



# Clem Labine's Period Homes

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# Preservation in Practice

A Minneapolis firm honors the past. *By Dan Cooper*

For an architect or designer, the choice of working in the historic milieu is catalyzed by any number of factors. Typically, he or she has an affinity for traditional styles or has found historicism to be a pursuit that is profitable in their market and suitable to their aptitude. A breed apart are those who have entered the field strictly as preservationists and have decided to spend their careers ensuring that as much of the past as possible remains for future generations – while also adapting their new work to be sympathetic to these existing structures.

David Heide of Minneapolis, MN-based David Heide Design Studio in such a designer, as his firm typically approaches a project from a preservationist's perspective. Rather than simply using historicism as an influence, Heide's intent is guided by our collective responsibility to

the past. "We always look to the building for precedent with respect to all materials, windows and other openings," says Heide, "and we're always paying attention to scale and proportion, to massing and roof shapes."

As so many of his commissions are preservation oriented, Heide has created a firm that espouses strict adherence to the accepted standards of the field. "We work on a wide range of projects, from National Register status to simple vernacular, and we consistently bear the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation in mind when approaching a project," he says. "We have a collection of guidelines from historic districts across the country in our library. It is common for us to consult the local repository of historic drawings to find original plans. In some cases, where drawings of the building in question are not available, we have found



David Heide (above) founded David Heide Design Studio in Minneapolis, MN, in 1997; over the past dozen years the firm has worked on a broad range of restoration, renovation, interior design and new construction projects, including this new Arts and Crafts cottage (top), which was inspired by the work of Greene & Greene. Above photo: Roy Blakey; top photo: Karen Melvin Photography



Located on a northern Minnesota lake, the Arts and Crafts cottage features robust timbering, large window openings and high ceilings. Photo: Karen Melvin Photography

an example of the architect's other work from the same time period, and these have been enormously helpful in re-creating missing details."

While Heide's work honors the past, he is not inflexible, maintaining a pragmatic philosophy about the need for architecture to evolve. "When we attend lectures and read about historic buildings and their architects, there is a reverence for the historic that sometimes seems extreme," he says. "All the things that affect projects today – budget, schedule, ability of the craftspeople and client taste – also affected projects historically. It's likely that not every building that Cass Gilbert designed is exactly the way he ultimately wanted it; I think sometimes the preservationist loses sight of this as it applies to the remodeling industry. We live in both camps and strive to advocate for buildings, while at the same time embracing the notion that change is good and necessary for the buildings' ultimate survival and viability. People want old houses, but they have to work at the end of the project, and the construction has to fall within budget parameters."

While Heide's body of work encompasses styles throughout the later-19th and early- to mid-20th centuries, there is a clear affection for the American Arts and Crafts Movement and turn-of-the-century Neoclassicism. Regardless of the style in which he works, there's an artfulness – "believability" – that is evident to those who have intellectually dwelled in the past.

A recent project, a new Arts and Crafts cottage built on a northern Minnesota lake, reveals the robust timbering of the era. The main staircase is a glorious assemblage of balusters, balconies and built-ins, all subtly illuminated with newel lamps. This is not the work of someone performing a rote copy of some lakeside retreat; it is obviously from the hands of someone who has spent hours contemplating the finer nuances of line, proportion and detail.

#### The Artful Kitchen and Bathroom

Many architects working in the field of historic restoration or interpretation punt when it comes to kitchens and bathrooms. Although one cannot fault their choices of material and design, their efforts with the finishes of these two mandatory rooms can be somewhat uninspired, as they spec the customary white subway tile and hex flooring along with the well-known examples of fixtures and hardware. Instead, Heide focuses as much attention on re-imagining the bathroom and kitchen as he does a grand staircase. He pictures himself in the era of interpretation and then strives to make contemporary needs conform to historical stylings, just as the historic finishes must adapt to modern demands.

"It's an interesting situation, since kitchens and bathrooms, which were service and utility rooms in old houses, are now greatly elevated in status in our culture," says Heide. "Rooms once relegated to servants – or the homemaker – are now used daily by the entire family. Doesn't it stand to reason that they should be similarly elevated in their appointments? This is a departure from a preservation sensibility, but we know that buildings, when not allowed to evolve, stand the risk of becoming obsolete – and therefore more endangered.

In the remodel of an 1892 Queen Anne in Minneapolis, Heide incorporated an arch over the paneled refrigerator unit. Photo: Susan Gilmore Photography



"We look to the intact interiors of the building to guide the precedent, but strive to be careful not to upstage the original parts of the building. I also believe that good design transcends style. We strive not to create a caricature of something, but a project that is authentic and honest in its structural design, its materials and its integrity."

A hallmark of Heide's kitchen design is capturing the richly paneled effect that utilizes battens and panels or bead board in a late-Eastlake or Craftsman aesthetic. In an 1892 Queen Anne that Heide added to and remodeled, for example, the kitchen incorporates a graceful arch over the paneled refrigerator unit, minimizing the telltale "paneled fridge" appearance. Likewise, the range hood is sheathed in matching wood to lessen its prominence in the room. Heide used the same techniques in the remodel of a 1904 Four Square in Minneapolis, and the result is an elegant yet approachable kitchen that is historic in appearance and fully functional by today's standards. Leaping boldly into the 1930s, Heide designed a streamlined Art Deco kitchen with highly figured woodwork and rounded cabinets in the Lake Harriet Villa, a sprawling Mediterranean Revival home.

Heide's bathrooms reveal a similar attention to historic detail coupled with an innovative use of materials that elevate them above the norm. In the restoration and interior design of a house in St. Paul, he created a graceful arched window and marble wainscot – a nod to McKim, Mead & White's Classicism – while a condominium on Summit Avenue in St. Paul renovated and restored by Heide features a striking oval mirror with a marble surround and elegant nickel sconces.

### Reverse Thinking

Summit Avenue is famous for its magnificent late-19th- and early-20th-century homes. It was in a condominium here that Heide was called upon to work within a scenario that was counter to his beliefs, as the house in question had been sectioned off into three units in the 1970s. "This project, which won a first place award for historic preservation from the Minnesota branch of the American Society of Interior Designers, was challenging for me personally," he says. "We have spent so much energy putting old houses back together and this project was, in a way, taking the house further away from its original configuration."

Despite his initial reservations, Heide began the preliminary tasks for the prospective project. "When I was interviewing for the job, the client took me into what was the dining room of the original house and said, 'I want to put the kitchen in here,'" he says. "I immediately resisted this idea, but it proved to be the right solution for the client and ultimately for the project." In fact, Heide cleverly placed the range in a recessed Gothic alcove and sited the cabinetry in the center of the original dining room. The resultant kitchen blends cohesively with the home and avoids the typical "crammed into the old pantry" look of so many condos.

During the 1970's condo-izing, a wing was added to the house, destroying a marvelous brick and tile conservatory. "We ended

up restoring the conservatory, having tiles custom made to match the originals," says Heide, "We restored part of the house and changed other parts of the building, but did so in a thoughtful and sensitive way. I believe we did right by the building."

### On the Boards

Although the recession of the past year has affected everyone, Heide is maneuvering through it. "We have two very exciting projects on the boards right now," he says. "One is another project on Summit Avenue in St. Paul. Originally built as a duplex in 1922, an 8,000-sq.-ft. residence is being restored for use by a retired college professor and his wife. Since the building is within a preservation district, we've undergone review for three additions to the house, and construction of a new garage and extensive landscaping. I am particularly excited at the opportunity to design two very different interiors with similar plans and window openings, but one with a very contemporary sensibility and the other more in tune with 1922. The house is virtually untouched since some regrettable remodeling in the 1950s."

In another project, Heide is restoring and adding to a 1905 summer residence on Lake Minnetonka believed to be designed by the Chicago architect Hugh Garden.



Heide fulfilled the owner's wishes in the 1892 Queen Anne by creating an historically inspired, yet functional, dressing room. Photo: Susan Gilmore Photography



Heide designed this historically inspired series of built-ins for the remodel of a 1904 Four Square in Minneapolis. Photo: Karen Melvin Photography

"The addition is nearly doubling the size of the dwelling, at the owner's request," says Heide. "It is gratifying to work with a client who values the decorative arts as much as I do, and to collaborate with the amazing pool of craftsmen who are painting decorative friezes, fabricating art-glass windows and constructing the furniture-quality interiors. We recognize that this scale of project is rare in my career and are savoring every minute of this opportunity."

### Enlightening the Client

A perpetual challenge facing the preservationist/architect is forming a good working relationship with clients, some of whom may not fully appreciate the significance of their undertaking. "The objective of most clients is to accomplish work on their historic house such that it is a seamless blending of old and new," says Heide. "We know, however, that this is not the goal from a preservation perspective. We are taught not to blur history, nor to confuse the observer about what is 1900 and what is 2009."

"Often when working with a client who has an old house but more contemporary tastes, we'll develop a sensibility about how we're going to approach the project. We may decide that things that are permanently part of the house, such as the doors, windows, finishes and casework, for example, will be treated as part of the historic house and preservation philosophies will dictate the aesthetic. Material that is less permanent, such as lighting, furnishings, window coverings and the like, will be designed to meet the owners' more contemporary desires."

Heide notes that combining new and old necessitates many discrete moves on the part of the designer. "As an example," he says, "we were working on a house from about 1912 filled with countless art-glass windows throughout the first floor. These windows were primarily clear and beveled glass with color used in the decorative areas. In the addition, the owners' desire for art-glass

windows to match the originals was accommodated, but in the new windows we used textured glass without color to make a subtle differentiation between the two."

Heide's love for the past and his design skill have served him well, but he's realistic about what is required to succeed in his profession. "When asked by students coming to the studio for informational interviews about careers in the industry," he says, "I tell them that I learned as much about doing my job working in men's retail and tending bar in college as I did in architecture school. Yes, you have to have talent and ability, but absent the skills to articulate your ideas and sell them — and to sell yourself — you're dead in the water." ■

Author Dan Cooper's *New Classic American Houses: The Architecture of Albert, Richter & Tittmann* was recently released by The Vendome Press. For a review, see page 116.



For the restoration and interior design of a house in St. Paul, Heide remodeled the bathroom with an arched window and marble wainscoting. Photo: Karen Melvin Photography



During a 1970's condo conversion, a brick and tile conservatory on historic Summit Avenue in St. Paul was destroyed; in the restoration of the conservatory (left), Heide matched new masonry with the old masonry in other areas (above) of the unit. Photos: Susan Gilmore Photography