

# Home

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## Preserving the past

Portland's Architectural Heritage Center serves as a community resource for building, home renovations

By **NANCY WOODS**  
for *The Tribune's*  
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In 1976, when Jerry Bosco and Ben Milligan bought West's Block building on Southeast Grand Avenue, the building was in bad shape. The transom windows had been painted over and buckets had been set on the floor to catch rainwater.

The two men bought the building to house their two glass-making businesses and a portion of their collection of architectural artifacts.

Today, the renovated building serves as an attractive, functional space for the Architectural Heritage Center, which houses part of the Bosco-and-Milligan collection, as well as exhibits and programs, including classes on everything from How to Research the History of Your Old House to the Vocabulary of Architecture.

In 1980, West's Block was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

But back in 1976 it was "falling plaster, funky wallpaper, leaky ceilings and more falling plaster," says Cathy Galbraith, executive director of the center. The outside of the red brick 1883 Italianate building had been painted over many times.



Although the building needed to be renovated, "Sandblasting brick is a 'no-no'," Galbraith says, "because it takes the skin off the brick, letting water infiltrate. We had kind of resigned ourselves to painting the brick red."

Then, one morning, she got a call from the general contractor, who told her he'd had a "brainstorm in the shower that morning."

Since the inside of the brick was free of paint, he told her, "why don't we take the brick down, clean it and then flip it."

Which is just what they did, turning every brick in the building around so the inside now faces out.

They also burned layers of

paint off the outside cornice, restored the wooden floors and brought everything up to code. The renovations were completed in 2005 with, as Galbraith says, "a lot of donated materials and services."

### Renovating a Craftsman foursquare

That was fortunate for home owners Denise Bartelt and her husband, Drew Nasto. When they moved into their 1907 Craftsman foursquare in the Hollywood neighborhood, the house was in good shape but the 9-foot-tall ceilings had been lowered and the vinyl floor was so bad that, in Bartelt's words, "it wouldn't clean."



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Denise Bartelt, left, found a firm through the Architectural Heritage Foundation that specializes in older home renovations. Craftsman Design and Renovation found the perfect solution to a tricky basement stairwell problem, which resulted in a beautifully designed bench and reading nook. Cathy Galbraith, above, is the executive director of the Architectural Heritage Foundation located in the renovated West's Block building in Southeast Portland.

There also was the problem with a side-entry door that had been changed, turning a porch into a "deck to nowhere."

In short, Bartelt says, the house was "very confusing."

So they contacted the architectural center for help in finding a renovation firm.

"We wanted to find someone who was going to take good care of our house, who understood

that we like the architectural details, that we didn't want to just strip down the house," Bartelt says.

They interviewed several qualified firms, but decided on Craftsman Design and Renovation because the company came up with what Bartelt calls the "saving idea" when it came to their problematic basement staircase.

"I'm 6-foot-1," Bartelt says, "and Drew is 6-foot-3. The stairs to the basement had low headroom. We needed to fix those stairs. Both of us had concussed ourselves a couple times."

Craftsman Design came up with the idea of using a backstaircase space to make a new basement stair and adding a bench and reading nook on the remaining landing.

"Now we have this lovely bench and reading nook with wood details that match the rest of our house," Bartelt says. "It looks like it's always been there."

The basement stairs, she says, are "beautiful," with fir treads that match the flooring in the kitchen. "It feels like a continuation of the house; it all makes visual sense."

Bartelt now volunteers as the center's "Friday desk person."

Looking back at her renovation project, she says, "I really don't know what we would have done if the center hadn't been there, if we hadn't had that sort of support system and resource for information."

She would recommend the center to others "because the people who are members have an interest in older architecture, older houses. It's the first place you should come to ask questions about that," she says.