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HOMESCAPE

Ideas for interior design & decorating



PHOTOS BY EUGENE PARCIASEPE, JR.
INTERIOR STAGING BY KAREN LANE FIERSTEIN/WELL-STAGED HOME

OLD HOUSE ON THE HILL

Couple restores Tenafly's King-Jellison house to its former stateliness — and receives an award in the process | BY ANTOINETTE RAINONE

Flashback, late 70s: A beautiful spring day. Karen Farris is a teenager practicing her driving techniques along the winding roads of Tenafly. She drives past an old Italianate Villa high on a hill, thinking: “How wonderful it would be to live in a house like that.” It’s a fleeting thought, one she doesn’t entertain again.

Not until 1996, that is, when she and her husband purchase that very house.

The road to buying the 1873 King-Jellison house, however, was as sinuous as the literal ones. Karen got her driver’s license, moved out of Tenafly to attend college in North Carolina, then took jobs at news stations in Washington, D.C. and Manhattan. When she met Michael Neus, whom she married in 1990, they moved to Singapore for 4½ years.

Karen Neus, a newlywed now living in an exotic land oceans away from her hometown, still wasn’t thinking about that old house on the hill. When the time came to have children, however, the couple decided to move back to New Jersey.

Déjà vu, 1996: Driving past that house in Tenafly again — now with her husband by her side — Neus sees a “for sale” sign on the lawn. Thoughts rush in — the same ones she had the first time she spotted the house two decades ago. Her feelings haven’t changed.

“There was a romantic feel about it,” says Neus. “It was unlike any other house you saw in town.”

It was a no-brainer. Six months later, the stately Italianate was theirs.



The King-Jellison house in Tenafly was built by renowned architect, Gamaliel King, for his newly married daughter Sarah King Jellison and her family in 1873. It was always believed that King, who designed the Brooklyn Borough Hall, also designed this Italianate Villa, but it was confirmed during the restoration of the home by the current owners, Michael and Karen Neus, during the early 2000s, who found his signature on the original house planking, with the date 1873.

Italianates have cubic or rectangular massing, low-pitched roofs, projecting eaves with brackets, rooftop cupolas and classical decoration. This Italianate is one of the few with towers. In fact, you can see the Ramapo Mountains from the cupola, which was also restored.

Right, original double-entry doors were preserved and coated with polyurethane.

Top, the library, formerly the parlor, is a cozy spot where the Neuses enjoy reading and listening to old-time radio shows.



LET THE RESTORATION BEGIN

Accustomed to adventures, the couple — now the fifth owners to occupy the house — would find themselves embarking on yet another: Historic-home restoration.

Like any house that’s been around for more than a century, their historic house needed attention, and lots of it. Three years after moving in, the homeowners decided to tackle the exterior, beginning with a paint job. Sounds easy enough, but alas, not with an older house.

“We stumbled upon an obstacle right away,” says Neus. The shingles were asbestos-coated cement, she explains. There were many pieces that needed to be replaced before a paint job took place, but authentic replacements were impossible.

“They don’t make anything with asbestos anymore,” she adds.

There was really no choice but to take the cement shingles away and see what lay underneath. What they found was original clapboard which was 50 percent salvageable — seemingly good news because the shingles could be custom-milled to match the original siding. However, the old siding was cut with sharp edges — “paint does not adhere to sharp edges, we found out,” says Neus. So, after much research and talking to the New Jersey Historic Preservation

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COVER STORY



David Marino of Van-Go Contracting beginning to demolish the old cement front porch.



The new front porch, in progress.



A restored bracket, left, and a new one, right, made to look like the old.



Period balusters were painted to match the historic colors chosen for the house.

OLD HOUSE ON THE HILL



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VAN-GO GENERAL CONTRACTING INC.

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Commission, they made the decision to take the siding off completely and install wooden cedar clapboards.

"With the new clapboards, we were finally free to paint the house," says Neus.

Choosing the paint colors turned into another research project, albeit a fun one. These kinds of homes pride themselves on their colors — and the more the merrier. Wanting to make the most authentic choices for a historic house, the couple enlisted the help from a color consultant at the University of Michigan.

"I googled 'historic paint colors' and found Robert Schweitzer," says Neus.

"Everything was done via e-mail. We sent him photos of our house and he sent them back with five color choices from which to choose."

They decided on sage green, with complementary trim colors in dark green, terracotta, gold and white. Then they hired Van-Go Contracting in Bergenfield to do the job.

"There's a symbiotic relationship between the landscaping and this bold, prevalent house that sits on a hill," says owner Peter Georgoutsos. "These colors — all earth tones — accentuate the home's beauty and reduce its impact on the landscape. You want the house to be gorgeous and subtle, not loud and obnoxious."

Along with the new clapboard siding,

Van-Go restored all exterior elements — as well as duplicated ones that were too badly decomposed — including moldings, brackets and chamfered posts.

Since soffits and corner brackets on the main roof had been rotted due to water damage, the soffit boards were replaced and new brackets fabricated by

hand using the old ones as models. This was one of the most important elements of the project, because the roof-level brackets are one of the most important identifying characteristics of the Italianate style.

THE FRONT PORCH

The next obstacle to overcome was the cement front porch. Added onto the house sometime between 1911 and 1920, it was an eyesore.

Enter David Marino to the rescue, an architectural designer and carpenter with Van-Go.

"It was an ugly, ugly thing," Marino says of the cement porch. "I said, 'Let's make it look better.' So I designed the new porch and I built it, too."

The intent was to create a porch fashioned after the original, which dated from when the house was first built. The Neuses scoured historical records in hopes of finding a photograph of the original, but to no avail.

They decided to fashion the new front porch after the Craftsman-style porch built onto the back of the house in the early 1900s.

The Neuses decided to fashion the new front porch, left, after the Craftsman-style porch built onto the back of the King-Jellison house in the early 1900s, below, David Marino custom-milled brackets, period balusters and large Doric pillars for the front porch.

Marino also restored the rear porch, below. They discovered that the crossbeams were never properly supported by vertical elements, so the roof had to be propped up and retained while a new foundation with modern footings was poured. They repaired the original chamfered columns and consulted a period pattern book to choose an appropriate rail and newel post. A new mahogany floor was laid, wooden steps were built to replace oversized poured concrete steps, and period-appropriate lattice was installed under the porch.



EUGENE PARCIASEPE, JR.

"David built the [new] porch on the computer to show us what it was going to look like," says Neus.

Everyone was pleased, so Marino went ahead and built the real porch, custom-milling brackets, period balusters and large Doric pillars.

The impeccable result is a porch that looks as if it's been part of the house for centuries.

HISTORY UNVEILED

During the process of restoration, the Neuses became simultaneously engrossed in discovering intriguing facets of their homes' past life.

They enlisted the help of Beth Potter, owner of her own research and consulting business, "HouseTales" in Haworth. Potter delved into various town records to unearth historical information, including the original owners and architect.

In 1872, George Jellison purchased the

COVER STORY

Tenafly land along with his wife, Sarah King Jellison, daughter of Brooklyn-based architect, Gamaliel King. King's most noted buildings include the Brooklyn Borough Hall and the York Street Methodist Episcopal Church, also in Brooklyn.

Although King was always believed to be the architect of this house, it was during the Neus's restoration that it was confirmed. They found on the original house planking, near the front door, the signatures of both George and Sarah Jellison, their son William, and Gamaliel King, with the date 1873. King had designed the house for his daughter and her family, then died two years later.

INTERIOR DESIGN

It's no surprise the interior of the home needed a lot of work as well.

"Like so many old houses, there were all these weird things inside," says Neus.

"Weird things" included the kind of thick stucco walls you'd normally find outside of a house, among many others. After taking care of a host of structural nuisances, the homeowners finally were able to focus on the interior design of the library and dining room.

They enlisted the help of Toronto-based interior designer Douglas Gill.

Gill chose burgundy colors in the library (which, in the past, would have been the parlor), with antique-gold moldings surrounding the room. Since the room was cold due to inefficient windows, (they didn't want to replace original windows) he suggested long, heavy draperies in burgundy and olive.

"I draw them every night, just as they did in the old days," says Neus. "They are long and heavy and really do keep the cold out. They're practical, but also very lovely."

Decorating the two rooms was easy. The Neuses had already amassed many prized possessions from their travels to Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Shadow puppets from Indonesia adorn the mantel, and paintings by Balinese locals hang on the walls.

The dining room, too, has many lovely details. "The dining table is a 1925 Dutch Colonial piece from Indonesia and the sideboard is a Chinese piece that we bought in Singapore," says Neus. "I love combining formal with informal elements."

At first, you may think that Oriental touches don't exactly match a stately Italianate. Placed sparingly throughout, however, they seem to emit just the right amount of exotic counterbalance to the rooms.

"I read that the Edwardians



loved to travel and bring back items from their travels, for their homes. In the same spirit, that's what we did," says Neus.

EYE ON THE FUTURE

All the Neus's hard work paid off: The couple was awarded the 2007 Bergen County Historic Preservation Commendation Award for their home's exterior preservation and restoration.

The real reward? "We've turned up history not known

before." Plus, a piece of the past has been preserved.

The road to getting people to understand the value of preserving the past is an arduous one, Neus admits, but it's a road worth traveling.

"Whatever we can do to help people understand the importance of historic preservation," she says, "makes everything we've done here worthwhile."

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scape copy and design editor.



PHOTOS BY EUGENE PARCIASEPE JR.
INTERIOR STAGING BY KAREN LANE FIERSTEIN
FLOWERS BY PAUL ANTHONY DESIGNS,
CRESSKILL

In the dining room, above, a teakwood mirror from Indonesia is placed above a Chinese sideboard, purchased in Singapore.

Left, the dining room also features a 1925 Dutch Colonial table from Indonesia. On the back wall hang framed pages from a Burmese Bible, which Karen and Michael Neus found in the back of a store while they were in Bangkok. "They were on the floor, all wrapped up," says Neus. "We couldn't believe we had found such a treasure."



Above, while on a family trip to Bali (the Neuses wanted their children to experience the Far East, as had they), they bought artworks from local students who were painting outside, including the elephant picture, on the top shelf.

The radio under the shelf belonged to Karen's grandmother. "I'm dying to get some old radio shows of 'The Shadow' and play them in this room," says Neus.

Left, a corner in the library, with original built-in shelving, makes a cozy spot for reading.