



Lawyers in Love (with Their Antique Home)

Built in 1895 and now owned by New Haven attorneys Tara Knight and Hugh Keefe, the Herz House has an exquisite stair, fully restored and commanding center stage upon entry

By DUO DICKINSON

PHOTOS: MICHAEL DOOLITTLE



Most **people** think that **falling in love** with an antique **home** means a **life sentence** of repair and worry.

But there are restorations that do not drag their owners into a multi-year disruption and hemorrhaging of the family fisc.

People love the history and craft of older homes, but many cannot abide the devotional dedication to restoration that purchasing a decaying beauty demands. However, value always creates a market — and a market always responds to provide supply where there is demand. So even in the iffy post-bubble world of residential real estate, a great home, in an established neighborhood will find eager buyers ready to move in.

Hugh Keefe and Tara Knight are attorneys in New Haven. If you

called this couple “defensive,” they would be flattered.

The partnership of Knight and Keefe is far closer than any mere professional association. Keefe has been practicing law for some four decades and as founding partner of Lynch, Traub, Keefe & Errante, PC in New Haven is one on New England’s most prominent defense attorneys. Knight founded her own the firm 20 years ago in the Elm City — Knight & Cerritelli, LLC, which has a stellar reputation as a boutique litigation firm.

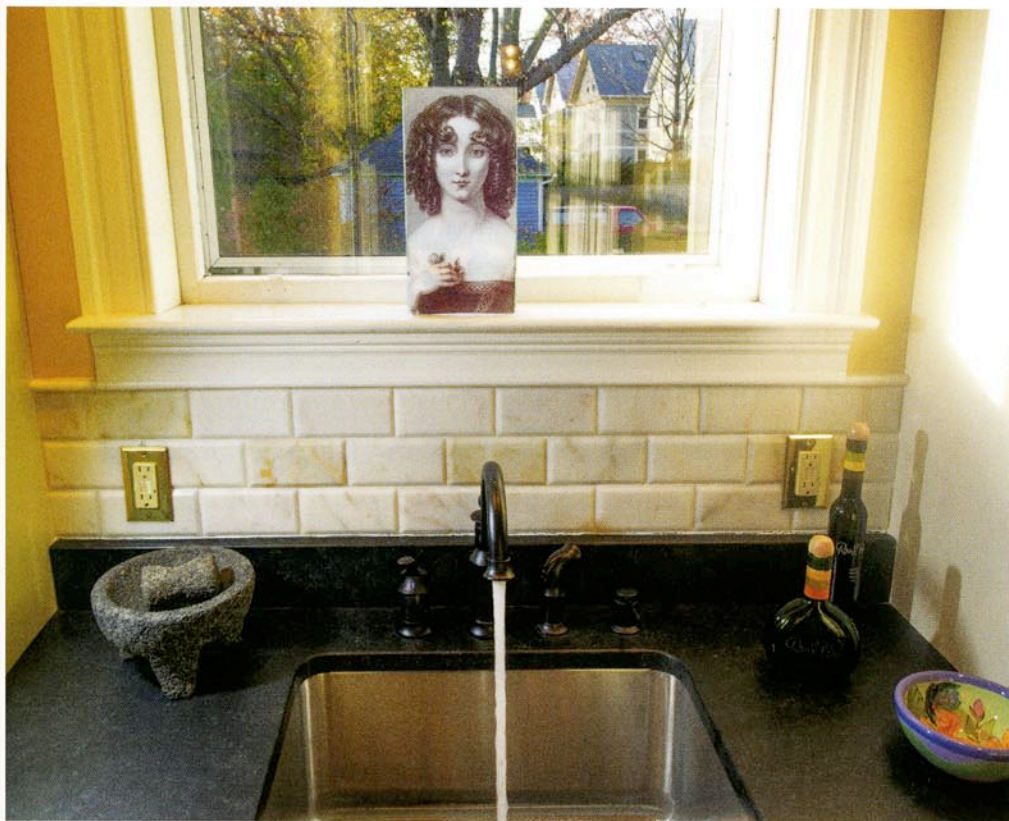
Beyond each of them having their own thriving practices, both of them teach law, volunteer for boards and institutions and participate in all that New Haven’s cultural bounty affords.

As a married couple of busy professionals with a blended family Keefe and Knight enjoy few (if any) hours in any given month to devote to their love of antique homes beyond appreciation and decoration. So the couple set out to find a



The new classic kitchen was part of the finished home purchase by Knight and Keefe, but the former saw the benefit of adding a full covering of tile to the backsplash and stove areas

The Herz House's effervescent Queen Anne exterior shape and trim-out is as expressive as its interior millwork. The stair has art woven into every aspect of its presence — sculpture-light at the newel, bold wainscoting at the wall, and a fully expressed stained-glass window top-lighting the stairwell without letting outsiders peer in.



Knight added simple stone backsplash tile to the existing granite countertop backslashes

home to love that needed no DIY fixations or construction time-dumps.

Their overloaded lives make time of the essence, so to speak, and so a five minute commute had tangible value, but more importantly the immediate neighborhood had to offer the on-the-spot amenities their fully-booked schedules could access in minutes. For Keefe and Knight, that meant looking in the Orange Street neighborhood.

As Knight explains: "We love the accessibility to the many things New Haven has to offer including its history, dining and cultural events. Orange Street is particularly great because we can walk to work, restaurants, fabulous markets and cafés."

The house they found in the neighborhood they loved is an exquisite example of Queen Anne architecture. Built in 1895 for Henry Herz — a "real estate and insurance man," according to the Connecticut Historic Commission's Inventory of Historic Resources — the Herz House was part of several contiguous homes designed by the architecture office of Brown & Von Beren.

Ten years ago this proudly eccentric expressive mass of shapes was shrouded in a 1960s aluminum siding overcoat, with bathrooms and a kitchen that had more liabilities than utility.



The sitting room/parlor has the hallmarks of the entire restoration - floors, trim and fireplaces completely restored, and Tara Knight's touch can be seen in the furnishings and art.



Exterior detailing of this Orange Street classic is at once bold and artful, as expressed by its entry. It's an extraordinary example of Queen Anne architecture — where Arts & Crafts met Victorian in a zesty expression of the decorative arts and bold massing.

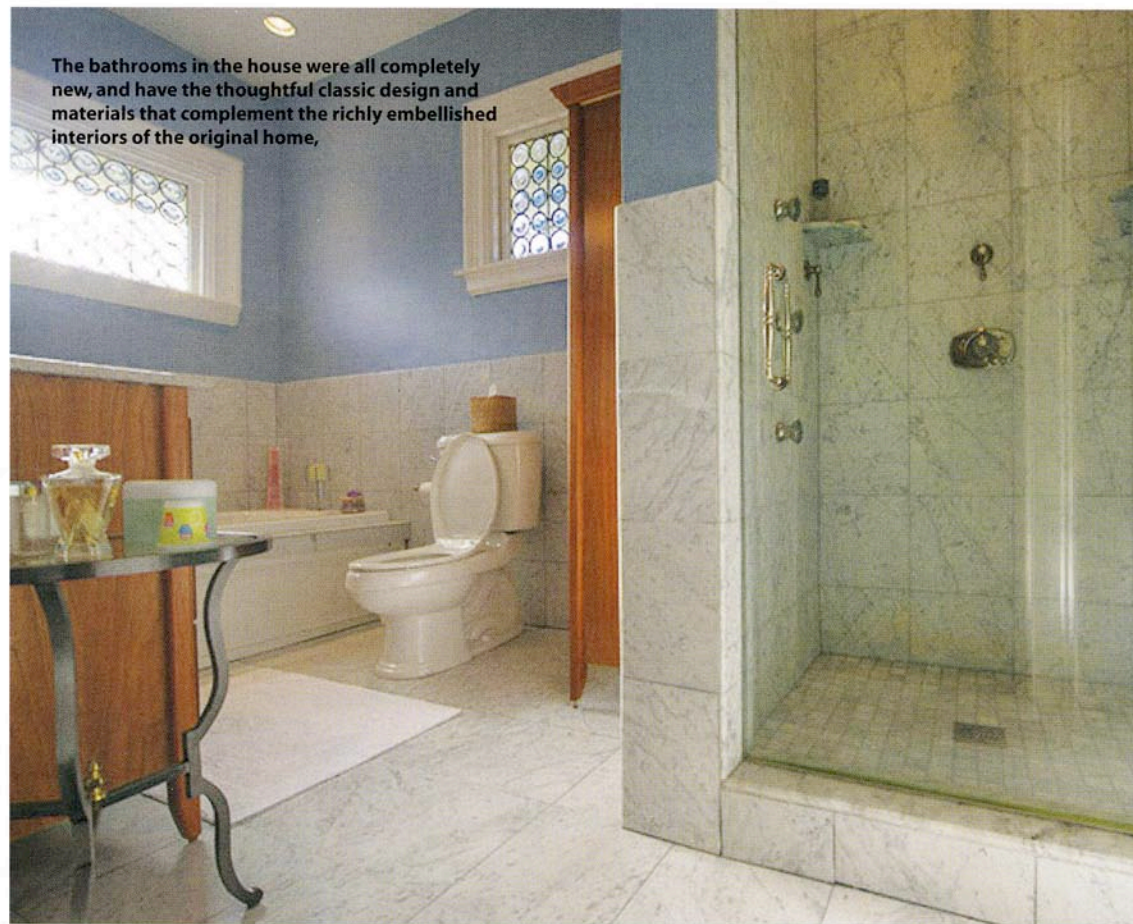


Although two lawyers now own this historic confection, it was two *different* attorneys who spared it an insensitive or incompetent restoration. Brothers Michael and David Kinney are infected with the old-house renovation bug, but rather than inflict their obsession on their families and legal careers, they opted to make historic restoration an entrepreneurial undertaking.

The brothers took two years to put the work into the home it deserved. Keefe explains: "Everything is quality and top-shelf. They took pains to leave the good stuff intact,

like the stained-glass windows, the wooden doors and floors, fireplaces — while at the same time installing the latest appliances and new bathrooms."

It didn't hurt that the brothers Kinney had some great bones to rebuild around. Architecturally Queen Ann style lies somewhere between Arts & Crafts and Victorian, and is characterized by zesty complexities of shape and the intricacies of expressive materials and decorative arts.



The bathrooms in the house were all completely new, and have the thoughtful classic design and materials that complement the richly embellished interiors of the original home,

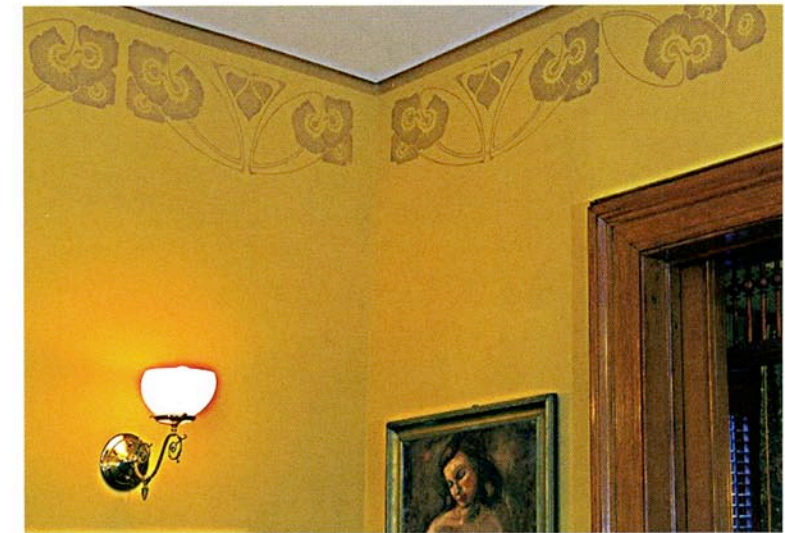
The original interior layout was fully respected in the renovation, and the exterior siding and trim were reborn in a loving restoration. But the real eye candy of this full-on showplace is the interior millwork.

The oak staircase and fireplace surrounds are *tour de forces* of hand-crafted expression. The trim is both bold and sinuous. The oaken floors are brought back to richly support the architectural art of Queen Anne detail that commands center stage in every room.

The new kitchen and bathrooms that were surgically insinuated are classic rather than fussy, and satisfy all the cooking and hygiene appurtenances any homeowner might desire.

The attic, which originally housed servants, was completely gut-rehabbed to the same fine degree of finish as the first two storeys of the home, allowing for adult children to return to full accommodations without imposing on either visitors or parents.

New heating and cooling equipment is carefully insinuated to be both invisible and efficiently effective,



The home's interiors celebrate the exquisite oak trim, doors and millwork. Tara's Knight's meticulous embellishment around those architectural features can be seen in rugs, light fixtures and extraordinary stenciling cornice decoration.

as is a minimal amount of new fixed lighting. These features maintain the antique ambience while providing a carefree new home to owners who have little time for tinkering with an aged accommodation.



The dance of acquisition took a little time as price and product had to align at an auction sale. The purchase of a fully restored home meant that Knight's passion for art and decoration could be applied to a fully realized context, rather than an in-process project.

Buying a finished home allowed the time and perspective to make furnishing it a delight after the couple moved in in November 2007. The last few years have seen a pristine shell become infused with paintings, rugs, furniture and light fixtures that are both zesty and also true to the spirit of the home.

"One of our best purchases was our quarter-sawn oak dining room table," Knight explains. "It has winged griffins carved into the legs and can easily seat 12 people. It was built in the early 1800s and I bought it on eBay sight-unseen from an antiques shop in Missouri.

"Another favorite object," she adds, "is a painting that hangs in our dining room depicting the New Haven Green and [its three iconic] churches."

Although Keefe and Knight were in agreement that their new old home had to be outfitted in a fashion that complemented the historic

reality they fell in love with, only one partner in the domestic firm of Keefe & Knight was the senior partner: "That is 100-percent Tara," Keefe acknowledges. "While I have zero interest in that stuff, I do appreciate her work and the end product. My mother would say that I enjoyed the luck of the Irish twice: finding Tara, and finding this house."

Keefe and Knight love their home, but it was the Orange Street neighborhood that was the critical factor in their selection of the Herz House. "We were excited to find something in New Haven and were part of the trend of people returning to cities and eschewing the suburbs," explains Knight.

Living the New Urbanist lifestyle may boast the street cred of "sustainability" as its intellectual justification, but these attorneys have a different argument for the allure of their new neighborhood. Muses Keefe, "The 06511 ZIP code must have the highest median IQ in the state."

That point of view is why New Haven is so dear to so many — and why the preservation of an intricate antique like the Herz House may in fact represent an economically viable business model. There are many threatened historic buildings in New Haven, but when history and neighborhood mesh to make living there a blessing, professionals such as Knight and Keefe — who could live and work anywhere — treasure being in this little New England city. ❖

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