

before & after

before



JUST IN TIME

Justice prevails. It took more than 50 years to undo the indignity of a Spanish Revival makeover, but a Victorian rowhouse has reaffirmed its heritage.

What have we gotten ourselves into? That moment of self-doubt injects itself at some point into most remodelings. Ed Mevi remembers all too vividly when it hit him: His family had been holed up for too long in a too-tiny apartment while workmen tore into their century-old Victorian home. Ed stopped by to inspect their progress: "I walked maybe halfway back into the house, and I remember looking up and seeing the sky and looking down and seeing the basement floor. And I thought, two-thirds of my house is gone!"

It would take most of a year to put it all back together. But when the work was finished, the Mevi home had the beauty and comfort that the family long dreamed of. And its facade had regained the expressiveness of its youth, as if ignoring the years it has clung to a sloping street in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood.

Ed and his wife, Patricia, had wrestled with the idea of moving, but they loved the charm of the old neighborhood and their deep backyard with its ancient redwood tree. They had lived here since 1978, when their two children were tykes and their house was just three years shy of its centennial. The quaint floor plan suited the young family just fine. The couple adapted



This 1881 home was 40-some years old when remodeled with an arched entry and tile roof, reflections of a wave of Spanish Revival design that swept the area in the 1920s. The new facade returns the home to its Victorian heritage.

WRITTEN BY LARRY ERICKSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN WEINTRAUB



one of the parlors to their bedroom, so the kids slept nearby. “It worked when they were little,” Patricia says. “It was very intimate.”

But it was too intimate for everyone by the time the kids were teenagers. The house had weathered the great earthquake of 1906, and the city’s “summer of love” six decades later. But it wasn’t strong enough to stand up to the changing needs of a growing family. When a 1989 quake toppled some of their plaster, the Mevis knew it was time for a change.

“We looked at new houses, but we couldn’t find another house with a yard this nice,” Ed recalls. Friends recommended talking with architect Michael Connell, who has a knack for updating floor plans without sacri-

Redwood siding, fish-scale shingles, and elaborate columns and moldings revived the bay and entry. Renovators determined that the original 1881 bay had a sharp rectangular form. Ed and Patricia were comfortable with the more relaxed, oblique angle that shows off more trim.

ficing their personality. Working with Connell, a plan emerged to peel away the Spanish trappings that had been added to the facade in the 1920s or ’30s. No record remained of the home’s original appearance, but neighboring rowhouses offered clues that would guide the work. The result might not be the exact intentions of the original designer and builder, but it probably would feel comfortable to them.

“Part of the appeal of this project was the neighborhood,” Connell agrees. He was eager to create a house for the ’90s, but of the 19th century as well. “That block is fairly intact, historically, so it was important that we maintained a form sympathetic to the neighbors.” ➤



LEFT AND ABOVE: No architectural detailing on the Mevi home survived, so inspiration for replacement trim was borrowed from neighboring homes that line the shady block.

Victorian hallmarks

Built in 1881, the Mevi home stands shoulder to shoulder with a row of Victorian charmers in San Francisco. Despite the toll of earthquakes and the whims of style, the city remains famous for its Victorian homes. Most celebrated are the elaborately painted Queen Anne houses, characterized by fanciful gingerbread ornamentation. The Mevi home and its neighbors show a classical restraint in detail that has stood up well to the changing tastes of generations.

There are numerous Victorian styles, but they share common themes: Ceilings are high and moldings elaborate; pocket doors typically separate front and back parlors; interiors tend to be tightly compartmentalized by today's standards, broken into multiple small rooms that were easier for their Victorian-era residents to keep heated. Fireplaces were numerous and often finished with tile.

Ed and Patricia Mevi were fortunate that prominent suppliers of Victorian architectural details are based nearby. Architect Michael Connell says two local resources for the Mevi renovation are firms that supply renovators nationwide:

- **San Francisco Victoriana**, 2070 Newcomb Ave., 94124; 415/648-0313
- **Beronio Lumber**, 2525 Marin St., 94124; 415/824-4300.

Plans beyond the facade were more radical. The original parlors, living room, and dining room survived, but the back of the house was gutted and created anew. "Victorian purists would have thought we were crazy," Patricia says. The main floor gained a modern kitchen open to a family room and a broad backyard deck. On the lower level, a former substandard "in-law suite" was reconfigured for the teenagers' bedrooms. And the back of the house rose to another level, where a new master suite takes in a dreamer's view of downtown San Francisco and a glimpse of the glimmering bay.

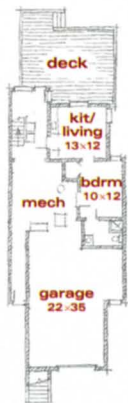
The house itself suggested this solution. The facade's height had always hinted at an upper floor. Connell simply delivered on the original designer's implied promise. Of course, dreams and promises can be costly commodities. Renovation took more time, money, and energy than Ed and Patricia ever anticipated. They had expected the work to take five months; it took a year (two years, if you include the design phase and the laborious process of obtaining permits). The final cost of the renovation actually exceeded the value of the house when work began. Ed admits they had doubts along the way, but not now.

"Toward the end, it got tedious," he says, "but we'd do it again, no question about it." Patricia, a teacher, is quick to add, "and we'd do much better."

The experience taught them lessons of value to anyone who contemplates a renovation:

- **"Come up with a good plan, find a very good contractor, and make as few changes as possible,"** counsels Ed, a lawyer. But some changes are inevitable, he says: "With an old house, it's impossible to anticipate all the things you'll have to deal with."
- **Allow unavoidable adjustments to be part of the fun.** The Mevis laugh at the recollection of ►

before:
1,900
square
feet



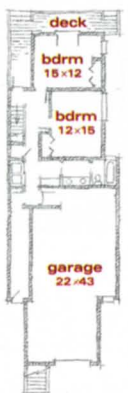
first level



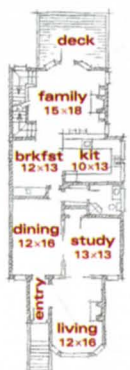
second level

By stretching a few feet into the backyard and adding a third level, the Mevi house grew 875 square feet. The owners were delighted that the changes separate parents and teenagers, while providing family space on the middle level.

after:
2,775
square
feet



first level



second level



new
third level

how trim details of the facade evolved. "We had these two old Irish carpenters working on it, and I just stayed out there and we refined it and refined it," Ed says. "We used stencil paper to look at different ideas and then had this cabinetmaker put our ideas together."

• **Know who's doing the work on your project, and be sure their abilities match your expectations,** says Patricia. The array of people involved in their project surprised the Mevis. They had taken pains to be comfortable with their architect and contractor. But they didn't anticipate the importance of individual craftspeople in the project.

• **Hire experts who can help with the details.** Ed and Patricia wish they had employed a lighting expert and an interior designer. "You have to make so many decisions," Patricia reports. "And without experience in these areas, you just have no idea how they're going to turn out."

Fortunately, the details turned out fine. And that was the most enduring lesson of the experience, Ed and Patricia agree: Though the project may seem out of control from time to time, perseverance finds its own reward. □

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