

A photograph of a charming white cottage with a dark grey roof and a brick chimney. The house features white horizontal siding and black-framed windows. In the foreground, there is a lush garden with white hydrangeas and a white patio umbrella. The scene is set against a backdrop of green trees and a blue sky with light clouds.

DOUGLAS

DREAM HOUSE



SEEN STYLE



How a 150-year old house was reborn.

BY SUSAN KEHOE, PH.D.
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ED DOUCET

MOST OF THE PEOPLE WHO SAW THE HOUSE on Chestnut Street in the town of Douglas, Mich., near Saugatuck, passed it by; but Barry Harrison saw the charm. When he purchased the house, many people said he would knock it down and rebuild. But he had a vision that only master designers can see; that will be evident as you view the before and after pictures of this restoration project.

“When I first saw the house, I thought all it would need was a quick top coat of white paint,” Harrison joked. “My biggest challenge was cleaning out the mess. The most recent family living there were classic hoarders. What I thought was a dining room table turned out to be two sofas covered with junk.”

When he cleaned out the house sufficiently to find the floor, he discovered rotten wood that was structurally unsafe to walk on. Walls had to be taken down and after plaster was removed he found old-style balloon construction. That meant the house had to be made structurally sound, which would also require new electrical and plumbing systems.

Harrison said, “The good news was that the granite foundation was as solid as the day it was installed.”

The title work stated that the 1,500-square-foot house was built in 1862. “I believe that was when the land was divided but that the house may have been built later,” Harrison said, “because during renovations I found a newspaper dated 1882 behind drywall.”



Upper left: Original kitchen with view to dining room. **Top center:** Original powder room off kitchen. **Top right:** Remodeled powder room and laundry room concealed behind the domed clock cupboard. **Center:** Remodeled kitchen with island and domed clock cupboard; view into the dining room.

Remarkable changes occurred on the exterior. “The most dramatic architectural decision I had to make about the outside involved how many columns to put on the front porch. The Southerner in me wanted eight square columns,” said Harrison, who grew up in Berea, Ky., where his grandfather was a furniture maker. “The designer in me settled for two square columns and two round columns.” He added a small brick porch and walkway leading up to the door that enhanced the clean white look.

When Harrison landscaped the exterior, he placed the new air conditioner compressor in the center of the garden next to the house. He then built a twelve-foot-tall obelisk to cover the compressor. The decorative cover became the centerpiece for the garden filled with

hydrangeas, yews and pachysandra trimming the borders. Neighbors and dog walkers see the ornament as a landmark of the restored place, never suspecting that a compressor is lurking inside.

Describing the interior design scheme Harrison said, “The furnishings are not typical of cottage colors like marine blue and white. I’ve chosen grey tones with yellow accents and lots of wood throughout the home; numerous items were handmade by me at the Art | Harrison Interiors workshop. Every room has custom crown molding, base molding and newly laid wood floors stretching across every room.”

All the rooms in the interior of the house were significantly rearranged. The original sitting room now serves as the master bedroom



Top left: Remodeled dining room with oval windows, double glass entry doors and mahogany table; partial view into remodeled living room. **Top right:** Original dining room leading to front door. **Bottom left:** Partial view into remodeled living room. **Bottom right:** Original dining room leading to the living room.



with a large ensuite bathroom and closet. Built-ins along the back wall are painted white to contrast with the deep grey color of the rest of the room. It's the perfect place for a TV, but Harrison prefers to have it hold pictures, books and collections.

The bedroom and ensuite on the second floor accommodates two queen-sized beds that he fabricated from iron plumbing pipes blackened with gunmetal. In addition to his design skills, Harrison designs and builds furniture from scratch.

The new living room is adjacent to the front door. It's filled with unique furniture of Harrison's creation like nesting tables made of wood and coated in a bronze finish. The dining room drop-leaf tabletop is made with three solid

slabs of mahogany resting on a unique twig base custom constructed from iron.

When asked to name his favorite room in the house, Harrison called it a tossup between the dining room and kitchen. "The dining room with lap siding has custom oval windows that I built to scale with the new front door is a favorite," Harrison said. "The kitchen has a large dome clock and my hand-made custom-fit cabinets. The unit conceals a hidden door leading to a laundry room and another bathroom. I'm quite pleased with that as well."

Two bedrooms, three bathrooms and wood floors, doors, cabinets and woodwork, all custom-built by designer Barry Harrison. This is truly a little dream house set just a block away from the Kalamazoo River.

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Top left: Remodeled dining room with partial view of master bedroom and steps to second floor. **Top right:** Original dining room and steps. **Middle left:** Original master bedroom with second door leading to the screened-in porch outside. **Middle right:** Remodeled master bedroom with wall of built-ins. **Bottom left:** Remodeled bedroom with view to master bath. Keepsakes hang on the wall and a table made by his grandfather is placed at end of bed. **Bottom right:** Original master bedroom.



Epilogue: Barry Harrison sold his labor of love shortly after moving in. Having heard about the unique remodel from neighbors, a couple came along "just to see it" and made him one of those offers. They also bought all the custom-made furniture that wasn't either an heirloom or keepsake. "The good news," as Harrison would say, is that he found another house to tinker with not too far away. Reportedly, the new house is in good shape and just needs updating and decorating. Stay tuned for a pictorial adventure of another Harrison dream house next year. NS

Art | Harrison Interiors
4339 Delemere Blvd, Royal Oak,
MI 48073
artharrison.net; (248) 549-1003