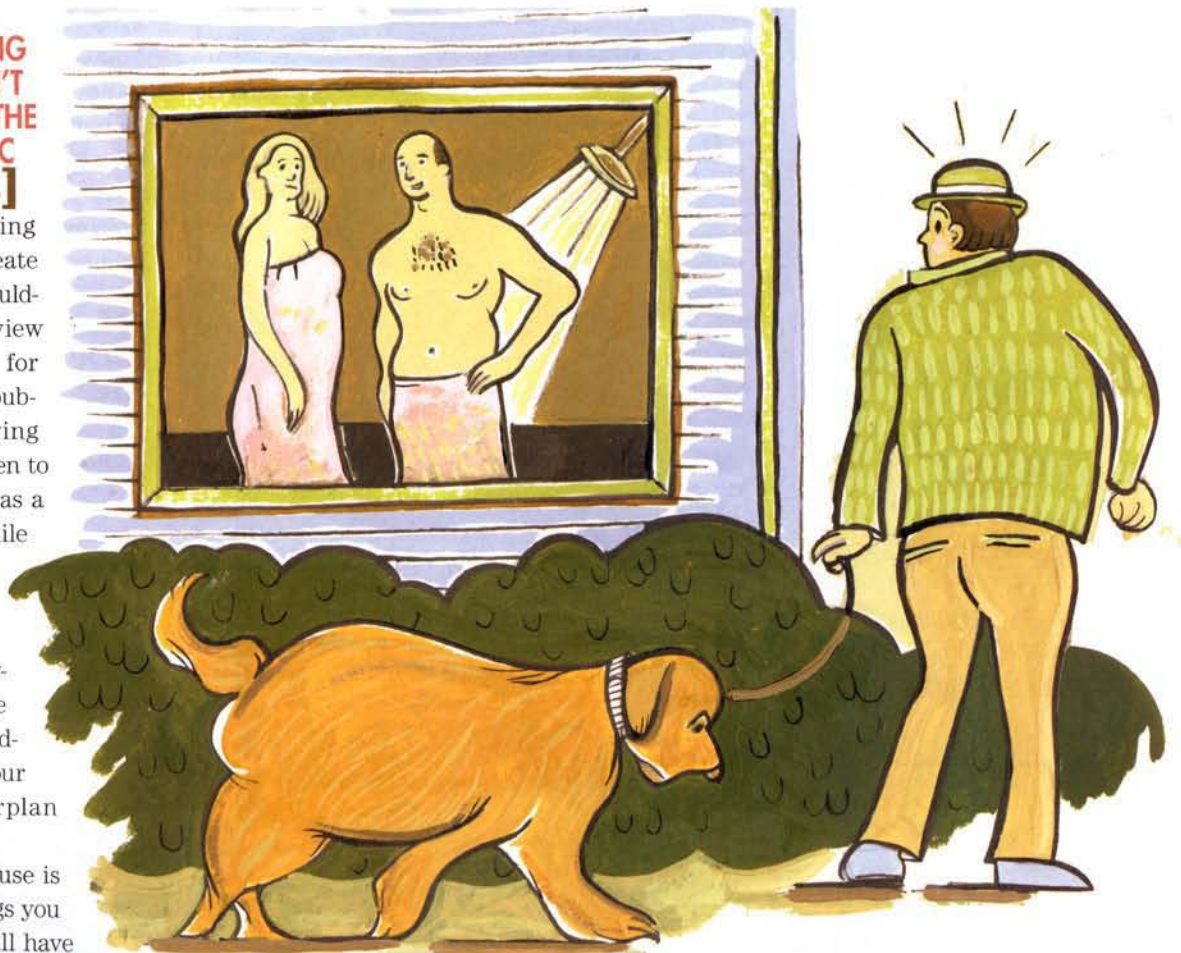
Yeah, you got a deal on that huge round window, but are you sure you want to muck up your turn-of-the-century house with it? *Oregon Home* talked with an architectural salvager, two restoration contractors, an architect and the executive director of the Architectural Heritage Center about how to balance remodeling with respect for your old house.

BY MARGARET FOLEY
ILLUSTRATIONS BY EBEN DICKINSON

[1. WHEN REMODELING AN OLD HOUSE, DON'T TOTALLY THROW OUT THE HIERARCHY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES.]

The latest trend of removing walls in old houses to create open floorplans can put should-be-private rooms in full view of the sidewalk. Entries, for example, should open to public spaces (think foyer, living room, dining room) and then to more private spaces (such as a kitchen or bathrooms). While contemporary lifestyles call for Great Rooms or command center kitchens, don't knock out walls willy-nilly. If you need to change your layout, there are period-appropriate ways to give your home a more open floorplan regardless of its style.

"For instance, if your house is a bungalow, there are things you can do to open it up yet still have a bit of separation between rooms," says Greg Olson, the owner and the president of Olson & Jones Construction. "You can put in architectural features that provide an open feeling and connectivity, yet still provide a line of demarcation such as a short wall with columns that are appropriate to the style, but still open up the space. Given a particular style of home, you can research the various elements that can be put in and find ones that are appropriate."



[2. WHEN YOU UPGRADE WINDOWS, DON'T MESS WITH THE BASIC SHAPE AND PROPORTION OF THE OPENINGS TO THE HOUSE.]

The size and placement of windows often define a home's architectural style. Triple windows, bay windows and touches such as leaded and stained glass were often given their placement for very specific reasons. "In the late-'70s and

early-'80s, the push in remodeling was to decrease the size of the windows," says Mike Byrnes, the owner of Aurora Mills Architectural Salvage in Aurora, Ore. "When you look at these buildings today, it's as if someone has taken their eyes out. Windows are an integral part of the design of a house. They create a pattern across the façade and create vertical and horizontal lines. When you alter the windows dramatically, you lose the architectural feel of the building. If you need to replace windows, there are companies that can reproduce your windows cost-effectively."

[3. RESPECT THE VINTAGE OF YOUR HOUSE, WHICHEVER DECADE IT WAS BUILT IN.]

You may live in a ranch house yet dream of having a Victorian with pink scrollwork over every inch of its facade, but think long and hard before doing something extreme. "It's that saying that carpenters have, 'Measure twice, cut once,'" says Cathy Galbraith, the executive director of Portland's Bosco-Milligan Foundation, which oversees the Architectural Heritage Center. "Be careful of decisions that are irreversible and don't buy into the fast-pitch sales. People care about the character of houses, and when you disregard the qualities of the house, you're simply taking away the future value of the property, both its intrinsic value and your financial investment. Plus, it's disorienting to walk into a house that's one style on the outside and another on the

inside. Don't have a 1930s house with a Victorian kitchen in it. That's historic, but it's not really appropriate."

[4. LISTEN TO YOUR HOUSE; IT CAN TELL YOU WHAT IT NEEDS.]

Just because your house has been stripped of period details doesn't mean that it's impossible to restore its original look. Often, there are clues in your house that will give you some idea of what it used to look like.

"Sometimes we take apart projects as if we're detectives," says Olson. "We'll look for hints of what may have been there. We look for old paint lines, shadows of moldings and the difference in ages among different pieces of wood. You can see where things have been nailed off or walls have been created or removed. A tear-out on a project can often reveal interesting information. The story of your house is often there just waiting to be discovered."

[5. IF YOU WANT TO ENHANCE YOUR HOME'S VINTAGE LOOK, KNOW THAT PERIOD MOLDINGS, MANTELS AND FLOOR COVERINGS REALLY DO MATTER.]

No matter the era of your house, a room is more than just four walls. And a room's details are often what make it appealing. "The most valuable rooms in a house that you can restore are the living room and dining room," says Wade Freitag, the

owner of Craftsman Design and Renovation in Portland. "For example, intact mantels and leaded glass are what those rooms were designed for, so it's worthwhile to restore them."

Smaller items, such as intricate or engraved latches, pulls and knobs can also enhance the period character and beauty of your house. "Anytime you have these artisan elements involved in designing a house, it's almost as if a universal language is being passed down in art," says Byrnes. "Today, these pieces are 100 to 150 years old or older, yet the artisan who made them is still speaking of craftsmanship and quality—things we may be missing today in what we design and build."

[6. DON'T GET SO WRAPPED UP IN YOUR HOME'S HISTORY THAT YOU FORGET TO MAKE YOUR OWN FAMILY'S HISTORY A PART OF THE HOUSE.]

Making a home your own is an important part of living in a house. "Understand how the spaces in your home were used historically and then look at how you want to interpret them for your lifestyle," says Byrnes. "That has nothing to do with renovations. It has to do with making it compatible. Hang things on the walls that define who *you* are. Put up family photographs or Grandma's quilt or a piece of art you really enjoy. Gustav Stickley and others wrote about that, and that's why you often see old spinning wheels and items from the past in Arts and Crafts houses. The idea was to bring your family's history and heritage into the house as well as more contemporary items."

[7. REMEMBER, YOUR HOME ISN'T THE ONLY ONE ON THE BLOCK.]

If you're having difficulties during a renovation finding out what design elements are most appropriate for your home's style, take a stroll through the neighborhood. Since most people live on a street of houses built around the same time, your neighbors' homes can give clues on how to finish your project.



"If you've done a little research on your house, but haven't been able to find out what your house was like before, look at the other houses on your block and the surrounding neighborhood before you start looking at and taking ideas from magazines and books," says Freitag. "Whoever built your house didn't work in a vacuum and was most likely influenced by building that was going on at the same time."

[8. BASIC PRESERVATION TECHNIQUES CAN PROVIDE A TEMPLATE FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR HOME.]

With older and historic homes, there's a hierarchy of how you can think about restoring features, remodeling and renovating. Keeping those criteria in mind can help you make decisions that will benefit your house during the long run. "The practices in historical preservation are, first of all, to repair and maintain along the way, restore when necessary and, if you have to replace, replace in kind," says Galbraith. "But replacing in kind should always be your last option. Study your house, do research and talk to people to make the most intelligent decision you can."

[9. HIRE PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERTS IN YOUR HOME'S STYLE TO WORK ON IT.]

To repair, restore or renovate a vintage home requires specialized knowledge. Make sure your contractor or architect has experience working on older homes and is familiar with the design and building issues that can come up during a project. "Hire a company who understands how to maintain an old house and knows the products you need to do that," says Freitag. "Someone who builds only new homes won't know where to find the materials and people who make all the specialized products you need for your

house. Your contractor needs to be able to recognize that, say, eaves were cut off and that those need to be replaced rather than just saying the eaves are missing and leaving it at that."

[10. DEFINE WHAT YOU MEAN BY 'RESTORE.']

When restoring or renovating your home, accuracy doesn't mean that you have to turn back the clock on your plumbing or only use calcimine paints. For most people, restoration involves recreating the original look of the house, rather than returning everything to its original state. "From a restoration point of view, a kitchen doesn't make that much sense," says Freitag. "In a 1910 bungalow, you would've had a wood stove and sloping cabinets. Nobody *wants* a kitchen like that now, but you can do cabinets with old styles and latches, yet the drawers have full extensions. Inside the cabinets, you can put in pullouts. You can hide dishwashers and refrigerators so that you have a kitchen that feels old-fashioned, but is compatible with how you live."

[11. REALIZE THAT SMALL CHANGES CAN HAVE A BIG IMPACT.]

You may want to restore your home to its vintage glory, but if a complete renovation is beyond your reach, simple well-chosen alterations can make a *huge* impact. "Even something as simple as a period-appropriate front door can make a huge difference," says Freitag. "A front door, in a compatible style with matching hardware, is a great investment."

[12. PRIORITIZE WHAT YOU WANT TO CHANGE.]

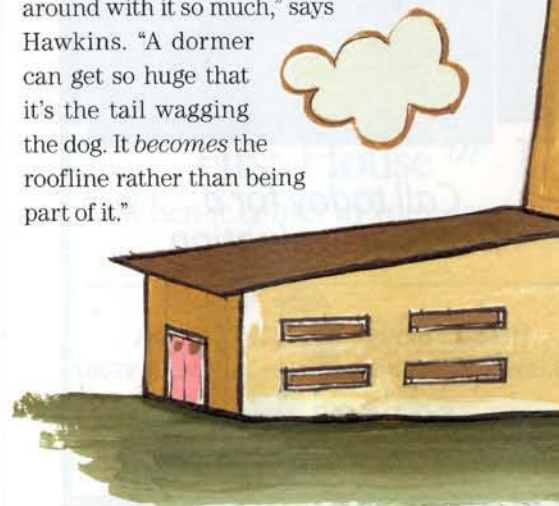
If you've just bought an old home that needs a lot of work, do the things that need to be done first before moving on to your wishlist. While it can be fun to spend evenings looking at wallpaper and paint samples or choosing lighting, make

sure the mechanics of the home are in order before moving on to more cosmetic alterations. "Sometimes you buy a house that's had something done to it and your plan is, ultimately, to reverse what's been changed or to improve upon it," says Galbraith. "But most homeowners have to deal with fiscal realities and decide what they're going to do first, second or third and what they're going to do when they have the money. A lot of it depends on the condition of the house. If you've got a leaky roof, you better do that before you renovate your kitchen."

[13. MATCH ROOFLINES AND ROOF PITCHES WHEN YOU ADD ON TO A HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT HOUSE.]

The roof is an important element of a home's design, and altering it can ruin your home's proportions. "Assuming the house is a nice design, respect its architecture," says Bill Hawkins, the owner of William J. Hawkins III Architect, FAIA, and the co-author of *Classic Houses of Portland, Oregon: 1850-1950* (2005, Timber Press, \$30). "If it's a Prairie-style house, don't add a pitched roof. It destroys the integrity of the home."

Even a change that seems minor can ruin a roofline. For example, if you want to add a dormer, make sure it doesn't become the dominant feature. "With good pieces of architecture, it's important to respect the quality and not muck around with it so much," says Hawkins. "A dormer can get so huge that it's the tail wagging the dog. It *becomes* the roofline rather than being part of it."



[14. REPLICATE ORIGINAL EXTERIOR DETAILS (FISH-SCALE SHINGLES, PORCH PILLARS OR BALUSTERS, TRIM ON THE EAVES) THAT WILL ENHANCE YOUR OLD HOUSE'S CURB APPEAL RATHER THAN NUKE IT.]

Rather than buy fat pillars to replace wooden ones that have rotted on their porches, some homeowners are low-balling the expenditure by having carpenters build new pillars out of what looks like 2-by-4s. The look of the house goes



from Ladd's Addition to Felony Flats in an instant. Rotting wood is a sure sign that work needs to be done, but don't assume that a decorative column or sections of siding *have* to go.

"Few things are more outrageously expensive to repair than to replace," says Galbraith. "People will say that they went to their local lumberyard and were told that their vintage siding isn't made anymore. That's not necessarily the case. There *are* woodcrafters that can mill to your specifications. Part of knowing what to do is going to the right craftspeople, hiring the right contractor and getting the right advice. You need to look for resources before taking the word of someone who doesn't necessarily supply what you need."

[15. RENOVATE YOUR HISTORIC REGISTRY HOME IN A WAY THAT'S CONSISTENT WITH THE GUIDELINES, YET STILL MEETS YOUR NEEDS.]

If your home is on the historic registry, you often need to have permission to make changes. If a remodel or renovation is designed properly, you can have a house that meets your standards as well

as historical standards. "With homes on the registry, a committee often has to approve the design, but that doesn't mean you can't make changes," says Olson. "In one case, we took out a garage on a house and put in a new one that was larger. We were able to save components from the old garage and match new components and applied both to the new building. We built something more modern in terms of size, yet kept the garage's original style. Now the garage fits cars, not carriages."

[16. SCOUR YOUR CRAWL SPACES, BASEMENT AND ATTIC FOR ORIGINAL HOUSE PARTS.]

Finding the perfect door, stained-glass window or piece of paneling can be as easy as searching the dark corners of your home. "What you need may be in your basement," says Freitag. "Sometimes, we'll come across old woodwork such as columns that went between the living and dining rooms, and we can put those back in. It's always great to find those materials for your house *in* the house."

[17. SEEK OUT OTHER OLD-HOUSE LOVERS TO STAY INSPIRED ABOUT RESTORING YOUR HOME.]

Portland and other areas of the Pacific Northwest are filled with people who are interested in maintaining older and historic homes. By forging links with organizations and other same-minded homeowners, you can learn more about your home and how to care for it.

"You've got to keep the faith," says Byrnes. "Owning an older structure is much more difficult than owning a newer one, but there are things going on in every neighborhood of old homes. People who are working on their homes share a bond, and you need to seek that out because you *don't* want to reinvent the wheel. Join organizations like the Bosco-Milligan Foundation or go to another group. For example, there's an old-home forum in Oregon City that meets once a month to share experiences. Find others who are doing the same type of work and enjoying it—and learn from them." □

