





A SWEET RETREAT

The Ruppman's wrap up their home renovation, completing the upstairs rooms and finally settling in to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

BY ROBYN DAVIS SEKULA • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS LITTLE

Above: This guest bedroom was redecorated with appropriate Victorian wallpaper and area rugs instead of wall-to-wall carpet. The minimal valances on the windows allow the refinished woodwork to show.

Opposite: When the home functioned as a funeral parlor, the upstairs rooms were used as offices. Now, the gracious upstairs hallway leads to several bedrooms and a sitting room. The carpeting was replaced by area rugs.

We pulled up the carpet in the upstairs sitting room and slid out a pocket door to discover there are beautiful, completely intact wheel-cut glass insets in the doors. What a welcome surprise!—Joan Ruppman

In every home restoration, there are surprises. There are the larger-than-expected bills (a bad surprise), but there are also hidden spots of beauty that only reveal themselves as the restoration continues (a good surprise). For the Ruppman's, the upstairs restoration on their 1884 Victorian was full of good surprises—welcome news considering the scale of their project. Built for Henry and Clara Denhart, the couple's Washington, Illinois, house was used as a funeral home from 1936 to 1999. The Ruppman's began their extensive exterior and interior restoration soon after they purchased the 5,000 square-foot property.



A nice surprise awaited the Ruppman's when they pulled these pocket doors out of the wall: beautiful wheel-cut glass inserts in excellent condition. The doors were formerly blocked in the wall by the carpeting.



Reconstructing this staircase was a major project. Though narrow and steep, restoring it helped the house regain its original character.

The sitting room at the front of the upstairs hallway quickly became the focus of their efforts. With its stained glass windows, original light fixture with cranberry-colored glass shades, and pocket doors with wheel-cut glass inserts, the small room took on a jewel-box effect, sparkling in the afternoon sun. The Ruppman's carefully removed all four layers of wallpaper, working their way down to the bottom layer, and salvaging enough of it to have it reproduced. The Ruppman's had attempted to do this in other rooms, but never found a paper that was suitable for reproduction. "I loved several of them," Joan says. "But time, layers of paper and paste had obliterated the colors."

Reproducing the wallpapers was expensive and time-consuming, Walter notes. Removing the carpet, refinishing the floors and furnishing it appropriately, finished the room nicely.

Next, it was on to creating comfortable and functional guest rooms.

We want guest rooms that are true to the Victorian period but are also functional for our visiting family and friends, including our grandchildren. We will be hunting for some furniture for the rooms, and I'm still choosing wallpaper.—Joan Ruppman

Out of all of the rooms in the Ruppman's home, the décor in an upstairs guest bedroom particularly suited Joan. Joan liked the floral patterned wallpaper, which made it the one room in the house where no one had to strip any wallpaper. As with all of the upstairs flooring, carpeting had to be removed and the floors refinished. An antique bed and table inherited from an uncle took residence in the room.

In the other upstairs guest bedroom,

the Ruppman's removed gold flocked wallpaper, and had the woodwork in the room stripped and refinished to bring it back to its original glory. As with other rooms, the floors had to be refinished. The fireplace had to be cleaned, but all of its original tiles were in place—another pleasant discovery. To give the room a restful feeling, Joan chose a subtle Bradbury & Bradbury wallpaper named "Bird and Anemone." The Ruppman's hunted down a Victorian bedroom set from an antiques store in Iowa. Joan uses the bed to display a simple quilt she purchased 25 years ago in the local Mennonite community. Another lovely surprise was finding a small, beautifully decorated sink tucked into the corner of the closet. It was not functional when the Ruppman's purchased the house, but they had it re-plumbed and it works again.

Also on the list of major to-do projects

was the reconstruction of a back staircase. The staircase was removed by the previous owners, who installed a freight elevator in its place. A craftsman rebuilt the stairs to add a quick and easy path to the kitchen, as well as to fill space previously occupied by the elevator. Cosmetically, the area now flows as it originally did when the home was built.

For the Ruppman's, their restoration has been a marvelous trip. It's required them to learn new things, buy a few additional antiques, work hard and, finally, enjoy the fruits of their labor.

This restoration has been an incredible effort. I can't believe how much we've done in such a short time. But this has been the kind of project that makes you feel like you're contributing to the community, as well as making the quality of your own life immensely better. We're pleased with how our project came together and are happy to sit back and enjoy the good life for a while. —Walter Ruppman

The wallpaper in this room was chosen by the former owners and the Ruppman's decided to keep it. An antique child's crib and rocking chair lends a nursery feeling to the room.



7 Essential Elements of the Victorian Bedroom

Unlike today's lavish master suites, the Victorian bedroom was designed for retiring for the night and getting ready for the next day, according to Ken Farmer, owner of Ken Farmer Auctions & Appraisals in Radford, Virginia, and an "Antiques Roadshow" appraiser.

Victorian bedrooms would have featured at least seven things: a bed, dresser, washstand and armoire, as well as a chamber pot, and pitcher and bowl set. The four furniture pieces would have matched and would have been sold in sets. A chamber pot would have fit discreetly into the room, and a pitcher and bowl would have been placed on the washstand. Those three pieces typically would have matched, as well.

Optional pieces would have included a lamp table on either side of the bed, functioning as a nightstand does today. A chair or small sofa might have been used in larger rooms, Farmer says.

Today, Farmer says, you can find matching three-piece Victorian bedroom suites, and sometimes four-piece sets. In 2005, he sold a four-piece mahogany set for about \$10,000 at a Virginia auction; however, he only sees those once or twice a year, while three-piece sets come through his auction house 15 to 20 times a year. Prices vary on both three- and four-piece sets depending on the type of wood used and the style of the pieces. Farmer says that rosewood always fetches a high price.