

ENTERTAINING WITH STYLE

The Ruppman's create a dining room and parlor that gracefully accepts plenty of company.

BY ROBYN DAVIS SEKULA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS LITTLE



Fall 1999

Today we removed the curtains in the front parlor, and the light that streamed in was beautiful. It really transformed the room. We also discovered that there are elaborate Eastlake-style moldings all around the windows, which had been covered up by the heavy curtains. We're really pleased and will make sure our new curtains don't hide that woodwork. Besides, we want to make sure we let in plenty of light. ~ Joan Ruppman

Walter and Joan Ruppman enjoy entertaining. They love hosting informal dinner parties and elegant soirees, entertaining guests with Joan's cuisine, Walter's stories and the all-around hospitality found in a small Illinois town.

So when they purchased the Denhart home in Washington, one of their first orders



TOP: Even after years of public use as a funeral home, the dining room's wainscot survived nicely. The dining room was used mainly as a sitting room when the home was a funeral parlor.

LEFT: Choosing just the right color to coordinate with the existing wainscot was a tough task, but the homeowners finally found the perfect shade of burgundy. The sideboard displays a collection of cut glass and silverplate pieces.

RIGHT: The Ruppman's were on the hunt for an appropriately sized dining room table and chairs when they spotted this table, chairs, sideboard and credenza, all matching, at a Philadelphia antiques shop. The table comfortably seats 16. The wainscot dates to the Arts & Crafts period.



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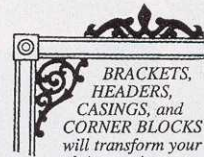
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LEFT: Stripping wallpaper was one of the tasks that the homeowners took on themselves to save money. They removed wallpaper in nearly every room of the home, including the dining room, shown here.

of business was to figure out the natural flow of the home, including where and how it best suited groups of people.

The house was built for Henry and Clara Denhart in 1884. Best classified as a Stick-style Victorian, it also contains elements of Eastlake and Aesthetic design on the interior. At about 5,000 square feet, the home was well-appointed with period details such as mantels, stained glass and high-style light fixtures. The house had been well maintained and was solid, making most of the interior renovation merely cosmetic in the principle rooms.

For years, the Denhart house had been a funeral home with a dark, dated look inside. The challenge for the Ruppman's was to welcome light back into the home and play up its many original features, taking full advantage of its structural beauty.

In the home's largest parlor, this work consisted of stripping away wallpaper, rewiring the light fixture and removing heavy draperies from around the front bay window. They also removed heavy shag carpet, so thick it prevented the pocket doors from opening. They replaced the carpet with a Victorian-patterned style that runs down the first-floor hallway, into the red parlor and up the staircase, unifying the space and adding bold pattern.

LEFT: A nook in the green parlor creates a perfect spot for a Victorian fainting couch, covered in a coordinating fabric to match the room. The clock, equipped with a handy shelf, is a family piece and a great place to show off some of the Ruppman's pottery collection.



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Spring 2001

We finally found a dining room table that will fit the room and work well with the style of our home. It seats 16, so we'll be able to have company over once we're ready. The only problem is it is in Philadelphia, so we're having it shipped.

The dining room required a little more diligence than the green parlor. The Ruppman's were able to preserve the room's best feature, its Arts & Crafts-period wainscot, which gave the room a rich look. But a dropped acoustical tile ceiling had been installed. The Ruppman's suspected that underneath was a water-damaged ceiling and their hunch was correct. After removing the ceiling, they had it replastered.

ABOVE: With its gracious mantels and spacious floor plan, the Ruppman's' first goal was to make this parlor brighter. They also hoped to make it more suitable for entertaining. They began by removing heavy curtains and installing a creamy green wallpaper. The platform rocker on the left is one of the first pieces they purchased as a couple.

RIGHT: With heavy drapes obscuring the windows, the Ruppman's discovered only later that the woodwork surrounding the windows was incredibly detailed. Removing the curtains also helped give the room an airy feeling.



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Diary of a Restoration

Because of the water damage, part of the Arts & Crafts wainscot had to be replicated by an artist, who hand-painted the missing parts so successfully a visitor wouldn't notice unless told about it. Above the wainscot, the Ruppman's worked diligently to find the right shade of burgundy to complement the wainscoting without overpowering it.

The Ruppman's painted six different colors onto boards, and propped the boards up on the fireplace mantel in the dining room. They then invited friends to look at the colors and help them choose the best fit for the room, finally settling on a deep burgundy shade. With lots of light, the room could take the dark color without making it gloomy.

The Ruppman's had hoped to discover parquet flooring when they removed their carpet, but found typical wood flooring instead. Refinishing it was a challenge—it was thin and a professional-grade belt sander would have ripped the flooring. Instead, they refinished the floor by hand and covered a portion of it with an area rug.

Finding a dining room table, though, proved difficult. They needed something large enough to fill the room and accommodate a substantially sized dinner party. Fortunately, the homeowners happened upon a Berkey & Gay dining room table, chairs, sideboard and credenza that would perfectly suit the space. The only problem was it was in Philadelphia. Knowing from their own hunt how hard it was to find the right pieces, they bought the dining room furniture and had it shipped.

The Ruppman's say their use of the house is still evolving. Sometimes they serve appetizers in the red parlor and after-dinner drinks in the green parlor. And sometimes they reverse it. "Everytime we have a gathering of some sort, Joan will say, 'I think we're beginning to know how to do it,'" Walter says.

Next month: Bathrooms and kitchens

WORKING FIREPLACES

Having beautiful mantels surrounded by antique tile wasn't enough for the Ruppman's. Not only did they want the fireplaces to look good, they wanted to use them as often as possible.

The task of making them operable again, especially in the green parlor and dining room, started with rebuilding the chimneys. Both of those chimneys had been lopped off at the roofline, and the Ruppman's had the chimneys reconstructed from the roof up. A few years ago at the Restoration and Renovation Conference, the homeowners discovered a pour-in-place process that could reline the chimneys. Another choice involved installing a stainless steel liner in the chimney, which they decided against, fearing that it would eventually corrode. It took some diligence to find a person willing to use the pour-in-place process on their home, and some time to actually perform the work, but it ensured that the chimneys could be used safely.

In the green parlor, the Ruppman's replaced the firebox to make the fireplace functional again. In the dining room, the fireplace had been bricked shut. The homeowners had the bricks removed and a new firebox installed to make it a working fireplace.

With both fireplaces, the tiles surrounding the fireboxes were in great shape, and all present. In the dining room, a few loose tiles had to be glued back down.

Every year, the Ruppman's begin to use their fireplaces in November, burning a wood fire as soon as the air turns crisp. ❧



The mantels and tile were almost entirely intact, one of the best features of the home; however, the chimneys needed repair to make the fireplaces functional again.



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