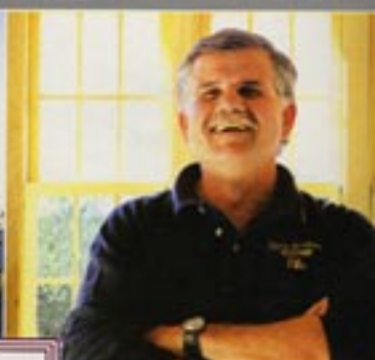


SPECIAL 25th-ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

This Old House

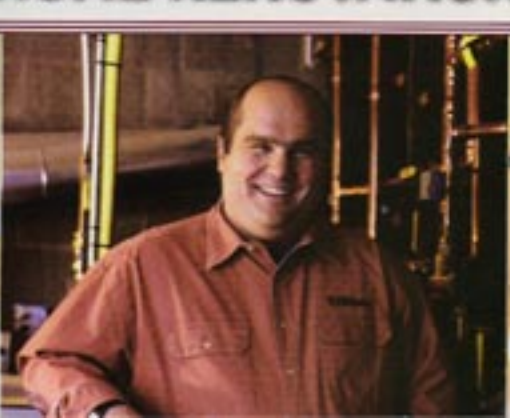
OCTOBER 2004



25
YEARS
25
OF THE BEST IN
HOME RENOVATION



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ADL KEYWORD: THIS OLD HOUSE



UNBURIED TREASURE

HE THOUGHT HE WAS BUYING A SIMPLE FIXER-UPPER;
WHAT HE DISCOVERED WAS A HOUSE RICH IN HISTORY

Some homes and homeowners are meant to be together—though it's not always obvious at first sight. When Andrew Payne first came across his timber-framed Cape Cod-style house some 14 years ago, he was less than overwhelmed. "The roof leaked, the plaster was cracked, and the fuse box was a nightmare," Andy recalls. He had recently started a contracting business, and the last thing he needed was a fixer-upper that would occupy all his spare time. So he decided to pass on the Wilton, Connecticut, property. *(continued)*



Stripping layers of paint from the dining room's fireplace surround revealed original red milk paint. OPPOSITE: the house's wide-plank pine flooring.



ABOVE: The half-bath-cum-laundry room on the first floor is completely new, but great care was taken to make the multifunctional space blend with the rest of the house. The old-fashioned farm sink is supported by a rustic, pegged mortise-and-tenon-legged stand that the homeowner built himself. **BELOW:** the house's exterior.

But after a year-and-a-half search for a starter home in his pricey hometown turned up little else, he was forced to reconsider. Yes, the circa-1730s house looked pretty woebegone, but it had a sturdy post-and-beam frame and original tongue-and-groove flooring. Yes, the windows were sealed shut by layers of paint, but through the cracked panes he could hear the nearby Norwalk River tumbling downstream. Besides, the 3/4-acre property held a run-down barn that Andy could fix up and use as a workshop. And mostly there was the fact that at this point in his life it was one of the few places in town he could afford.

HASTE MAKES MISTAKES

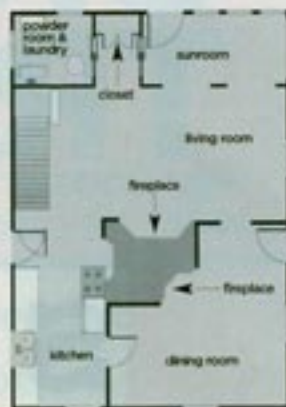
To tackle the necessary work, Andy planned to slowly renovate his way through the house as time allowed, from the living and dining rooms, kitchen, and screened porch on the first floor to the modified-four-square floor plan on the second. He did, however, have a pressing need for an office. So after tearing off the house's failing asphalt roof and replacing it with hand-split cedar shakes, he gutted one of the upstairs spaces to make room for a desk, a bookshelf, and a fax machine. Focused solely on creating a functional room, he removed three original oak joists in an attempt to increase the ceiling height as he put up drywall.



That hasty decision is one he still can't quite forgive himself for. Over the following months, as he moved into other rooms and stripped the walls down to the lath and bare timbers, Andy was increasingly taken by the elegance of the

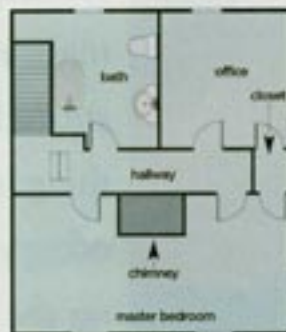
What They Did

FIRST FLOOR



Although the plan of the 1,050-square-foot house remains unchanged, a screened porch was enclosed to create a four-season sunroom, and a cold-storage area was converted to a half-bath and laundry room.

SECOND FLOOR



Upstairs, the master bedroom was created by removing a wall that separated two smaller rooms. It shares a closet with the home office.



home's post-and-beam framing. Eventually, he realized that he would only be happy if he restored the house as completely as possible—while still modernizing it—to show respect for and celebrate its Yankee craftsmanship and ingenuity. "My dream changed from just getting the house into livable shape to uncovering the timber framing in each room to show it off." And he decided to learn the name of every post, girt, and summer beam he came across.

The living room mantel was scraped down to its original "soldier blue" paint, and the new, three-paneled overmantel was painted to match. At the rear of the firebox is an old beehive oven.



ABOVE: Suspended from the beadboard ceiling of the porch-turned-sunroom (inset) is a rope-and-barrel pulley once used to dip into a well beneath the floor.

RESTORATION REVELATIONS

When he got around to enclosing the shed-roofed porch, Andy made another discovery: Hidden above the ceiling was a clever rope-and-barrel pulley, once used to draw water from a well dug beneath the porch. He decided to leave the pulley right where it was for all to see. Likewise with every stick of framing. Even when he was forced to incorporate new materials, he tried to maintain the integrity of the place. He matched the house's new windows, for example, to the existing 12-over-12s by building up their sill thickness, extending the head casings and sills, and pounding wooden pegs into the corners to simulate the pegs that held together the original units' mortise-and-tenon frames.

Of course, he had to make a few concessions to modernity along the way. "I had my electrician update the wiring and put in a 200-amp service panel," Andy says. "Before that, every time I tried to toast a piece of bread, a fuse would blow."

A LABOR OF LOVE

Despite Andy's commitment to the project, the work progressed slowly. "It's tough to be at a job site all day and then come home and have to pick



"MY DREAM CHANGED FROM JUST GETTING THE HOUSE INTO LIVABLE SHAPE TO UNCOVERING THE TIMBER FRAMING IN EACH ROOM TO SHOW IT OFF."

—HOMEOWNER ANDY PAYNE



the tools right back up," he says. Fortunately, in 1997 Andy met Laura Avery, who also had an affinity for old houses. The two hit it off and were married two years later; their wedding pictures were framed with wood salvaged from the home's old windows. Besides infusing the project with a jolt of energy, Laura provided a much-needed second pair of hands to help strip the walls down to the lath, wire-brush the timber framing clean, and scrape, plaster, and paint everything else. "There's blood from my knuckles in these walls," says Laura.

The showpiece of their efforts is the living room, with dozens of newly exposed posts, joists, and girts that run almost the full width of the structure. In places, the Paynes uncovered Roman numerals that had been chiseled into the timbers to help the original framers properly piece everything together. They also sandblasted the brick fireplace and restored its surround. Throughout the first floor they used a sander to carefully refresh the oak floors, which are still studded with tacks from the days when they were covered with decorative painted canvas.

The couple's regard for the past is also evident in the master bedroom. Andrew fashioned the airy space by merging two upstairs rooms, removing the old plaster ceiling, and exposing the attic beams to open up a cathedral ceiling. Rising up through the original heart-pine floor planks—some 18 inches wide—is the home's chimney, which is pockmarked with old stovepipe patches. The main attraction, however, is the exposed posts, beams, and rafters that crisscross the room. One modern touch is the low-voltage rope lights, which the Paynes use to highlight the exposed framing the way others might showcase fine art. "Sure, we wanted to make the place more comfortable," says Andy. "But we also wanted to keep the house as true as possible to its eighteenth-century roots." ■

ABOVE LEFT: The homeowners uncovered a quirky wedge—perhaps used to lock the joint—in one of the beams. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The master bedroom door was stripped to the original paint.

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