

## 'Renewed homes' heading for their second century

STORY BY

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May is "Historic Preservation Month" — and, while the demolition of single family houses seems never-ending, I would like to introduce and thank four property owners who the spent time and money to repair, remodel, and renew their older homes.

All have completed their work within the existing "footprint" of their structures (not extending beyond the original walls). Three are on standard, 50x100 foot lots; one is on an unusually small one. Like the three bears, the houses are of varying sizes: two small, one medium and one large.

A restoration or remodeling project is always challenging. When a roof comes off, or a wall is opened up, there are often unpredictable "surprises," depending on the skill of the original builder, and aging materials — such as knob and tube wiring, corroded plumbing, or asbestos in siding, insulation, or floor tiles. Routine maintenance may have been deferred for many years, or repairs made by interim owners or contractors who took shortcuts.

Finding craftsmen with the skills, patience, and integrity to "do the job right" can be challenging, but working with them is a pleasure. This is why it is easier for "new build" developers to purchase an old house for basically the value of the land under it, and build a brand-new structure (or multiple units) on the lot. The processes and costs of new construction on an empty piece of land are predictable; those for restoration or remodeling can be complicated.

### The Large House

■ Southeast 11th and Nehalem Streets (Legal description: "Block 52, West half of



PHOTOS: EILEEN G. FITZSIMONS  
This large Four-Square-style house, built in 1908, is located at S.E. 11th and Nehalem Streets.



This cottage, finished in 1921, faces S.E. 17th, just south of Bybee Boulevard.

Lot 10 and South 30 feet of the West half of Lot 11, Sellwood subdivision"). Built in 1908, this two and a half-story "Four Square" style house is owned by Charles Kingsley and Anna Debenham, who previously lived near S.E. Division Street.

Their most visible improvement was rebuilding and extending the front porch, which was failing structurally. It was removed, but some original materials were reused. The new front porch now wraps around to the west side of the house, with new French doors providing access to the dining room. The angle of the porch roof was also changed to increase

the amount of light entering the interior of the house. Deteriorated windows were replaced with insulated ones, with the same pattern and dimensions as the originals. A new flight of stairs leads to the attic, which previously was only accessible through a pull-down ceiling hatch. This space now serves as a master suite, with new bathroom and skylights.

New electrical and plumbing, closed cell insulation, and a heat pump have upgraded the mechanical systems throughout the house.

The final touch was removal of some aluminum siding, restoration of the lapped siding and shingles, new exterior paint, and fencing. The couple worked with a designer who prepared the working drawings and obtained the required permits, but Charles was the contractor of record.

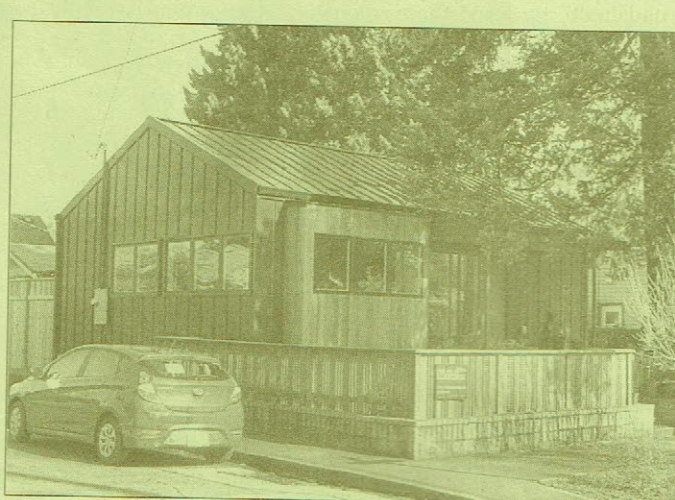
**"Finding craftsmen with the skills, patience, and integrity to 'do the job right' can be challenging, but working with them is a pleasure."**

to finish the attic and basement of their one-and-a-half story home. The basement had been partially converted into an office by the previous owner, but this space was completely finished so it can be used as a guest room, with a new bathroom.

The stairs to the attic were



This modest bungalow, built in 1925, is on S.E. 15th Street near Llewellyn School.



This tiny house, at the corner of S.E. 14th and Ogden Streets, was completed in 1925.

### The Medium Size House

■ S.E. 15th, near Llewellyn School (Legal description: "Block 17, South half of Lots 2 and 3, Tolman Subdivision"). Built in 1925, the house looks smaller than the previously described one, but according to tax records it actually has more square feet of living space (2,277). The only obvious change to the exterior was the addition of a new dormer window at the back of the house.

The owners wanted more useable space than provided by the original two-bedroom, one bath home, and chose

rebuilt to existing safety code, and a skylight was inserted overhead to bring light into the stairwell. The former attic now contains a spacious bedroom, a small bonus room, and a new bathroom. The original knob and tube wiring was replaced, as was the plumbing. Additional upgrades included insulation and solar panels on the west-facing roof. The garage serves its original purpose, and was not converted into an Accessory Dwelling Unit.

### Two Small Houses

■ S.E. 17th, third lot south of Bybee (Legal description: "Block 9, Lot 3, Westmoreland subdivision"). Built in 1921, this house has 1,872 square feet of living space. Owner Dina Nisbet states that 80% of the house was replaced. Wanting to remain in the neighborhood where her son attends school, she purchased the house in 2015. The long-time owner was cautious about selling, and was especially protective of a large tree in the back yard.

Dina managed to deflect a persistent redeveloper who

was offering cash for the property, and kept the tree.

Like the other homeowners in this article, she wanted to stay within the existing walls of the house, which had one bedroom and bath. Her solution was to finish both the basement and attic, gaining two more bedrooms, a second bathroom, and new kitchen, as well as new plumbing and electrical work.

Dina had an engineering degree in her native Russia, but when she immigrated she discovered that she would have to repeat her education, so she has supported herself as an accountant. However, she employed her drafting skills to prepare the required drawings and obtain her building permits from the city. She and her business partner (who share a flooring and construction business) did most of the demolition themselves, then improved the drainage, replaced the ceilings, and installed insulation, flooring, sheetrock, windows, stairs, trim, and paint.

The work took a year to complete because it was being done in their "spare" time, but Dina hopes that the neighbors have forgiven her for the lengthy disruption.

■ S.E. 14th and Ogden (Legal description: "Block 9, West half of Lot 9, Block 9, City View Park subdivision"). Built in 1925, this house has 1,008 square feet and one bathroom. This house is on an under-sized lot (50x50 feet), with three large Douglas Fir trees crowding the front yard.

The house was stripped back to the studs, and it appears the basement was finished (I was unable to interview the owner). Once the extensive interior upgrades were completed, the outside was sheathed in vertical "board and batten" patterned black steel. The façade is further punctuated with a segment of wood paneling, which calls attention to the front door, painted turquoise.

Although the new siding is non-traditional for a house of this era, and would be overpowering on a large two-story house in mid-block, on this tiny house on a tiny lot, shaded by three very tall trees, it is intriguing, rather than jarring.

All four of these homes are owner-occupied, and if you see their owners out and about, say "thanks". A great many hours of thoughtful planning, time, and money were expended to help these homes move into their second century of occupation.

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