

Old House JOURNAL

www.oldhousejournal.com

Bungalow Brickwork

Arts & Crafts Accents for Any House

QUICK WINDOW & ROOF FIXES

That Buy Time for Later Repairs

Victorian Ironwork for Your Garden

Stripping Paint with Steam

PRO STEPS IN SLATE

*How to Install a
Graduated Roof*

PLUS

Sources for LIGHTING PARTS

THE ARCHITECTURE of
GERMAN-AMERICAN HOUSES

June 2006

A Restore Media Publication

\$5.95US \$6.95CAN



0 09128 47600 1

East Nashville Folk

One old-house owner carves a niche business out of her own historic backyard.

By TAYLOR BRUCE

The morning breeze drifts down Holly Street in East Nashville, past the Colonial-columned fire station and a row of eclectic old houses. A troop of workers pound, saw, and drill away on a gutted house whose studs stand alone, waiting for a new future. This is a neighborhood where riches went to rags and where a sidewalk com-

munity is now turning back time through its rejuvenated homes. One time-traveling homeowner is R. Lynn Taylor, whose house restoration became a beacon for many and led to a business that has everyone talking.

Little Victorian Restoration

Lynn bought her 1898 Folk Victorian house on Holly Street in 1993. At the time, most music city citizens felt East Nashville was rundown and an eyesore. Lynn only saw the neighborhood's great potential. "I like the roughness of an old house," she says. "Everything is handmade, which gives it such depth and charm."

The sturdy, unassuming appearance of the Folk Victorian house, also known as a gable-front-and-wing or gabled-el, suits Lynn's appreciation for quality and economy. Popular between 1870 and 1910, these houses are plain but emblematic of the city's working middle class. While a Folk Victorian house typically incorporates a porch and some ornate woodwork, it remains uncomplicated and vernacular. Some people refer to it as Queen Anne's "carpenter-designed cousin."

Lynn's restoration took a few years, but the house—with its original hardware, doors, mantels, and two authentic fire-

Specialty milled baseboard mimics the cut of existing poplar trim that had endured for more than a century.



TOM GAELIN



TOM GAELIN

Lynn built the picket fence around her Folk Victorian and designed the front gate's circular cutaway to complement the round gable vent original to the house.

The front parlor features an original mantel with typical Victorian detailing and antique lozenge-shaped fireplace tiles. Lynn modeled the restoration of her bedroom fireplace on these tiles.



places—proved a worthy wait. She spent many hours stripping trim and reattaching doors which, true to her fondness for authenticity, hang slightly out of plumb. “I’d rather have an original that doesn’t fit quite right, than a reproduction,” Lynn says.

In the parlor, an original fireplace rests under a gingerbread-detailed mantel. The face and hearth display 100-year-old tiles with custom corner pieces. The fireplace in the bedroom down the hall didn’t have a salvageable hearth, so Lynn made a cost-effective reproduction. “I rented a tile saw and sliced larger tiles into slivers to match existing ones,” she says. The resulting green and white lozenge-shaped tiles are so close to the originals that most people would never know the difference.

Lynn also took a creative approach when restoring her center hallway, which



TOM GAUIN

Lynn's kitchen is the one place where she added modern architectural elements, such as skylights. She believes that adding metal to a historic kitchen is an easy way to get a fresh feel without straying too far from the original.



TOM GAUIN

The original front door features ornate carving and millwork details, including dentils and rosettes, hallmarks of the Victorian era.

had original poplar trim around the door but lacked enough baseboard. She solved this problem by milling new boards to resemble the antique cut. Because she knew that old poplar and new poplar wouldn't take stain the same way, she stained the new wood in a darker tone and left scuff marks and holes alone for an aged look.

Business as Usual

Like her house, Lynn's career has organic roots. She got a degree in architectural engineering and designed 4,000-square-foot houses in Florida before returning to her native Tennessee in the mid 1990s. At that point, restoring her own house became her calling, but when she put her talents to work on her Holly Street home, people noticed. "My realtor and contractor started referring jobs to me," Lynn says, and in 2000, her home restoration business was born. It started with small jobs, attic renovations and additions in East Nashville, and now, her residential design business, Taylor Made Plans, is the talk of

the town. Lynn works primarily with historic bungalows and Victorian-era homes on projects big and small. She designs 1,000-square-foot additions, freestanding garages, and complete infill houses that fit the character and personality of existing neighborhoods in historic areas and urban settings. Here, too, she aims at affordability. "I don't want to design 5,000-square-footers," she says, "I want to work for average people, like my neighbors."

Lynn finds that combining new with old, modern with historic, is the great challenge of a period home restoration, especially with Victorian houses. She is passionate about historical detail, particularly front-of-the-house elements such as windows, trim, and fireplaces.

In 2004, Lynn's company caught national attention. Oxygen Network recognized her in its Build Your Business initiative; she was one of three female entrepreneurs (out of 16,000 applicants) to receive a \$25,000 prize for their start-ups. With the check and stamp of approval, her



Taylor-Made Houses

Lynn's design approach can be seen in the images from three very different projects:

A family of infill homes (top) lines up in harmony with Arts & Crafts bungalows. The quintet of houses possesses hallmark features—tapered columns, deep porches, wood shingles, and gabled dormers—and garnered the city's highest order of preservation commendation. Not only are they perfectly matched to the neighboring homes, built from 1890 to 1910, but because they occupy a formerly vacant lot where trash collected, the houses helped turn around the once-rough block.

In another instance (middle), Lynn nearly doubled the size of a house while matching the roof pitch, scale, and feel of the original and adding period-appropriate details such as Arts & Crafts light fixtures and hammered-bronze door hardware.

For this house (bottom), Lynn created a mostly glass sunroom addition showcasing decorative Victorian brackets and arches that copy details from the original structure. With the addition of a bold color scheme in red, black, purple, and gold, the house now shouts to passersby. "Our Katrina-displaced neighbors love it," says owner Glen Durdin. "They feel like there is some New Orleans next door."

company quickly kicked into high gear.

In six short years, Lynn has worked on more than 60 homes in East Nashville alone, and her business has expanded into other historic Nashville neighborhoods as well. She currently offers dozens of personally designed stock plans for historic infills, additions, and restorations that carry authentic details to a new standard. "Our philosophy is to retain and restore as much of the historic fabric as possible, protecting the appearance and integrity seen from the street," she says.

Golden Days Are Here Again

Before a massive fire occurred in 1916, East Nashville was a tony place to live. The Vanderbilt family even looked into purchasing acreage in East Nashville to build its university, but at the time real estate was too pricey. Now, after the fire, suburban sprawl, and several downtrodden decades have taken their toll, Lynn is helping the neighborhood reclaim an award-winning reputation.

East Nashville is a living museum of historic homes and an artist entrepreneur's dream, but for Lynn Taylor, it is home. Leaning against her front door, Lynn looks across the street to the gutted house where laborers come to a day's rest. Only studs, a foundation, and the roof remain. She understands the difficulties old houses present. "Houses from the 1880s are harder to work on because the construction is not as good as 1920s bungalows," she says. "You can tell technology got better with each decade. Also, there were several styles during the Victorian era, so you can't mix and match elements." Lighting is one example of the difficulty in finding period-appropriate items. For her own home, Lynn is "still waiting on two wall sconces."

Even with its challenges, the neighborhood keeps Lynn busy with projects. "It's like a fever," she says. "Once one house gets renovated, it's contagious." 🐾

Taylor Bruce lives in Birmingham, Alabama, and has written for Southern Living and Portico.