

Beautiful, stately HISTORIC HOMES

by MARIE SOPROVICH



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FIND OUT YOUR foundation isn't as solid as you thought it was? Water leaks in on rainy days; spiders, bugs and mice find their way into the dark places of the musty- smelling and damp basement. But, you love the old house, it has character, history and a sense of belonging in the community. Neighbours, friends and family all love it, and demolishing it would be as sacrilegious as taking down the 100 year old elms that form a canopy over the street. You have ideas about what you want to do to upgrade and modernize the inside, but the character of the home must stay intact.

That is what happened to this heritage home in a well-established neighbourhood in Edmonton. Homeowners, Tania and David love older homes, having moved from Sydney, Australia and Ontario, respectively. They were pleasantly surprised to find a home this unique, in Edmonton. "The 1923 house was originally owned by a dentist and he built this home for his growing family. We learned the history of the house during the renovation



when the elderly daughters of the original owner showed up at the front door. Right in the middle of the mess!" recalls homeowner Tania. "They had all kinds of stories about how cold the house was and how the drafts came through the walls that were insulated with horse hair and old newspapers! The family huddled around the coal grate in the upstairs sitting room, and indeed, the coal stain from the original furnace was still visible in the basement

laundry. The house had knob and tube wiring and a servants bell button in the dining room." The house was much simpler then; the decorative scrolling on the gables was added later. However, many other features, including the small paned windows, blurred by age; the leaded china cabinets; fireplaces; an original butler's pantry with cedar cabinetry and flour bins, created an inviting storybook charm and the desire to preserve the "arts and crafts" 1920's style of the house. Practical considerations forced Tania and David to renovate. The original 1923 bathroom, described in the real estate blurb as "retaining original character theme of the home" was translated to mean "has not been renovated since 1923." It was small, the pipes were clogged with 80 years of residue, and it was impractical to share for a family of four. An ensuite bathroom and a family room necessitated an addition to the back of the house. It was a simple request.

They searched for the right renovation company to help them with their project and selected Aquarian. After discussing the scope of the work, the Aquarian team created drawings and put together a budget. It was a big project that required foundational work for the addition and the refurbishment of electrics, heating and plumbing. "It was the need for an addition that ultimately led the renovation team to discover the precarious situation in the basement." Tania shared, "The foundation would have been fine if we didn't disturb the soil around the house – after all... it had stood there for nearly 100 years." It didn't take long, however, once the basement renovation started, for the crew to recognize just how seriously impaired the old foundation was. All construction was halted as company owner and foundational engineers were called in to assess the durability of the original brick foundation. The news wasn't good. The foundation was so unstable that house was in danger from the renovation. Some big decisions needed to be made. The alternatives were to demolish and rebuild in the architecture and style of the original design or lift the house, dig a new basement, and pour a new foundation? The conversations went back and forth. Aquarian priced out the difference between the cost of a new house and the cost of a new foundation added to the planned renovations. Cost was in



THE HOUSE WAS SECURED WITH BEAMS AND HYDRAULIC JACKS INCHED UP THE ENTIRE HOUSE WHILE WOODEN PILES WERE USED TO SHIMMY AND SECURE THE HOUSE HIGH OFF THE GROUND. ONCE THE HOUSE WAS HIGH ENOUGH THAT A BOBCAT COULD GET UNDERNEATH THE OLD FOUNDATION WAS REMOVED AND THE NEW BASEMENT DUG CAREFULLY, CRIBBED AND THE NEW CONCRETE FOUNDATION WAS POURED.

TANIA AND DAVID LOVE THEIR RENOVATED HOME AND ENJOY THE FUNCTIONALITY OF A WELL-CONSTRUCTED AND MAINTAINED HOME THAT STILL HOLDS THE MEMORIES, ENERGY AND FORM OF THE PAST. THEIR RESTORATION OF THIS HOME HAS NOT ONLY PROVIDED GREAT PERSONAL SATISFACTION BUT HAS ENHANCED THE CHARACTER OF THEIR MATURE EDMONTON NEIGHBOURHOOD.



favour of a new build... but culture, character and the preservation of history were more important to the homeowners.

The connection homeowners Tania and David had to the essence of the house, from the rough cut beams at the core to the decorative interior features that were put together a hundred years ago by artisans of the past, under the direction and energy of a very courageous and pioneering Edmonton family, won out over cost, and so the project began again with a whole new level of complications and challenges. This is the joy of renovation!

Steel girders were placed under the house and supported by "house of cards" pillars of pressure treated lumber. After the connection between the house and basement was broken, hydraulic jacks placed under the girders inched up the house. Brave workmen stood under the house, placing more lumber beams on the growing pillars. Once the house was high enough, a bobcat manoeuvred underneath to remove the remaining foundation and to dig out the new 9 foot ceilinged basement—a great improvement over the low and gloomy original. The new foundation walls were cribbed and concrete poured. After the concrete was cured, the house was gently set back down on its new foundation. "It was tricky, but it worked" recalls the site supervisor. Not only was the new foundation higher, but the whole house was nudged over two feet to become compliant with new zoning laws. With the house firmly in place, the renovation was back on familiar territory for the Aquarian team.

Horsehair insulation and old newspapers were replaced with R20 and walls were dry walled and painted because the original plaster walls did not survive the foundation work. New flooring in the addition was seamlessly integrated to the original oak strips, and roofing and siding were updated but retained turn of the century appeal. The master bedroom on the second floor added a new ensuite with a soaker tub, separate shower and a large vanity as well as a spacious walk-in-wardrobe. The interior space was updated completely. The original bathroom was updated with functional plumbing, while retaining the marble mosaic floor. Fixtures and tiling matched the original. The kitchen was renovated with white maple cabinetry to match the original woodwork in the butler's pantry. It was expanded slightly to fit a functional kitchen island. The dining room was fitted with an art deco style, copper-coloured tin ceiling. However, the key feature was the new family room with a loft ceiling, large fireplace and windows that connect indoor and outdoor living spaces, maximizing natural light on gloomy winter days. Tania



and David love their renovated home and enjoy the functionality of a well-constructed and maintained home that still holds the memories, energy and form of the past. Their restoration of this home has not only provided great personal satisfaction but has enhanced the character of their mature Edmonton neighbourhood.



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