

A classic Stick Style Victorian from the mid-19th century was restored and then fully renewed by a series of owners, including a full landscape garden design taking a two-family home into a 21st century home for a young couple and their new child.

Stick Figures

A landmark Fair Haven restoration spans two decades and three owners

Some people think of houses as being similar to cars. The flaws in that analogy are obvious: a monthly loan payment may be a useful yardstick to decide whether a car fits your budget, but as many found out over the last few years it's no way to decide to buy a house. None of us build our cars, we do not add onto them nor do we expect where we live to be "traded in" on a regular basis to get a better model. (At least not lately.)

But over enough time, most homes do acquire many owners. When it was built in 1868, a Stick Style house on Clinton Street in Fair Haven was clearly a family's point of pride. But, sometimes life intervenes even for those who believe fervently in the permanence of possessions, and a host of other owners intervened over the last century.

Then again, sometimes homes are reborn as prized possessions. Often revivification can span multiple owners. When New Haven architect Chris Williams spotted this house in 1989 (a time of cresting hope in Fair Haven), he and his wife, Mary-Beth Coffey, could see beyond the dilapidation to the potential:

"We were looking for a historic house that was not 'newly renovated,'" he recalls. "This house needed considerable work. We gutted most of the interior and reconfigured portions of the plan to [create] two two-bedroom apartments. We installed new plumbing, wiring, interior finishes and cabinetry."

But the house's exterior proved to be an even greater challenge.

"The front porch was totally missing and we re-constructed it to its original design," says Williams. "In addition to finding miscellaneous railing parts among the weeds in the back yard, I contacted an elderly women living in East Haven who had a childhood photograph of herself sitting on the porch steps that included the original railings."

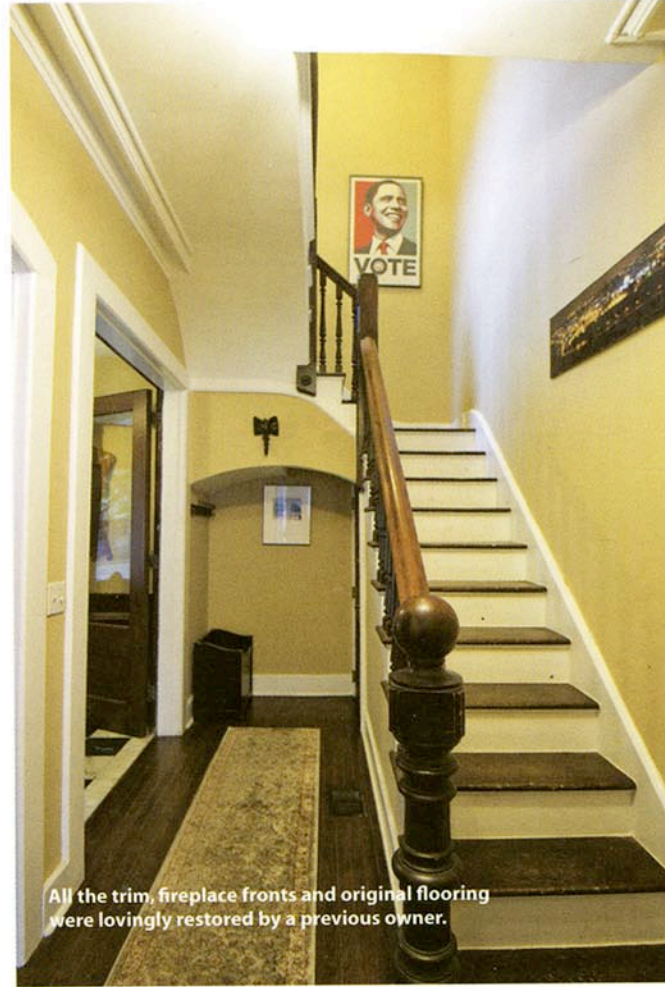
Williams set about to draw the porch from the "archeological" and

PHOTOGRAPHS: Anthony DeCarlo

BY DUO DICKINSON



A renovated bottom newell (above) and the renewed front door (below left) fully reinvigorate this Stick Style Victorian's front entry.



All the trim, fireplace fronts and original flooring were lovingly restored by a previous owner.

photographic evidence and obtained a grant from New Haven Preservation Trust to assist in the funding of its complete reconstruction, including fence. The hollow core metal front door was replaced by a pair of carved antique doors from the collection of local antiquarian Bob Rubenoff.

This full-on renovation took place as Fair Haven's housing market took a nosedive in the early 1990s and architect Williams felt the sting of the building industry slump. There was precious little architectural work to fund completion of the renovation.

Ultimately it made sense to sell, and that sale was followed by another in the piggyback "flipping" of the house to new owners during the resurgent home values during first decade of the new century. Those owners fell fully in love with the home.

Sarah Miller, an editor at Yale Press, and husband Lee Cruz, who works at the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, already lived in Fair Haven, in a condo, and wanted the open-ended occupancy of the "family home" — not something to be traded in but, just as Chris Williams realized, a



The reason for reclaiming any home from disrepair: harboring a loving family: Sarah Miller, Lee Cruz and baby Pablo.

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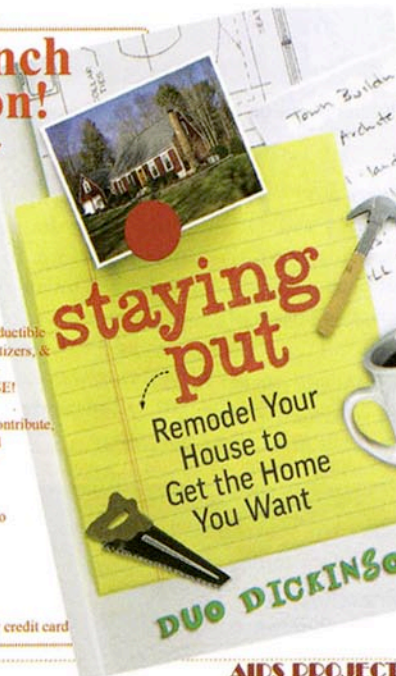
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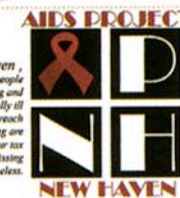
tickets: \$100.00 per person, tax deductible, includes celebratory cocktail, appetizers, and an autographed copy of the book — TWO WEEKS BEFORE RELEASE!

if you cannot attend, but want to contribute, any donation is greatly appreciated

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All proceeds from this event will benefit AIDS Project New Haven, the oldest AIDS service organization in the state of Connecticut. APNH not only helps people living with HIV/AIDS manage their medical and housing needs, it provides counseling and therapy, transportation to doctor's appointments, home delivered meals for critically ill patients, and even an emergency food pantry. At the same time, its educational outreach programs combat the spread of the disease. Alarmingly, cuts in state and federal funding are threatening the ability of APNH to provide these essential services. Without your tax deductible donation, some of the most fragile of those living with HIV are at risk of missing medical appointments and meals—even becoming homeless.



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A spruced up kitchen still has the original interior renovation of architect Chris Williams' design, including a brew opening to the living areas (center) and an overarching vaulted ceiling.

place of unique character into which one would enthusiastically channel love and commitment.

So in June 2008, at the crest of another housing boom, Miller and Cruz jumped in and bought their family home.

Miller recalls that the owners who succeeded Williams and Coffey had not quote felt the love. "The outside was quite deteriorated, had not been painted in ten-plus years and exterior repairs had not been done," she recalls.

But there can be second acts in the life of any home, and a year or so after

assuming occupancy the couple set about completing the renovation begun two decades before. In 2009 Miller and Cruz embarked on an extraordinary restoration of the home's exterior. Additionally they created a full landscaping plan for the yard that was executed in 2010. And in the full measure of time, Cruz and Miller

were married under the maple tree in the back yard in October of that year.



The exterior renovation was not just a "paint job," but a carefully crafted and painstakingly considered effort. Lee's brother Sam Cruz led a family assault on getting it just right. The New Haven Preservation Trust was enlisted for help in color selection, after which samples were created and reviewed.

Virtually every detail was authenticated. Clear cedar was used for all new work, the front door architect Williams had salvaged was completely renewed, and the predictable repairs required after the 20-year interval since its last maintenance were executed.

The work was so exquisitely executed by contractor Claudio Encalada down to caulk selection, decorative painting highlights and trim replication that Cruz and Miller applied for and were granted a Connecticut historic tax credit.

The landscaping was also done with care by landscape designer Chris Ozyck — replacing lead-contaminated topsoil, and providing for perennial beds as well as a family vegetable and herb garden.

A patio and elevated grassy area made outdoor living civilized. The steps and edging used salvaged bluestone curbing from Quinnipiac Avenue. Even the driveway was infused with the essence of Fair Haven, replacing generic blacktop with crushed clam shells.

Even though the home is effectively "complete,"

there are always repairs to be made, and the potential for enhancement is always on the horizon — perhaps creating an office in the attic or a second-floor deck over a one story wing with a river view. The Cruz/Miller clan is indeed in it for the long haul.

The couple's uncompromising efforts were recognized by the New Haven Preservation Trust's awarding of a date plaque to the property this summer, a program any thoughtful building restoration project may apply for.

All these moves polished a faded home to live up to the hopes and dreams of a couple who are venturing into family creation (beyond dogs Rey and Zoe as well as Bibi the parrot).

The bright smiles of baby Pablo were welcomed home last March. Pride in ownership, commitment to the historic integrity of this building and to the future of Fair Haven were deeply important to Miller and Cruz when they decided that this was their family home. But as important was the playground of the former Strong School just next door.

Homes are architecture, they are essential elements of a streetscape, and they can be gifts to a community. But in the end, the reason houses are built, renovated, and renovated again, is to serve the greater human need to harbor, nurture and hold a family in the loving arms of a place that extends its heart into built form. A place called home.