

The Homeowner's Guide



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM CHARLIE ALLEN RESTORATIONS

In the news...

April 2009



In case you missed it, the *Boston Globe* profiled Charlie in January, naming him **“The Renovator”** and sharing his tips regarding the renovation and restoration of period homes. We loved the introduction to the article, written by Hayley Kaufman: **“Calling Charlie Allen a general contractor is a bit like calling an archeologist a ditch digger. It’s true, but misses all the subtlety and craft. Allen renovates period homes, undoing the damage that’s been done over the years — sometimes centuries — by well-meaning owners and builders, and updating decrepit systems to make them functional and safe. And he does all this while trying to keep the beauty and integrity of the home intact. One of his favorite moments? Peeling back the aluminum siding from a home to see what treasures lie beneath. ‘That,’ he says, ‘is really fun.’”**

Recognition....

Our whole-house renovation of an 1870s Shingle Style home in Cambridge has just been awarded a Cambridge Historical Commission Preservation Award! Readers of this newsletter will remember this comprehensive project—it was featured in our last issue. Congratulations to the homeowners, and thanks to the CHC for this welcome recognition!

Upcoming lecture...

Homeowners who’d like to learn more about the care and upkeep of older homes will have their chance on Wednesday, June 10 from 7 to 9 p.m. when Charlie Allen speaks about **“Renovating Your Period Home”** at Brookline High School. To register, please visit the Brookline Adult & Community Education website, www.brooklineadulted.org, or call 617/730-2700.

What is a Period Home?



Shingle Style—1874-1910

Shingle style homes are easily recognizable by their completely shingled exterior. Both the roof and the siding are continuously shingled.

The shingle style began as a reaction to Victorian fussiness so you will not see any gingerbread, spandrels, or delicate trim work. Instead these gorgeous homes were built and stained or painted to fit into their natural surroundings. Paint colors are muted and the composition of the structures are organic. As you might guess this means that the floor plan within is asymmetrical as well.

Other telltale features of shingle style homes are the irregular roof lines, and gables on multiple levels. Many have wide, shady front porches, allowing their owners ample space to enjoy the outdoors.

Shingle style homes have also evolved to take on characteristics of past architectural styles: many have turrets borrowed from the Queen Anne period, or Palladian windows borrowed from Colonial architecture,

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Project Phasing - How you can benefit



In today's economy, a whole house renovation may seem daunting. But leaving your home's needs unconsidered is not the answer either. You may need to focus on maintenance only or doing smaller projects but the work should all be part of a well thought out whole house plan. The plan is an outline that we draft together gathering all of your home's pressing needs and your wish list and then creating doable projects based on your ability to fund work. The whole house approach is a smart proactive step, especially for owners of period homes.

Over the last decade, we've accomplished a wide-ranging, long-term, carefully-budgeted plan for one of our favorite clients. Kim first began working with us in the late 1990s, and together we established a comprehensive plan for her 1870s Victorian Mansard. Today, Kim's house is a neighborhood jewel that has won an historical preservation award and attention from the press. Here's how it all happened:

1998: STARTING SMALL

Kim hired us for what she later admitted was a "test run." After all, a contractor may be in your home for an extended period. You want to make sure the chemistry is right! For our initial project, we were tasked with repairing rotted bulkhead doors, and insulating the laundry room in the basement.

1999 TIME FOR THE PLAN

Once Kim realized that we were a good fit, she began thinking seriously about her renovation wish list. It was time to develop a whole house plan. We measured interior spaces and worked with Kim to design her bathrooms and dream kitchen. We discussed the changes that Kim wanted for her other living spaces, too. The resulting interior plan helped us figure out how to phase the construction work in a way that was efficient and would prevent going back to previously completed items or through finished spaces while undertaking work in the future. This road map also helped us define what

items to address in each phase so Kim could continue to occupy her house in relative comfort. We also considered the home's many exterior needs, some of which were urgent.

2000: THE HEART OF THE HOME

Kim's kitchen was part of a turn-of-the-century addition that was cold, awkward, and out-of-date. It was time to renovate. At the same time, Kim wanted to convert a first floor half bath into a ¾ bath and update her second floor bath. We built a makeshift kitchen in Kim's dining room so she could use that during the kitchen renovation, and staggered our work on her bathrooms, making sure that one was always available. The process — which took a bit longer than anticipated when we discovered a badly-compromised interior wall that needed repair — resulted in two beautiful baths, and an inviting and modern kitchen that respects the home's period integrity. One major aspect of the kitchen design was to maintain the connection to the outdoors as Kim, an avid gardener and cook, wanted to be able to enjoy her yard while preparing meals and baked goodies for her friends and family. This connection was achieved by installing new wood windows on two walls of the kitchen instead of upper cabinets.

2003: ON TO THE LIVING ROOM

The fresh new look of her new kitchen and baths made it clear that her other living spaces required updating as well. When she felt ready to embark on a new interior project Kim contacted us about updating her living and dining rooms. Poorly crafted cabinetry that had been introduced to the room in the



past was removed. New shelving units with lower cabinets **that complement the home's increasingly improved character** were built in, forming a cozy seating nook. In addition several windows were replaced, improving energy efficiency and **increasing the room's cozy allure. The floors in the living room and the dining room were refinished and the walls painted.**

2005: PUTTING ON A NEW FACE

Every time Kim returned to her much-improved home, she saw a weathered and uninviting exterior clad in ugly vinyl siding and aluminum gutters that had been installed in the 1980s. Years of neglect had left the brick foundation in need of re-pointing. Rotting cellar windows and loose and drafty wood double-hung windows remained on the 2nd floor. It was time **for one of Kim's biggest projects**—the complete renovation/restoration of the exterior.

Off came the vinyl siding and aluminum gutters, and an ugly cyclone fence was taken down. Then came the fun part! We **checked off Kim's to-do list**—restoring original window sills, mansard window buttresses, and appropriate window and door backband mouldings, fabricating small tight square lattice panels, and reestablishing wood gutters. Aesthetically tying the addition back into the house was a tremendously satisfying process. The last of the old windows were replaced with new wood replacement units and all 20 windows received period



appropriate black storm windows to improve the home's energy efficiency and comfort. We blew in insulation to the exterior **walls to further increase the house's energy efficiency. With the final touch of historically appropriate paint colors, this once-neglected beauty was sparkling again**—the exterior renovation even won a Cambridge Historical Commission Preservation Award!

2006: BEDTIME

We came back inside and turned our attention to two bedrooms. We refinished floors, and added a fresh coat of paint. We also rewired, eliminating years of outdated and tangled wiring and electrical systems. In the process, *four* phone jacks that had been installed in the guest bedroom over the years were removed. This project also included completing some items from earlier projects that were left out for budget reasons, such as replacing cellar windows, all but one was replaced, and new more appropriate raised panel doors were installed on the built-ins.

2008: WARMTH & AMBIENCE

Kim had a chimney and marble fireplace mantel in the living room but no fireplace. To build one, we installed a new hot water heater in the basement that vents directly to the outdoors, rather than through the chimney she needed for a fireplace. The chimney was opened up and a new firebox was built. A cast in place masonry chimney liner was poured to create a safe flue for the new Victorian cast iron wood-burning fireplace insert. The original marble mantel was cleaned and polished, and a new hearth extension was recreated salvaging some original tiles and setting new reproduction tile. Today, Kim enjoys warm winter fires without worry.

2009: WRAPPING UP

This spring, we checked off the last item on Kim's to-do list: restoring her deck. The last cellar window will be replaced and of course, there is still that unfinished basement....



Committed to retaining the authenticity of your period home.

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Upcoming event!

Cambridgeport Walking Tour

Please join us on Saturday, May 2 when Charlie Allen Restorations sponsors a fun, family-friendly Open House Walking Tour of four recently renovated and restored homes in the Cambridgeport neighborhood. Each location will feature fun activities for kids and interesting presentations for adults **(including “green cleaning,” spring planting, and a kitchen demonstration.)**

The tour runs from 10 a.m. to noon, and all of the participating homes will be open for the entire time. Presentations, however, will be scheduled. Maps and a timeline will be available at the Charlie Allen Restorations office, 91 River Street, starting at 9:30 a.m. All of the Open House locations, including our offices, are conveniently located within a four-block area. Please call us at 617/661-7411 with any questions or to RSVP. Hope to see you there!