



THE RIGHT PATH to an Historic Renovation

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Virginia is home to one of the highest concentrations of historic homes in the country. Scattered across main streets and winding country roads, these homes have withstood Civil War battles, numerous of US presidents, and the invention of indoor plumbing. This is good news for Virginians who love the architectural bones and timeless details these houses offer. But anyone who has ever lived in a house with a century or two of history knows, there are certainly challenges to renovating an historic home.

I know this firsthand, as my husband and I restored and live in an 18th century manor home listed on the National Register of Historic Places. I have also helped clients renovate countless historic homes throughout my 35-year career.

Upgrading an existing structure constructed 75 or more years ago requires a methodical approach,

especially if the house is a landmark venue, nationally registered, or left vacant and damaged. Below are five key pieces of advice to keep in mind when modernizing and restoring the stunning beauty of a treasured past.

Hire the Right Team

To build the best project team possible, take your time and thoroughly research experts in historic renovation. Regardless of the home's age, it's critical that a structural engineer evaluates it to ensure it is structurally sound, and if not, what steps need to be taken to make it so. An architect knowledgeable about the local historic preservation requirements and funding sources can guide you through the design process and help you improve the home's floorplan and flow in a way that makes sense for modern living. Seek a general contractor who has proven experience with historic renovations and see their work for yourself.

Understand Restoration vs. Preservation

Preservation is bringing a home's original character back to life. This involves keeping and repairing its original historic form to ensure it doesn't further erode. Whether you are refinishing original hardwood flooring or restoring original molding by replacing it with a custom piece representing the original product, that's preservation. However, sometimes preservation is not necessarily what a homeowner wishes to do. Therefore, the project cannot receive any grant or funding options. When not using federal and state dollars, a homeowner can renovate a historic or "old" home, which allows an owner to modernize the floorplan and the function within the home. Changes can include opening up small-scale rooms, modernizing staircases, removing interior partition walls, and so on. It is incredibly important that you determine very early in the process if you are using these dollars. When a property is on the National Register of Historic Places, you cannot renovate it. You must restore and preserve, and both the exterior and interior components of the home are controlled. When not using those dollars, you may do whatever you wish. However, if a property is in an historic district overlay, the exterior is controlled but not the interior.

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Before



After

Federal and State Funding

There are programs available to support extensive preservation efforts on an historic home. However, as I mentioned, using these dollars can restrict the extent of renovation efforts. It is important to understand the controls that come with the financial supports. It is also crucial for the project team to understand completion date requirements for grants, tax credits, and other financial aids and incorporate those deadlines into their planning schedules. Missing an important date could lead to a significant setback for the project or loss of dollars. Meet with key stakeholders early in the design phase so that everyone understands the requirements and restrictions of these programs.



Choose a Classically Current, Timeless Design

A renovated historic home can feel the time in which it was constructed or feel more contemporary based on the selection of interior design elements and furnishings. Elements that can affect this feeling include decorative light fixtures, tile and tile patterns, wall treatments, window treatments, and ultimately, furniture selections. Certainly, an historic home will feel more from its original period if the style of décor and furnishings are sourced from the time in which the house was built. Much like the home itself, combining old with new is a guaranteed way to create visual cohesion and a more timeless feel. Consider mixing family heirlooms with modern accessories to create contrast—when done well, this establishes a truly authentic interior.





Understand the Time Commitment

Prepare yourself for a more extended renovation period than what a more contemporary home requires. Renovation of an historic home may require custom designs and handmade pieces, which, by default, make these projects longer than those for modern homes. Especially in the current climate—everyone from historic masons to skilled woodworkers are in high demand. Although it may be tempting to work with a contractor or carpenter skilled for new con-

struction or modern renovation project, it's worth a slightly longer timeline to ensure the entire project team specializes in the ins and outs of historic construction.

Amongst all of this advice, the most important thing to consider is the experience of living in an historic home. Spaces often do not readily support modern-day storage needs, meaning you may have to reinvent how you manage the household, and ongoing upkeep will likely be more expensive. At the same time, you simply

cannot find the same level of details, quaintness, and stature in modern construction as you can find in an historic home. Historic country homes often sit at the knoll of a hill and offer tree-lined driveways, expansive views, a nearby brook or a stream, and sunbeams from sunrise to sunset. This is what's lovely about an historic house, and this is why they are lovingly restored. And if despite the potential negatives, you still love the character, you're the right type of person for the job.



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A New Lease on Life

Twelve bucolic acres set the stage for this magnificent estate. This major renovation of a late 19th century home tripled the historic home's size and transformed the property into a stately family home.

The existing historic structure was restored and sensitively renovated with modern amenities. Thrilling in its

craftsmanship and architectural detailing, it is an exquisite work of art. Although grand in scale, the residence consists of a variety of thoughtfully proportioned spaces that are inviting and comfortable, whether a casual family area or a more formal room. The living room with its fireplace and custom built-ins; the large open kitchen with island and reclaimed brick-floored butler's pantry;

the coffered ceiling hallway; a new one-story faceted sunroom; the master bedroom with vaulted ceiling; his and hers master bathrooms; and a screened porch with views of the river all make this place unique for its owners and their guests. The home's new entry sequence—a transportive drive, entry court, and welcoming front porch—complete the vision of grace and ease.



Born and raised in Virginia, **Cathy Purple Cherry** ultimately landed in Annapolis where she grew a large architectural firm specializing in high-end custom homes and estates. A talented architect, visionary, and three-dimensional thinker, Cathy is able to marry clients' dreams with the reality of the built environment. While Cathy revels in the intricate design opportunities presented by high-end residential architecture, she is equally passionate about her philanthropic efforts and her work serving the special needs community through the firm's Purposeful Architecture studio. An award-winning residential architecture and interior design firm specializing in exceptional homes and luxurious estates throughout the East Coast from Plymouth, MA to Warm Springs, VA, Cathy has grown her team two-fold in the past three years. Purple Cherry Architects truly loves the journey of bringing together their clients with stunning pieces of property where they can build the home of their dreams.

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