

ALL IN THE DETAILS

The Ruppman's restore the exterior of their Illinois home, carefully replicating the original details. BY ROBYN DAVIS SEKULA • PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS LITTLE



Above: Removing the home's aluminum siding and repairing the wood underneath proved to be the biggest tasks in the exterior restoration. The wood had to be hand-scraped and patched after removing the siding.

Getting the exterior details correct is more important to me than anything. We're working from old photos and clues we find on the house to tell us how to proceed with the restoration. I want it to be as accurate as possible. —Walter Ruppman

For 30 years, Walter and Joan Ruppman lived across the street from the Mason-White Funeral Home in Washington, Illinois, all the while curious about how the building originally looked. Aluminum siding covered the home's wood clapboard. A simple affair with straight posts, the front porch didn't seem quite right for the house's age. It needed help and the Ruppman's were just the people to restore the home to its former turn-of-the-century grandeur. Built in 1884 for Henry and Clara Denhart, the house was a funeral home from 1936 to 1999. The Ruppman's purchased the 5,000-square-foot home in 1999, then began the extensive exterior and interior restoration.





The new homeowners wanted as authentic a restoration as possible. With some research, they discovered a wealth of photos that revealed the home's original details, including photos that dated back to when the house was first built. Older photos showed that certain elements had been removed or obscured, helping the Ruppman's get an idea of what changes had been made.

Above: It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call the Ruppman's project an extreme restoration. The Ruppman's restored the brackets to the eaves, stripped all of the paint off the home's exterior, rebuilt the porches, installed a new roof and restored a missing dormer to the roofline.

Left: Rebuilding the front porch—as shown in this in-progress photo—was one of the many major projects the Ruppman's undertook during their renovation.



Left: Overlooking the garden and yard, the back porch is a great spot for a glass of lemonade on a warm afternoon. The porch had been enclosed by previous owners, but now it's the entrance the Ruppman's most frequently use.

To get the restoration started, they began at the top—rebuilding and lining the chimneys and installing a new roof. They chose shingles that resembled slate since the home would have originally had a slate roof. The Ruppman's also hired a crew to rebuild all three of the home's porches, matching the earliest photos they found and replicating the beautiful detail that had once crowned the house.

Much of the home's exterior simplification took place when the former owners installed aluminum siding to lower maintenance costs. Furring strips for the aluminum were nailed into the original wood siding, so after the aluminum siding was removed, the Ruppman's hired a crew to repair and strip the home's wood siding—a process that had to be done by hand.

Decorative brackets and woodwork were removed during the process as well and had to be replicated by the Ruppman's. The home's 75 brackets were rebuilt and re-installed, and the Ruppman's restored a dormer on the front of the house that had been removed. The exterior project continued although work inside the home was complete. And Joan was able to appease her own passions with a new garden.

We're going to turn the paved parking lot into a garden. It will return the area to what it should have been all along, and allow me to pursue my favorite hobby. We're also in the process of creating a driveway that will fit with the home's style.
—Joan Ruppman



Left: Approximately 75 brackets were built to replicate the originals, along with other various pieces of decorative woodwork that gave the home its Victorian flair.

An avid cook and gardener, Joan's strongest desire for the home's exterior was to create a beautiful garden. The Ruppman's achieved that by tearing up the parking lot that ran along the side of the home. First they broke up the pavement and hauled it away, then poured 62 semi-truckloads' worth of dirt in its place. They fashioned a sunny spot for vegetables, herbs and flowers.

The Ruppman's also wanted to design a driveway that fit in with the character of their home. Their contractor, Tim Beutel, found antique paving bricks at a Chicago salvage yard and used the bricks to create a driveway leading toward the carriage house.

As the Ruppman's see it, no detail is too small for attention. Their show-stopping house is proof of their dedication.

There is nothing quite like pulling in our driveway after a long day at work and seeing the transformation of our house. It is becoming the kind of place the original builder would again recognize, and the kind of place we love to come home to.—Walter Ruppman



When the Ruppman's purchased the home, its once-grand porch had been replaced with a much simpler design. The Ruppman's decided to return it to its original grandeur.



The carriage house was built to replicate the original structure, as documented in photos. Today it serves as a garage, providing both form and function for the Ruppman's.



The home's original brackets were removed by previous owners and other ornamental detail was lost under the aluminum siding. The Ruppman's invested heavily in the exterior, re-creating every detail as it once was.

Seven Steps to a Great Carriage House

Reconstructing a carriage house, as the Ruppman's did, is a major project, but it can also be a great addition. A carriage house can provide a garage, a place for garden tools, and all of the amenities that a modern homeowner wants in a vintage shell. The Ruppman's hired a construction crew to build a carriage house in the spot where a modern-day garage was, working from photos to come close to the original carriage house's design.

Here's a seven-step process for those who want their own old-fashioned carriage house:

- Start with the original photos, if available. If not, seek out homes built in your same time period for design ideas. Take photos of those to start.
- Get an idea of the scale of carriage house you want and where it should be situated on your property.
- Imagine modern uses. Your old carriage house design may not accommodate today's large cars or mini-vans. Think of the size of the door you'll need for everyday use as a garage, if that's your intention.
- Consult an architect or trusted contractor. Show them your vision and the historic photos if you have them. Explain how you want the building to function and what you plan to use it for.
- Plan for a second floor. Carriage houses often were two stories tall.
- Plan to replicate the paint scheme and some of the details from your own home to help your carriage house blend in.
- Build it. This handy structure will make a beautiful addition to your Victorian estate.



Building a well-dressed carriage house to match their elegantly restored home was a top priority for the Ruppman's, who use the structure today as a garage and storage building. It was based on the design of a carriage house that once stood on the property, which the Ruppman's found in old photographs.