

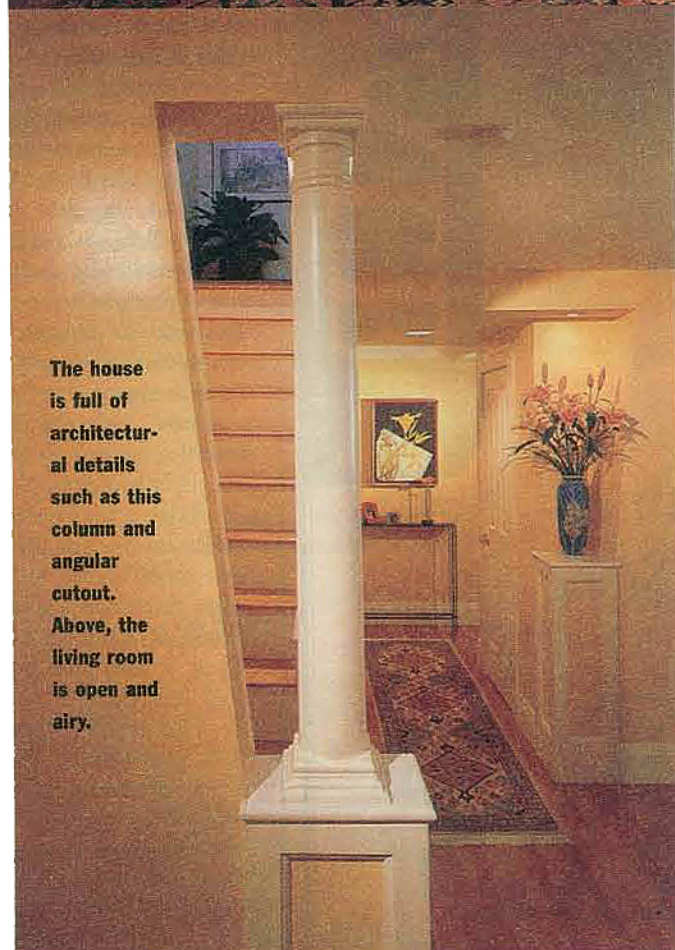
The Boston Globe

YOUR HOME

SPECIAL SECTION

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Gentlemen's Quarters



The house is full of architectural details such as this column and angular cutout. Above, the living room is open and airy.

Starting Over

by GAIL RAVGIALA

With nearly two years of sweat equity up in smoke, Cindy Collen-Holt and her husband, Gregory Holt, were ready to sell what was left of their property, collect their insurance and walk away. "Because of the bad feelings about all that had happened," says Collen-Holt, "it wasn't our immediate decision to rebuild."

Understandable enough. Their two-family Victorian handyman special had just about burned to the ground. Only its stately porch and a few damaged framing timbers remained in the charred ruins. Since purchasing the Arlington house, they had spent almost all their free time fixing

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it up, and the fire had left them feeling devastated.

They asked their old friend, Cambridge architect John Black, to come by and have a look, however. Together, the Holts and Black began to explore the possibilities.

"We knew he was good," says Collen-Holt, "especially with residential work. Little by little, we got excited about rebuilding and getting involved with the design."

They could start with a clean slate. "The one thing we knew," says Collen-Holt, "was that we needed and wanted a two-family. We also knew the space had to be better than it was before. The old house was a one-family, built into a two-family — but not well."

Their unit, the larger of the two, was on the second floor. As with most Victorians, the space originally was a warren of tiny bedrooms and sitting rooms. The Holts had taken down walls and rearranged traffic patterns to make it more livable, but it still lacked good light and open space.

"The downstairs apartment," says Collen-Holt, "had beautiful details ... pocket doors, moldings, ceiling medallions. But the second floor had none."

Black drew up a number of plans. "I don't even know how many now," says Collen-Holt laughing, "but there were quite a few."

In the end, they settled on a configuration that resembled the old house: A one-bedroom apartment on the first floor, and a three-bedroom apartment upstairs. Working with Black, they hired Isam Hijazi of Boston Contractors and Developers and began the rebuilding.

Without changing the basic footprint of the structure, the Holts were able to eliminate all the things they

didn't like about the old house. For example, the original house left them virtually cut off from their own back yard. Not only did they share the rear entry with the tenant, they had to walk around the house to get to the yard on the opposite, more private side of the building.

Black created a delightful private entrance for the Holts that runs from the back porch on the street side, through to the pleasant little yard. An open stairway leads from the hall into the kitchen/breakfast room above. The tenant's unit has its own private entry off the porch.

"We took some space from the rental unit," says Black, "but we created a more gracious entry to the second floor."

Two of the three bedrooms were moved to the third floor with a bathroom in the center of the space. A

wall with a glass-block insert divides it from the hall and stair allowing light from the stairway window to filter in.

The stairway itself is handsome, rising two steps from the living room to a landing, set off with columns set in angularly cut alcoves.

Black also used columns along with half-walls to separate the kitchen from the dining room. French doors lead from there to the living room.

"The French doors create a larger opening," says Black, "and allow you to see from the living room through to the kitchen. Now no matter where the sun is, you can take advantage of the light."

The Holts chose contemporary furnishings that nicely complement the new construction. Splashes of color come from carpets selected from Yayla Tribal

Rugs, 283 Broadway, Cambridge.

Outside, the house is painted in bright shades of salmon and pink making it every bit as friendly as a painted lady can be.

"They wanted the Victorian flavor they had," says Black of his clients. The roof line has three gables and a dormer, the general design coming from sketches of the original house.

To give the house old-fashioned flair without adding much to the budget, Black used different colored shingles to create a striped motif on the roof. Similarly, he used bands of color on the clapboards and diamond shaped shingles, alternating the pink and salmon tones. In addition, he strategically placed fish-scale shingles for another chance at color variation. Such subtle changes have considerable visual impact.

"We picked details

from the porch as a starting point," says Black, "and drew them through the rest of the house."

Inside, he also found inexpensive ways to create more details such as using plaster to create a look of raised paneling, which was then framed by 1×3-inch stock lumber. Similarly, the columns he used are stock issue from the lumber yard, simply cut to fit the space and then neatly finished with more stock trim.

"It's simple and inexpensive," says Black, "yet it gives a lot of character to the space."

"John paid a lot of attention to detail," says Collen-Holt. "So much of new construction is plain and boxy, but not so here. The new house is more open. It is sunnier with more storage space. The rooms are larger, the circulation is better. And it's a much prettier place." ▲



Half walls open the dining room to the kitchen and breakfast room.