

## SPOTLIGHT



Southland Homes and client chose for the flooring 2 1/4-inch red oak planks in Sherwin Williams' ranch oak stain. The fireplace surround is 12x24 cedar vein cut tile.

## SOUTHLAND HOMES HELPS SAVE HISTORIC PROPERTY, GIVING IT NEW LIFE

BY MARSHA CANRIGHT

The handsome gray cottage at 1005 Oxford Street is a Cinderella story from beginning to happy ending.

It is the winner of the Houston Heights Community Improvement Award for Residential Renovation and will be featured on the Heights Historic Homes Tour in April 2014.

The cottage was an unlikely candidate for celebrity when Colin Shelton, president of Southland Homes, had his first look at it almost two years ago.

Built in 1896 for a German immigrant family, the small house had fallen from an earlier graceful state into ragged disrepair.

Shelton couldn't quite visualize the award-winning home that would soon unfold.

"I was surprised it was still standing," he says.

The Houston builder had renovated dozens of historic homes in three Houston historic districts, including the Heights and River Oaks, but this house was in the worst condition he had ever witnessed.

Details of a classic cottage — the broad-balanced windows and lofty 10-foot ceilings — were marginally visible. Years of neglect and vacancy, termites and fires, and do-it-yourself construction had taken a heavy toll on the 1,100 square foot property.

Homeowner Bobbie Knox Eichard purchased the house in December 2010 after a two-year search that included viewing more than 200 properties.

She knew she wanted to settle in the Heights, and when she found the cottage, dilapidated but with a certain charm, she knew she was home at last. Eichard moved into her fully renovated home last November.

"Bobbie Eichard is dedicated. She knew what she wanted. She had a vision and a plan, and she assembled a team who could do the job," Shelton says.

With Eichard at the helm, the team included designer Colby Weems of C Weems Designs, Troy Campa of NewberryCampa Architects, and

Shelton's Southland Homes.

"Not many people can say they love their builder when the project is complete — but I truly can," adds Eichard.

"Southland's entire construction team was patient, fully engaged, sensitive to my budget, committed to quality, and the end product is beautiful," she says. The house actually came in about 5 percent under budget.

For Shelton, the house was a fun project but also complex and challenging. "We kept the shell of the house, and we replaced the walls, floors and interiors — always with appropriate materials for the period and in the original style," says Shelton.

The foundation was rebuilt from the inside out.

The house doubled in size to 2,200 square feet and is comprised of three bedrooms, two baths, and a garage apartment. The plan is so seamless it's hard to tell the addition, says Shelton.

Since its completion the project has gleaned several awards. In addition to the Heights renovation honors, the cottage kitchen has received a Prism award from the Greater Houston Builder's Association, and a Star award from the Texas Association of Builders.

Historic property renovations are more complex than new construction and always have special needs, explains Shelton.

There is the important and often time-consuming work with historic district boards that govern and protect the historical significance and ambience of the neighborhoods. Part of his job involves walking the homeowner through these procedures.

In past projects, Shelton has commissioned craftsmen to rebuild antique windows and to custom cut molding to match original fittings. In this house everything had to be symmetrical, lined up perfectly, which was not an easy task.



ABOVE: The kitchen is part of the open floor plan. The countertops are honed Carrara marble; the backsplash is Ann Sacks; heath-white ceramic. All cabinetry is custom built. BELOW LEFT: The central hallway (seen here from the front door) connects the entire house and acts as an art gallery. BELOW RIGHT: The master bath flooring is grey BXL5 imported from Italy.

"We do quite a bit of work in the historic districts; it's probably 60 percent of our case-load," according to Shelton.

"Renovations are a part of our business that also includes new home construction. Shelton has been a builder for nine years, and started Southland Homes in 2007.

"This house turned out to be a beauty; it's truly unique. The exterior is traditional but the interior is contemporary and is exactly what the homeowner wanted," he says.

"When you save an old house, and you add all the modern comforts, there's something about it that is rewarding. It's a good feeling to be able to bring it back to what it should be."

Customer service is key to Southland's business, Shelton said, and customers like Eichard agree.

"When we finish a job, we're proud of it. We care about details and the quality. And, we build lasting relationships with our customers."

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