

The Restoration Chronicles - Chapter 1



The house before we purchased it

Welcome to a new series about the restoration/renovation of our home. I love Before and After pictures and hope you do, too! Though nearly all the major work is done, owning a historic home is a constant, never ending enterprise.

Since this was a massive project, I will break it down into chapters. Please note that these pictures are through the various seasons and some of the original ones were done before digital cameras. Where I could, I tried getting the same angle for the “after” photos.



We love this North Central neighborhood but, at the time, had two small children and a house we were outgrowing. Daily, I would push a stroller down the street and stop and stare at this property. You couldn't see much from the road. It was so overgrown and neglected. I was intrigued.



Entry/Staircase Front Hall- prior owners

When we told the realtor we would like a property with some land, she showed me (my husband was out of town) this mysterious house, which wasn't publicly listed for sale. I saw it in November and couldn't stop thinking about it. At the same time, the conversation in my head with myself, kept saying my husband would NEVER go for it. It was difficult to see the bones of the house because it was so cluttered with personal belongings.



Family Room-prior owners

Weeks later, I asked to see the house again, with my spouse in tow. When you are married to a lawyer, they can go for hours without facial expressions and I had no idea what he thought of it during our tour. His answer to my question "Well, what do you think?" was "Let's make a ridiculous offer and see what happens". So we did. The owners countered \$25,000 higher and suddenly, we were the proud owners of Bella Terra.



Happy New Homeowners!

Working with a fabulous architect ([Cathy Hayes](#)), we settled on our 2nd choice of contractors (the 1st one wasn't available for the next 12 months). This contractor told us the project would take less than a year. I figured, at most, a year and 6 months.

As a result, we bought a double wide trailer (24' x 56'), parked it in the back (we have nearly 2 acres) and lived there with 2 toddlers. Unfortunately due to several unexpected problems and an unethical contractor, it was nearly 3 years later that we finally moved in. Remember the movie with Tom Hanks, The Money Pit? Yes, we were living it!



The house was built in 1912 and the previous owners had lived there for over 30 years, with little to no maintenance or improvements. The exterior windows had bars on them. There was no central air conditioning, just 6 window units....and only one actually worked. Not only was the house filled with stuff, but they had numerous storage containers scattered all over the property. It took 6 months for the owners to clean out the house and to close the real estate deal.



Before



The house has gorgeous architectural features: several arches, window trim, stately columns and a belly band~~the decorative band that bisects the front of the house. Unique bottle green Terra Cotta tiles from [Ludowici](#) graced the roof.



The front of the house needed minor repair with exception of all the windows. Long story as to why, but mid-way through the project we discovered we had to replace 55 windows. Of course, since they were originally built on site 100 years earlier, each one was a different size and different sash patterns. [Marvin Windows](#) made 55 custom ones to fit the openings, which set the project back by months. Groan.



Front entrance view from the porte Cochere – before



The front terrace had major cracking in the scored concrete and you can see in the After photo, where we replaced the large damaged sections with Raja slate.



The original main entrance to the house was from the north and south sides of the front terrace.



We left the original configuration but created a front entrance that leads directly to the front door and added a slate path to the porte Cochere.





Whoever designed this house (architect unknown) kept many things in mind. Here are a few of my favorites: The house is perfectly placed on the lot~~large front lawn and nearly 2 acres of privacy. Notice the deep overhangs on the roof. This keeps the heat out during the summer, but allows light in when the sun is lower in the winter. The porte Cochere allows for easy parking without having to go in and out of a garage.

Thank you for joining me today and I hope you enjoyed Chapter 1 of the Restoration Chronicles. I plan on writing a chapter every few weeks to show you more of the project!

Have a joyous Wednesday, my friends! To see more Restoration Chronicles Part 2 click [here](#).

Mary

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