

House Beautiful

These Storied Structures Might Just Convince You to Buy a Historic Home

You may face 100-year-old wiring and "creepy basements," but these photos prove how satisfying renovating can be.



BY JESSICA CHERNER | PUBLISHED: JUN 16, 2023



While current architectural trends tend to lean towards convenient, streamlined structures that prioritize technology, there's something to be said about historic homes. After all, the artistry and attention to hand-crafted detail they showcase are hard to come by in new builds. That said, buying and renovating an 80-plus-year-old space is a big commitment—both financially and emotionally. We chatted with five homeowners who chose history over modernity to discover if such an investment is actually worth it.

Here's what they said.

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The Old Charmer



Though renovating a historic house—especially one built in 1905—comes with plenty of challenges, Lisa Schwert, founder and principal designer of Innate Studio, faced a big one: bad timing. She and her husband began their historic home’s partial gut renovation in February of 2020, mere weeks before the whole world shut down. Once she was able to continue her work—supply chain delays and all—she got to work fixing up the place, from replacing the HVAC systems and electrical wiring, “which was the original knob and tube,” Schwert notes. She also removed several non-load-bearing walls and a staircase to create a primary suite, reworked the kitchen’s floorplan, added an entryway closet, incorporated heated tile floors, and restored the original Douglas fir hardwood floors, among other sweeping changes. “Wherever possible, we kept the existing finishes and restored original details to respect the character of the home,” she explains.

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It was a successful renovation, but world events affected her and her family's plans to move into their brand-new, very old home. "As so many people did, my family completely rethought our situation during the beginning of the pandemic," Schwert says. "For numerous reasons—mostly to be closer to family and have a separate space for my mom to move into—we made the difficult decision to complete the renovation and sell the house." Not for nothing, her hard work and myriad upgrades to the home were well worth it in the resale. "We were able to recoup our costs and realize a profit that we actually used to renovate our new home," she explains.

Pros: "We were lucky that the interior of the home had been so well maintained. Being able to keep the existing flooring throughout helped with costs, added character to the home, and was less wasteful," the designer says.

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Cons: Schwert explains, “This home was special because it had the most beautiful proportions and details, but aspects of the layout and property really needed to be reworked to bring it back to its original glory.” Another issue she reluctantly tackled? Replacing decades-old systems. “It was expensive to have to completely redo the HVAC and electrical, but, in some ways, it was a good thing that we knew we just had to do it and didn’t go down the path of trying to work with an older system only to have to start over in the middle of construction.”

Worth it? “While it ended up being stressful to do the work during the early days of Covid, it was such a gratifying process and really made me realize how much I love working on single-family homes—especially older ones,” Schwert admits.