



• The highly decorated 1895 Queen Anne house has elements of Shingle Style and Free Classic design.



SUBURBAN RENEWAL

INTERIOR DESIGNER TIFFANY LEBLANC STRIKES A BALANCE BETWEEN THE HISTORICAL INTEGRITY OF A LATE-19TH-CENTURY VICTORIAN AND THE COMFORT LEVEL OF THOSE WHO CALL IT HOME.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL J. LEE

Furnishings strike a balance between luxury and informality. Their proportions and placement work in the 19th-century rooms.



Left In the sitting room, the fireplace has a surround of Italian onyx tile. All of the white-oak woodwork was carefully cleaned and refinished.

Far Left The formal fireplace in the main parlor is surrounded in cherry wood and flanked by original ornamental plaster.



From top left The white-oak built-in at the entry is original to the house. • Traditional furnishings include an antique sideboard, the table, and dining chairs. • The dining-room fireplace has a stamped metal surround and a carved oak mantelpiece. • The print (on aluminum) of Ukrainian dancer Masha Dashkina Maddux, by photographers Ken Browar and Deborah Ory, makes an interesting juxtaposition with the ornamental walls.

When you live in a 10,000-square-foot Queen Anne Victorian—a *grande dame* of a house built in 1895—

passersby snapping pictures of its ornate architecture become commonplace. Women asking to step inside to revisit where they used to sneak cigarettes when it was a Catholic girls' school might, however, startle most homeowners. But one owner, the longtime inhabitant of this house in Newton, Massachusetts, invites them in to take a look around.

That there is still schoolgirl graffiti on the basement walls suggests how principled the mother of two is about maintaining the historical integrity of the place she's called home since 1990. "I feel like it's my responsibility to be the steward of this house," she says, sharing that the paraged and shingled structure was built for John Quincy Adams Whittemore, a shoe-polish magnate who sold it 40 years later to the archdiocese of Boston. "Before making every decision—minor to major—I ask myself, 'Am I respecting this house? Am I doing it justice?'"

While she was married and raising her now-adult children here, she stuck conservatively to Victorian-style furnishings

and décorating. Not long ago, newly divorced, she wanted to take baby steps toward change. Through a Houzz search for "how to brighten up old Victorians," she found Boston-area interior designer Tiffany LeBlanc. An epiphany! "Tiffany made me realize that I could live in a Victorian without the trappings of that era and still respect this amazing house."

In short order, brightening the house with dark woodwork inside and sun-eclipsing porches outside led to a respectful refresh of all 15 rooms, without any changes to the house's original footprint. Enlarging or adding windows was off-limits, so LeBlanc layered in a game-changing amount of light through lamps and downlights. She partnered with local builder Fergal Moughan to rejuvenate the oak floors and decorative woodwork—stripping, conditioning, and staining the massive amount of tired wood to make the tones warmer and more consistent from room to room.

"We wanted to be accurate and yet let the house reveal that it had been with multiple, different caretakers," says LeBlanc.





Windows, woodwork, and even a painted ceiling were restored. The new kitchen occupies a previously remodeled room.



Above In what was a billiards room, the frescoed plaster ceiling was restored after fading and water damage. **Right** In the study, the sideboard from Made Goods is finished in a faux shagreen. **Opposite** The kitchen is frankly modern with all the amenities, but its vocabulary is traditional and classic.



Right The massing, chimneys, and tower point to American Queen Anne style; the targeted gables with ornamental plaster have an English sensibility.



Talented artisans were brought in to address intricate architectural repairs, such as fixing original leaded-glass windows and attending to the pivotal restoration of the double entry doors by adding glass panels and hardware that brought back their original profile. On the mezzanine—a former billiards room now used as a den—a museum conservator painstakingly refreshed the paint on an original ceiling fresco that had faded over the years and suffered water damage.

“It was very important to me that we respect the history of the house in doing any kind of renovation,” says the homeowner. “Tiffany understood that completely.”

With the homeowner’s enthusiastic blessing, LeBlanc orchestrated a metaphorical sweeping of cobwebs. She replaced old-fashioned furniture with pieces of cleaner design, like a living room coffee table with modern detailing and a tuxedo-

arm sofa in the same room. “The forms of the furniture are transitional in nature,” the interior designer explains, adding that throughout the house she tried to strike a balance between its history, on the one hand, and making rooms feel current, on the other.

“It’s a formal house, but you don’t have to feel that way when you’re in it,” says LeBlanc, honoring the relaxed lifestyle of the family, which includes young grandchildren and an 80-pound dog.

The six original fireplaces are of intricately carved mahogany and oak with marble, onyx, and handmade Italian tile detailing. But no oil paintings hang on the walls, no antique carpets lie on the floors. Instead, large-scale, modern photographs express the less formal ambience both the designer and the homeowner sought. “I don’t feel that interiors have to



Above Pale and neutral colors, modern art, and simple lines bring a serene ambience to the sensitively restored Victorian house.

match the architecture,” LeBlanc says. “Some friction, some contrast, is good.”

To anchor seating arrangements, LeBlanc opted for large rugs and overlay rugs, treatments more modern than their oriental counterparts. “We let the texture of the rugs be a nod to a more transitional-style house,” she says.

Even the new kitchen and a new primary suite above it combine the livability and functionality of a modern-day home with classic design elements. Both rooms had been remodeled (badly) before, so removing a big chimney that ran through the middle of them was not a sacrilege. Doing so allowed LeBlanc to create a kitchen with better flow and a coffered ceiling.

Its white Shaker-style cabinets, white subway tile, brass, and polished-nickel hardware lean toward traditional, in deference to the owner’s desire for simple elegance. As for the primary bedroom and bath, LeBlanc says, “By doing this renovation, the homeowner has a wing that’s hers, with a much better layout than before.” The French *bateau* tub wrapped in a stainless-steel skirt is the epitome of yesteryear intermingling with the present.

“The house is cohesive, it unfolds gracefully,” LeBlanc observes. The homeowner’s gratitude is immeasurable: “Tiffany helped me make the house my own,” she says. “It’s prettier, lighter, happier, and fresher.” • **FOR RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 116.**



Left In the study, windows with leaded transoms are original, as is trim and ornamental plaster. Updated elements include a Galbraith & Paul paper, Carlton V upholstery, and an Urban Electric fixture.