

# The Rehabilitation of the Hyde-Stephens Home

## Rehabilitation Process

When considering the rehabilitation of this home, we knew that we faced numerous challenges in order to complete this project. Those considerations included: Balancing the need for updating with maintaining historically accurate look; The potential loss of the historic floor plan and aesthetic when updating to the needs of a modern homeowner; Budget constraints due to location and ability to resell to a future homeowner; Damage repair vs replacement as a result of many years of neglect and abandonment; Complementary improvements to the existing structure and property. We were fortunate that water intrusion was minimal to the main portion of the house, even during the many years of sitting vacant. However, there was still significant damage to the home in many areas that needed immediate action. To be clear, this house was nothing short of a total wreck when we acquired it.

Perhaps that is why the prior owners spent several unsuccessful years searching for a potential savior. Without the financial means or technical skills needed to take on a project of this scope, they needed a white knight—and they found one. Having been in this business for almost 20 years now, I can honestly say that I do not know for how much longer the home would have stood without immediate attention—but probably not long—and it was the most challenging project we ever endeavored to

complete. The foundation had failed in several places, plaster walls were falling in, siding was deteriorated on every wall, windows didn't function, electrical and plumbing were unsafe and nonfunctional and there was no source of heat.

Additionally, the roof had probably been on it's last legs for going on 10 years and the fact that the leaks weren't more substantial is a miracle. But the bones were solid.

The original floor plan was basically unaltered. And we knew from the moment we saw it that the home could be amazing again, it would just take a lot of work.

Ultimately, we decided that the best approach was to maintain as many of the historic elements as possible while updating the systems, such as electrical, plumbing, central heat and air, roof, insulation, etc. to meet current building code. As a part of this, the decision was made that the floor plan would be left unaltered from its original style. However, since a home from this era would likely not have either an indoor bathroom or a modern kitchen, some considerations would have to be made for these additions. In order to accommodate these additions, we rebuilt a poorly constructed enclosed back porch to house a kitchen and bathroom. We feel that even this slight alteration to the floor plan is still historically accurate as many homes in Nashville that were built prior to the 1930s likely had kitchens and bathrooms added in this manner. It was quite common to enclose a back porch to add a bathroom once water and sewer became available to a neighborhood.

Having decided that we would maintain the existing floor plan, the work could now begin in earnest. We began by removing all non-historic elements or changes that had been made in the 1950's-1980's. With a clean slate, we then turned our attention to repairs to the existing stone foundation. While this needed some

significant attention in one spot, the approximately 3 foot thick stone foundation held up amazingly well over the past 150+ years and only minimal raising of the floors was needed to achieve a reasonably level living environment. We were able to leave many of the original windows and almost all of the doors and hardware were still functional. While these may not be truly “original” to the home, many of these features still likely date to the late 1800’s. The original wood floors in much of the house remained in decent well-worn condition, considering their age, and we refinished these making only minimal patching to damaged spots. Even closet wardrobes that were likely constructed in the bedrooms in the early 1900’s were left as built. Where modern updates were necessary, we tried to select materials that provided a historic aesthetic that was complementary to the home but not distracting from its historic look. The exterior cladding was badly damaged, but where possible we kept the old and patched in new material. On the inside of the home, we attempted to maintain as many of the plaster walls as possible, but after years of neglect this was not possible in some of the spaces. Ultimately, we touched every aspect of this house in some way, attempting to do it justice and preserve the home for generations to come. This 2 year project was very much a labor of love, as it is often more difficult to work with existing materials than it is to simply replace. But we persevered with a dedicated team that was committed to the process of saving this treasure of the Bordeaux Community.

## Material Selections

Materials selections were made with an eye towards the past but still able to meet the needs of a modern homeowner. What follows is a narrative from the designer, Whitney Youngblood, explaining some of her key choice of materials:

*Around the turn of the 20th century, Victorian ornamentation was added to the house in the form of an ornate scalloped trim & increased ornamentation around the front porch columns. Other changes include removing the bottom two-thirds of the middle two porch columns and replacing the entry door sidelites & transom with a more Victorian-era looking stained glass. Taking into consideration that Greek Revival homes were most often painted a simple white with a darker accent color, we repainted all of the original elements of the structure in white & chose a saturated warm, stone gray to highlight the later added Victorian ornamentation.*

*The newly installed black metal roof is consistent with both the coloring that Greek Revival homes usually exhibit & mimics the material that may have been used on a Southern farmhouse during this era. The entry door was painted a saturated classic black and the porch ceilings were painted a light blue that is an unmistakable tradition in Southern architecture. The grand U-shaped driveway is a red aggregate that pays homage to the red pea gravel or simple dirt drive that was once commonly used in such applications. The stone masonry foundation was also restored to it's original state using materials salvaged from the site. Galvanized aluminum half-round gutters were added to the fascia of the home as this style of gutter was one of the first widely used gutter systems in America, especially during the Colonial & Victorian eras.*

*The interior walls of the home were painted in a light, stone gray and paired with crisp, white trim highlighting the tall ceilings, substantial trim & expansive windows that adorn the front elevation of the structure. The hardwood flooring throughout the house was sanded down and stained a deep ebony color to camouflage the extensive damage to the original wide plank floors in both the foyer & living room and unify the original flooring with the hardwoods that were later added in the dining room & bedroom.*

*The electrical elements of the house were updated to modern standards (since obviously this home did not have electricity originally) but retain a historic feel. The large lighting fixtures in the home exhibit a beautiful live, antiqued brass finish and magnificent ceiling medallions into which they are anchored. The light fixtures are controlled by mother-of-pearl push button switches with antiqued brass switch plates that feature a simplified Victorian motif.*

*All of the fireplaces original to the home had been converted to Victorian-era coal burning fireplaces at some point. All mantels were refinished and painted a crisp white to match the trim throughout the home. The Victorian cast-iron fireplace surrounds now sit before colorful handmade custom tile completing the fireplace transformations. The brick of the chimneys above the mantle were also exposed to better display the original character of the home.*

*A newly rebuilt porch enclosure to the home includes a kitchen, two bathrooms and laundry closet. As all of these modern-day conveniences would have originally been outside the home. The finishes and selections are a bit more modern but with a definite nod to tradition and history. The addition features an encaustic*

*cement tile floor that introduces a historic pattern, texture & material to the new spaces. The shaker-style kitchen cabinetry is painted white to match the trim work and are accented with ornate, Victorian-era cup pulls & crystal knobs. The focal point of the kitchen is an oversized custom range hood with chestnut accents flanked with chestnut shelving.*

*Beautiful, historic inspired soapstone countertops are used in both the kitchen & master bath. Plumbing fixtures are a polished, living brass finish and feature a simple Victorian shape & style. Just off the kitchen, the guest bath features a console sink, marble tub/shower surround and reclaimed-wood sliding barn door. The master bath includes a clawfoot tub, walk-in shower and double vanity. A repurposed antique sideboard now serves as the vanity with soapstone countertops and vessel sinks. The tile throughout the master is Carrara marble with a historic hex tile format on the floor and subway tile upon the walls.*

*We intentionally avoided adding unnecessary embellishments, instead working to allow each expansive room to stand on its own and be ultimately repurposed through the use of furnishings to meet the needs of the future homeowner. Even landscaping was kept to a minimum to avoid distracting from the home itself.*

*It was truly a joy to work on this on this project and I consider it the crown jewel in my portfolio of design work.*