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# porch proud

An old St. Paul Victorian loaded with potential has been slowly brought back to life by the co-owner of Tangletown Gardens. Now it finally has the front porch to match.

BY MOLLY GUTHREY

The Victorian on Avon Street in St. Paul was built in 1889: It was the year that President Grover Cleveland signed the paperwork that admitted North Dakota and South Dakota into the Union. Across the world, Paris was inaugurating the Eiffel Tower and Vincent van Gogh was painting "The Starry Night." In South America, an outbreak of yellow fever temporarily halted construction of the Panama Canal.

Time passed and passed: Two World Wars. Eighteen U.S. presidents. From silent movies to cable television. From the typewriter to the personal computer. From the horse and buggy to the automobile. The Victorian stood through it all — even as Rondo, the neighborhood at its edge, was plowed down for the construction of Interstate 94.

Finally, in 1995 — 106 years after it was built — a young man named Scott Endres purchased the Avon Street Victorian.



The new porch, above, was built with the garden in mind. Below, the 1970s version of the porch was too plain for a Victorian and the materials hadn't weathered well.



PHOTOS COURTESY  
OF DAVID HEIDE  
DESIGN STUDIO



## "I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE POSSIBILITY"

"Back then, I was a 23-year-old person who was just starting out," said Endres, now 44. "I had been taught that to rent is to throw away money. I couldn't afford a great old Victorian — the Victorians in my neighborhood were built for blue-collar families, the craftsmen who built the bigger houses but still put their love and creativity and skill set into their own homes. But it's not a frilly, fancy Victorian. It's a little more clean-lined inside. Not so gingerbread."

The shabby-chic piece of architecture in the Summit-University neighborhood was still something special, though. Or, rather, the young man knew it could be returned to something special.

"I fell in love with the possibility of the house," Endres said, "but I realized that a lot needed to be done to get the house where it deserved to be. Over time, with a lot of sweat equity, I crossed things off the list. Eventually, I was able to reach out to contractors and friends in the industry to help me."

The porch needed professional help, that's for sure. It had literally not withstood the passage of time.

"The porch had actually been rebuilt in the 1970s by the former homeowner," Endres said. "When I bought the house in the early 1990s, the porch was OK, it was fine. But over time, slowly, the foundation of the porch and the floor started to rot. I knew at some point I'd have to do something major. It would have to be taken down from the roof and rebuilt."

Not just rebuilt — restored.

"In the 1970s, the porch had not been re-done exactly as perhaps the original owner or architect or family might have intended," Endres said. "I wanted to restore it back to the integrity the home deserved."

Endres enlisted David Heide of David Heide Design Studio and Wayne Petrie of Housecraft Home Remodeling.

"This was not necessarily a weekend project," Endres said. "And I have an unusual schedule in that I work all the time. But that's OK because I love what I do."



## **"THE PORCH IS REALLY THE BACKDROP"**

The porch in this case was a literal bridge between Endres' work and home: He is the co-owner of Tangle-town Gardens, Tangletown Gardens Farm and Wise Acre Eatery, an urban oasis and operation based out of South Minneapolis.

"When I bought the house, the garden was nothing like it is today," Endres said. "The garden has evolved like the rest of the house: I bring my work home in a good way.

"My own personal garden connects me to why I got into horticulture in the first place. The porch is the first thing I see when I come home at the end of the day or what a guest experiences when they come to my home. It's a bridge between my home and my garden."

Heide saw the porch's role a bit differently.

"The porch is really the backdrop for Scott's spectacular, show-stopping garden," Heide said.

The previous porch was too simple, though, for a Victorian.

"When the porch was rebuilt in the '70s, it had very few details," Endres said. "It was kind of basic, from the posts to the decking. It was just an underwhelming thing that I saw when I came home and, over time, the materials didn't last. The porch floor literally put a spring into my step."

## **"I WANTED THIS OUTDOOR ROOM"**

In the case of the Avon porch, restoration was like digging into a mystery.

"The goal was to design the porch that was always there — without knowing exactly what was there," said Heide.

How is that done?

"We look at historic precedent, to see what's going on in similar houses in the neighborhood, how elaborate or simple, within the context of the neighborhood," Heide said.



As Heide saw it, there were other parts of this restoration that were even more challenging.

"It was kind of a challenge, imagining how construction could happen in the middle of this beautiful garden," he said.

Endres had faith, though.

"I reached out to David Heide because he's an expert in the field of historic architecture and preserving the past but also making it part of the future," Endres said.



Back in 1889, the American porch was like Facebook: A social tool, a way to interact with friends and acquaintances.

"Porches in our society are used differently than when this house was built," Heide said. "People today want more privacy than is expected on a front porch; we're putting porches on the back of houses today."

Endres doesn't have much time to sit on his porch — but his plants do.

"I have a lot of container plants and plantings on the porch, which serves as a connection between the house and the garden," Endres said. "In modern homes, there's more of a seamless connection between indoor and out. This was a modern take on that. I wanted this outdoor room that was more of a seamless connection."

#### **AVOCADO GREEN, TOMATO RED**

The Victorian porch was rebuilt over the span of a few months about four years ago. It took some time because of the detail work and craftsmanship involved.

"In 1889 architecture, everything was about the detail," Endres said. "Brackets and finials and spindles — a lot of wood elements to be built or sourced."

Everything was replaced except for the roof. The result is a thing of whimsy. The porch's new columns and arches are based on the details found on the home's existing upstairs porch — with decorative cutout details added.

The porch — like the rest of the exterior — is painted mostly avocado green, but the cinnamon-red color on the porch steps and floor adds whimsy and is repeated elsewhere as an accent.

"I love the way the colors are earthy but still vibrant," Endres said. "It's a palette that's saturated in color without being jarring. I love green, obviously — I work with it every day of the year — but I wanted a green that has a little bit of warmth to it. Something welcoming."

The Victorian on Avon Street is elevated on its lot, framed by a stone retaining wall. The porch is low-slung enough that it doesn't require a railing — giving it the effect of being an extension of the garden. And what a garden! "Visitors are sometimes overwhelmed at the diversity of plant choices," Endres said.

"Based on one of my passions in life being plants and gardening, my garden has become an experimental playground in pushing the limits of what we can and can't grow. I try to include things you don't see in everyone else's garden. I like to have things with a lot of foliage interest and things that are bold, with very large leaves or very interesting textures or wonderfully concentrated colors and textures next to each other."

There's a reason, after all, that opposites attract: Pairing something with its opposite partner, they look quite stunning together.

"We have 'zone envy' here — we wish we could grow things that other parts of the world take for granted. But, even though it's more of a challenge, we can grow these things, if we consider them annuals or are willing to dig them up and store them inside over the winter."



One's eyes will need to rest after such a sensory smorgasbord, and the "new" porch is now a good spot for a reprieve: It's a place both old and new, practical and beautiful.

"The vintage wicker furniture set that my grandmother used at her farmhouse is there, and there might also be furniture that is more comfortable as well," said Endres with a wink. "There are art pieces and pottery; it's a three-dimensional experience."

When was the last time he sat on the porch, though?

(We asked Endres this question when it was still winter, so he had to think about it for a while.)

"It's about the best place in the world to enjoy morning coffee," he said, "and when I'm working on my garden, I'll stop and take a rest there for a while while I ponder my next move or simply enjoy what's in front of me."

In Minnesota, though, the season for porch sitting is extremely limited. That's OK, Endres said.

"I see the porch as a psychological resting place," he said. "Just seeing it as I'm coming and going gives me that sense of rest." ■

*Molly Guthrey, a Pioneer Press reporter and columnist, is a regular contributor to Spaces.*