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THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, SECTION G



PHOTOS: JULIE OLIVER/OTTAWA CITIZEN

A new contemporary kitchen is married to old features such as oak pocket doors and fireplace brickwork once again exposed in a Sandy Hill heritage rental.

Uncovering a JEWEL

Designer, renovator team up to bring out the beauty in a heritage rental, turning it into an executive apartment for the upscale crowd



Ulya Jensen and Noel McGinnity did a 'recon mission' to determine what from the unit was worth salvaging, like a brick wall they uncovered in what is now the bedroom.



ANITA MURRAY
AT HOME

Sometimes it takes a re-think of things to bring out the best in a person or project. For interior designer Ulya Jensen and renovator Noel McGinnity, that was certainly the case.

Both were involved in high tech, yet had interests that pulled them elsewhere. Each left the field a decade ago to focus on a more hands-on, creative career. Their paths crossed early on and they have collaborated ever since, with their latest project, the revamp of a heritage property in Sandy Hill, an example of highlighting the best features of an old gem while bringing it into the 21st century.

"We talked about what we should preserve, what is popular now and what's going to show some of the history and the age of the actual building," says Jensen. "I really wanted to keep a lot of the Old World feel."

The key was to marry those heritage features with a more

contemporary look for an executive suite that combines comfort and sophistication.

Built around 1904, the sturdy Victorian on Besserer Street combines a whitewashed brick facade with wood siding, dentil work and interesting detailing. As a heritage building, there are limits to what can be done to the exterior, but inside the rules aren't so strict.

Gone are the old lath-and-plaster walls, which were hiding a wealth of brickwork that is now exposed along a full wall in the bedroom and again around the living room fireplace.

The dated kitchen and bathroom were ripped out and the apartment's layout rethought.

Now there is a sleek kitchen that has become the focal point of the space, featuring a mix of timeless, dark, Shaker cabinets and contemporary hardware, granite counters that step down to accommodate a low window and a door rescued from a closet-turned-powder-room that now hangs on a kitchen wall adorned with coat hooks. A new granite mantel over the fireplace matches the kitchen counters, rooms have been updated with pot lights and there are solid oak floors throughout, complementing the colour scheme.

"We wanted to keep it earthy," Jensen says. "I'm typically a grey

girl, I like to do cooler in homes, but I really thought with the history of the building, the exposed brick, I just felt we've got to go rich, we've got to use that nice kind of dark coffee colour." She chose Sherwin Williams Accessible Beige for the walls because it's "a creamy colour, not too yellowy."

But despite the new elements, they were careful to preserve what mattered, like the elaborate oak pocket doors separating the living room and kitchen. "You think of pocket doors as something that's more of a modern thought," Jensen says.

McGinnity straightened the

doors' track and sanded and varnished the panels, choosing to leave them as natural as possible.

"You could spend a lot trying to fix them all up again but then they're new; they don't have that kind of rustic look," says the 39-year-old father of three, who has done much of the work himself. A transplant from Ireland, he has owned the six-unit building for close to a decade, gradually fixing up the units as tenants leave. Next up is the basement unit under this one. His goal is to eventually update all the units to executive suites to attract a professional crowd.

Aware of neighbours' concerns over Sandy Hill property owners who have tried to meet the student-housing demand by converting buildings into multi-unit apartments with several bedrooms and little common space, McGinnity made the decision to do the opposite. He could have easily turned the 850-square-foot unit into a two- or three-bedroom, but says, "that's not what this building is about, what it should be used for."

For tenant Dominique Babin-Muise, it was love at first sight. After four years in "cookie-cutter" apartments while finishing medical school and now starting her residency with The Ottawa Hospital, she was ready to live in a place that she would love spending time in. An online ad posted just five minutes before she saw it "screamed apartment with character," says Babin-Muise, who moved in July 1. "Even though the apartment was not completed at the time I saw it, as soon as I walked into the space I felt at home. It was not until the day I moved in that I saw the finished kitchen with the granite countertops ... and was almost moved to tears."

Ulya Jensen,
ulyajenseninteriors.com
Noel McGinnity,
mcginnityenterprise.com



The Victorian building dates to about 1904. Noel McGinnity, who owns it, is fixing it up as tenants move out.

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