sun HOMES AND DECOR

SATURDAY, JULY 8, 2023

Deep in the throes of a restoration

Renovation of a Merrickville landmark home is full of pleasant discoveries

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Special to Postmedia Network

When you're renovating a house built in the 1840s, you're bound to come across a few stories.

For Kate Folk, discovering the signature of a Victorian craftsman on the back of a staircase was just one of many memorable moments in a year spent restoring a mansion in Merrickville, about an hour southwest of Ottawa.

The pencilled signature was hard to decipher, but with a bit of research, Kate deduced that it belonged to William Thorpe, who had helped add a third storey to the Queen Anne-style property in 1890.

The turreted home with its wrap-around veranda is a Merrickville landmark, and Kate had long admired it while growing up in the village.

After her stepfather passed away, Kate, her mother and three brothers started discussing what sort of joint project they could undertake in his memory.

In June 2022, they decided that purchasing a 3,585-square-foot former B&B and converting it into a whole-home vacation rental was the ideal plan, because it would help them share the family's favourite place with a wider world.

"I so deeply love the village of Merrickville!" Kate says with a laugh. As soon as they got the keys to the property, they set to work restoring and furnishing the house with the help of Greg and Kim Forsyth of Merrickville-based Design Your Life.

Greg came on as general contractor, while Kim took on the interior design. Kate became general manager of the property, which the family named Maple & Rose.

There were other pleasant discoveries besides the craftsman's signature. When dismantling the kitchen, Greg uncovered an eye-catching stone wall that now forms the back boundary of the living room.

Similarly, he found a disused window beneath a layer of drywall. It became a pass-through between the kitchen and sunroom.

He'd renovated other heritage houses in the past, so he knew it would be a project of ups and downs. "These homes are always filled with surprises. Some are nasty, some are fabulous," he says.

In the nasty category, he had to reconstruct the severely deteriorated veranda. The sunroom also had to be torn down and rebuilt, but Greg says the resulting space is already popular with visitors.

"Kim's design vision was to create a little haven to relax and enjoy the view of the beautiful gardens. The use of the deck, board floor and board-and-batten walls help to create that cottage feeling," he notes.

Décor was a key consideration for Kate as well. In March 2023, when most of the rooms were still deep in the throes of restoration, she brandished a tablet glowing with inspirational Pinterest boards as she took a visitor from room to room. During the impromptu tour, she often spoke of the property as if it were a person.

"It's sort of like, when we came in, she had a lot of makeup on," she says. "There were bright pink walls, bright yellow walls, dark maroon, dark green, orange — there was a lot happening in here." Kate describes the family's approach as removing that makeup and allowing the home's natural bones — such as a stained-glass window in the living room — to shine.

In the home's seven bedrooms, the team has been careful to preserve historical touches while giving each chamber a thoroughly modern feel. So vintage wallpaper and antique light fixtures serve as accents to snowy sheets, dove-grey chairs and custom-made wooden clothes racks.

A highlight of this third-floor bedroom is a plush round chair from Wayfair tucked into a turret.

The round protrusion on the wrap-around veranda was added in the late 1800s, so the homeowner could play music for guests on the lawn and at the tavern across the road. *PHOTOS BY TANIA BLAKE PHOTOGRAPHY*

Live-edge floating shelves and a dark-grey backsplash keep the kitchen contemporary.

Kate's affection for Merrickville has translated into a strong focus on partnering with local contractors, suppliers and artisans. Each bedroom has an ensuite stocked with Fox and Fern soaps from nearby South Mountain.

Vintage chandeliers sport hand-blown glass shades from Merrickville's Gray Art Glass, which also supplied the home's wine glasses. The family worked with Wick Witch Apothecary, a local candlemaker, to create a signature Maple & Rose scent. And guests receive a welcome basket brimming with locally made cookies, caramels and mustard.

So who, exactly, temporarily rents a seven-bedroom house? To date, it has been popular with extended families and wedding parties, Kate says.

However, Maple & Rose has a bonus that also makes it appealing to small corporate groups and retreat planners: a 1,200-square-foot outbuilding that a previous owner hoped to use as a dance studio.

It is now a meeting and gathering place complete with a large-screen TV, multiple couches, long table and kitchenette. Use of the outbuilding is included in all rentals.

Before Maple & Rose opened to guests last month, the family threw an opening party so that Merrickville residents could see the finished product. (The renovation project had attracted keen interest in the community.)

"People were really worried that we would strip the house of its character," says Kate. Part of the reason she documented the restoration meticulously on social media was to allay those fears.

"We have so much respect for the history of the home, and its stories, and its architecture, that we want to preserve that and carry it on....If I could hug this house, I would."