Building a New Victorian

Elegant Valance Ideas

Summer Lights on Martha's Vineyard

Salvage Secrets
Building Character

Seldom does a For Sale sign appear on a vacant parcel in Newport, Rhode Island. So scarce is land in the City-by-the-Sea that moments after it was announced a historic lot was up for grabs in the spring of 2000, a bidding war ensued. Within 24 hours, a handful of hopefuls were vehemently vying for three-quarters of an acre nestled in the heart of the Kay Street/Catherine Street/Old Beach Road District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. When the dust settled, the only person left standing was Mark Horan, a custom homebuilder with a penchant for 19th-century architecture.

When Horan first surveyed the property, he could not help but admire the scattered remains of a Victorian estate that originally presided on the grounds before being ravaged by fire in 1973. Peeking through an entanglement of overgrown brush was an antiquated brick wall and August copper beech and linden trees set in place by a wealthy railroad financier more than a century ago. Those precious links to the past helped inspire Horan to build a historically sensitive residence in the 2,800-acre neighborhood, which already lays claim to 129 significant buildings.

Brick-a-Brac Hall

When noted 19th-century architect Richard Morris Hunt and his client Henry G. Marquand first surveyed the very same plot in the early 1870s, Newport was in the midst of a building boom. As mega-wealthy industrialists were erecting colossal mansions along legendary Bellevue Avenue, moderately wealthy intellectuals from Boston and Philadelphia were building impressive

A parterre garden with brick walkways, a privet hedge, white hydrangea and Don Juan roses add to the formality of the home's façade.

A new Victorian home in Newport, Rhode Island quietly blends into its Gilded Age surroundings and reveals its Gilded Age identity.

By Cheryl Hackett Galvin
Photographs by Kindra Clineff
Left: Horan frequents shops throughout New England searching for antiques to furnish his new home. The living room is appointed with an antique parlor set and mantel, a vintage hand-painted Asian cabinet and a period-reproduction chandelier.

Opposite: A raised panel oak archway forms a graceful transition between the home’s formal and informal living spaces.

The handsome Eastlake walnut mantel pairs beautifully with the home’s extensive quarter-sawn white oak moldings and millwork.

Intricately turned balusters and newel posts embellish the grand staircase.
The formal dining room celebrates Victorian style with classic white raised panels, decorative moldings, antique furnishings and delicate white lace drapery.

residences just a few blocks away. Prolific architects such as George Champlin Mason, Dudley Newton and McKim, Mead and White transformed Newport into an architectural laboratory, where many vernaculars were tested and perfected. Extraordinary examples of Italianate, Stick Style and Queen Anne homes abounded along the quiet country lanes leading to Easton's Beach from Bellevue Avenue.

Hunter's vision for his longtime friend, Marquand, was a massive three-and-a-half-story home distinguished by a central timber-frame gable with a corbeled balcony and a granite ashlar, patterned brick and wood façade. Although Linden Gate struck a commanding Gothic pose, the home was better known as "Bric-a-brac Hall." Apparently, Marquand, who also served as the president of the Board of Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, had an appetite for collecting and jammed every nook and cranny of his home with objets d'art.

In 1895, architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler hailed Linden Gate as being, "a vigorous and individual piece of work." Interestingly enough, more than a century later, the newest owner of the famed Old Beach Road property would echo the sentiment. Says Horan, "When I purchased the land I hoped to build an original home that incorporated the best the Victorian era had to offer with a floor plan and amenities necessary for today's lifestyle."

A Modern Interpretation

For as long as Horan can remember he has been drawn to the artistry and craftsmanship of the 19th century. As a boy growing up on Cape Cod, he lived in a rambling turn-of-the-century Shingle-style home overlooking Nantucket Sound. Horan says, "I loved the details in that house, such as the turret, the second-story porches and the gambrel roof." As a teenager, he became acquainted with the building trade by framing houses for his family's real estate development company. After college, Horan settled in Newport and established his own building firm. He says, "I love the wide variety of building styles and enjoy touring and studying historic homes."

Inevitably, Newport's rich architectural heritage leaves an indelible mark on those residing in the island community. Horan's clients often request houses that recall the charm of the Victorian era. Over the years, Horan Building Company has built numerous homes that incorporate period-inspired...
The master bedroom opens onto a second-story porch and features a marble bathroom and a gas fireplace. An antique wicker teacart, floral bedfiddling and matching chaise lounge are some Victorian touches.

Soon after the home's exterior was completed and adorned with a Benjamin Moore historic paint palette of autumn gold, sage, alligator green and cottage red, many a passerby automatically assumed the stately home was just another restoration in progress—a common sight in this district. Horan says, "Each case of mistaken identity is the best compliment I could receive."

Structurally, the interior of the home boasts many Old World features including a grand staircase, ceiling arches, flooring, doors, wainscoting, molding and millwork crafted from quarter-sawn white oak. Horan enlisted the help of local interior designer Carolyn Schmitz to select a spirited combination of furnishings, wall coverings and window treatments that best reflect the young bachelor's tastes.

When visitors pass through the solid oak and beveled glass entry doors they note the intricately turned newel post and balusters of the staircase in the foyer, which closely resemble those found in neighboring estates. Even though the formal living room features a dramatic bay window and crown moldings, the focal point of the room is a fireplace fitted with an antique walnut mantel salvaged from a home in nearby Providence.

The formal dining room is located on the opposite side of the foyer and is adorned with plaster crown moldings, white raised panels and a crimson damask wallpaper. An antique reproduction crystal chandelier with frosted and etched glass globes illuminates the room with Victorian elegance.

The gourmet kitchen and family room are situated just beyond the formal rooms and overlook the park-like grounds. Sleek stainless-steel appliances happily coexist with custom cabinetry painted ivory with an olive glaze, seeded glass insert doors, brass hardware and granite counters supported by carved wooden corbels. Similar white custom cabinetry also distinguishes the butler's pantry next to the kitchen.

The second and third stories of the home include eight large bedrooms and bathrooms decorated with an eclectic mix of new and antique furniture and accessories. The master bedroom suite is indeed a study in luxury: The has a romantic open porch and a dual-view gas fireplace that can be viewed from the bedroom and from the whirlpool tub in the marble bathroom. Aside from the first-class amenities, perhaps what makes the master bedroom suite so unique is its poignantly view of a 130-year-old copper beech tree that belonged to the original Linden Gate estate. Whether you admire the magnificent relic from the room's expansive windows while resting on a chaise lounge or peer over the porch rails from a wicker seat, you cannot help but ponder the beauty and grace of a bygone era.

**A Neo-Victorian Verdict**

Richard Guy Wilson, a professor at the University of Virginia, author of several books on 19th- and 20th-century architecture and host of A&E's America's Castles, came recently to meet Horan and tour his new home. Wilson says, "This neo-Victorian fits very well into the neighborhood. Horan's house illuminates how much better understood is the architecture of the 19th century. He looked very carefully at actual houses and pattern books to create the exterior. Spatially, the interior of the house is contemporary and represents modern living. Victorian fragments, such as the antique fireplace mantel and light fixtures, and high-quality reproductions add to the home's ambience."