



Upstairs, Downstairs

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Today, with leaf-dappled sunshine flickering through the front window, it's easy to see that the Rosedale mansion is a Victorian dream home. It's a bit of a shock to realize that it once was the ultimate renovation, an award-winning project in which absolutely everything in the house was either repaired or replaced.

When John Emery bought the Rosedale mansion a few years ago, it was definitely showing its considerable age. Even so, there was something imposing about the way it presided over its oversized lot.

Built around 1890, it had once been well-loved, but later, during the half-century when it was a boarding house, it had been sadly battered and bruised. The interior spaces had been broken up into a gloomy maze of narrow hallways and small bedrooms. "There were rooms for about 20 boarders," Emery recalls.

Renovating the 8,000 square foot mansion was a massive undertaking. Emery, President of Fairmont Properties, led the rescue mission. As he examined the house, he found tantalizing fragments of original mouldings and woodwork, although much had been damaged or was missing. It obviously needed more than a cosmetic makeover.

The house had a split personality. It had originally been the home of a wealthy Toronto family and their servants. Owners and servants lived under one roof, but in two different worlds. The owners lived in the front rooms which had been richly decorated. The servants lived and worked in the back in small, plain rooms — and even had their own plain staircase. The two sets of steps had been built side-by-side, separated by a wall.

"It was like the show *Upstairs, Downstairs*," says Emery. "The layout didn't work for a modern situation." Emery's team came up with a plan to create brand new spaces that looked as if they'd always been there — thereby winning resounding support from the heritage board.

First to go were the shabby partitions from the boarding house era. The old staircases were ripped out and were replaced with one grand staircase that went straight from basement to attic, linking all living spaces and unifying the house from bottom to top.

The open-concept plan devised by architect Gordon Ridgely swept away the cluster of drawing rooms and parlours in the front of the house, replacing them with a welcoming foyer, spacious hallway and large living room. In the back, a large family room and country-style kitchen was created out of a jumble of pantries and store-rooms that surrounded the original kitchen.

ultimate renovation

In the basement, a romantic wine cellar with tasting area was installed, along with a spectacular state-of-the-art home theatre. It's the ultimate party space.

At the top of the staircase, in what had been a shabby attic space, a quiet retreat was created with a cathedral ceiling. The six bedrooms are strategically located away from the public spaces.

As much as possible, original woodwork and decorative fittings were saved and refurbished, and all new work was made to reflect the styles of more than a century ago. The goal was to make the old fixtures as good as new, and to make everything new look old.

The renovation didn't stop at the front door — a plan for the front yard by landscape architect David Orsini created a dramatic formal space from the porch to the front sidewalk. And in the back, the old coach house was updated in similar style.

When the work was done, a few loads of antique furniture and decorative objects brought life back to the mansion, instantly turning it into the home of an imaginary family. Anyone wandering through the rooms soon got the impression that the owners had just stepped out on an errand and would return at any moment.

The antiques stayed in the house for a few weeks last fall while Emery put the house up for sale. Emery prefers to keep the sale price private, but will acknowledge that the sum was well into seven figures.

The Ontario Home Builders' Association inspected the home and presented Emery with the OHBA Award for Most Outstanding Renovation (\$100,000 or more). Today, the Rosedale mansion is back in service as a distinguished private home.

Emery and his team aren't resting on their laurels, however. This spring they will complete renovations on two other Rosedale homes, both of which will then be put on sale.

"We do a lot of work in Rosedale," Emery explains. "It's good when you do something, and when you're done, maybe it will be there for another 100 years." **RD**



The Rosedale mansion is now ready for another century of loving care. Original details, such as the fireplace, were refurbished.

After the renovation a selection of fine antique furniture brought life back to the mansion while the house was up for sale.



A new master bedroom was created as the old floor plan was reconfigured. The spacious room now includes a cozy seating area with fireplace.



sources

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