



Preserving the Past

This 1920's French Chateau was sure to be demolished if it hadn't been for a family with a vision and a crew with the means to execute it properly.



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The homeowners and crew alike were delighted to find this set of pristine wooden stairs under terribly worn and dated carpeting.

When the current family bought this Atherton house, General Contractor Frank Lewis of Prime Pacific Builders says, "The previous owners were living in the guest quarters, leaving the main house vacant for almost 20 years."

As a result, the plumbing in the main house didn't work, the electricity was outdated, and the interior was in shambles. While any other family might have found the project to be an unworthy money pit, this one saw the home as a worthwhile act of

preservation and couldn't wait to tackle it. They had had experience with moving in and out and living with big crews. Their previous home in San Francisco was used for the filming of the popular 1990's television show *Party of Five*. "The family had to constantly adapt when the crew needed to prop it and film," explains Lewis.

After the television show's six-year run, the family decided to move to the Peninsula and take on another project—this elegant French-style estate. Lewis and his crew were hired immediately to gut and reconstruct the 5,400-square-foot main house, update the plumbing and electricity, and add an additional

Near Right: "The kitchen was remodeled in the 1950s and I think was done through a Sears catalog," Lewis says with a grimace. "Everything was vinyl and lime green." Like every other room in the house, the kitchen was gutted and brought back to its original grand French style with a hand-carved limestone hood by Stone Creations, and cherry cabinets by the North Bay's Sweetheart Cabinets.

Far Right: The walls of the dining room, like all the others in the house, had become dilapidated and impossible to work with. "Some of the walls had fabric behind to cover cracks," explains Lewis. To remedy the situation, the fabric was removed and all the walls were re-plastered and evened out. Recessed lighting was subtly added to incorporate more light into the room without taking away from the beauty of the antique chandelier. Tapestries add an Old-World flare.

Below: Elegant crown moldings were restored in the master bedroom along with a charming hearth





1,000 square feet to the attic. While it was obviously important to bring the house up to modern standards, the family was adamant about keeping the house true to its original style. This required the crew to salvage and restore what they could of the flooring, roof tiles, windows, doors, and hardware back to its original luster. This was a task Lewis, an aficionado of the old-style craft, was certainly up to doing. The catch was that this family wanted it done quickly.

The result is an elaborately revived 6,400-square-foot, custom-designed manse that took an astonishingly short five and a half months to complete. In order to keep to this unheard-of

pace, Lewis was juggling a slew of subcontractors, including electricians, painters, and finish carpenters, who quickly and carefully worked around each other.

None of this would have been possible to complete in that time frame, however, without the absolute thoroughness and decisiveness of the homeowners. "They knew exactly what they wanted. People always think they know what they want, but these folks really did and that made all the difference in time."

Thanks to the owners' clear vision, passion, and hands-on approach, as well as the crews' devotion to restoring the past, this house will be around for future generations to appreciate. ■