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Through the Garden Gate
Our Home and Garden Issue



Victorian Jewel

A Facet of Owners' Personality

By J.M. Lacey



Before

Photos By Benjamin Galland

David and Mabry Brumbach manifest both charm and energy. Their flair for the creative is embodied in the minutest of details in their restored Victorian home. One cannot help but to be instantly drawn to historic grace upon climbing the first few steps at 912 Carpenter Street.

Both originally from the South — David from Georgia and Mabry from South Florida — they wanted to return to the area to be closer to family. Impressed with the coastal area, David felt Brunswick “had been undergoing a lot of renovation and the city itself was putting a lot of emphasis on this,” and they had “met a lot of eclectic people.” David explains they planned to reside in the historic district if they could

find something they would really want to hold onto for awhile. They wanted a home they could live in and felt that many of the residences for sale in the area had too many formal sitting areas. They found their Victorian on Carpenter during their last day of viewings. “[The house] was really laid out well for us. The way the bedrooms related to each other and the rooms that are here and how they function within each other. That was one of the primary reasons we decided to take this house.”

The Brumbachs purchased their Victorian home in 2002 and eventually sold their residence in Chicago. The blend of home and owner has been a perfect match.

Built in 1904, the home was owned by Lawrence R. Akin, state senator from Glynn County who served four terms during the periods of 1909 and 1922. He later deeded the home to his daughters, Minnie C. Harrell and Agnes Akin Atkinson, an author of children's books during her lifetime.

The house has been lovingly tended for the last century. As is typical for many large Victorian homes over the years, the Brumbach residence had gained additions, morphed into a multi-bedroom dwelling and then finally, apartments. The Brumbachs have been converting it back to its original family home form for the last seven years.

"Even though there was a lot of work that had been done to it, we didn't have to do anything to the floors," says Mabry. She noted that "all the woodwork was intact" and so a lot of the renovating involved removing the additions from previous owners.

The exterior of the home underwent a complete renovation in 2006-07. When they purchased the Victorian, the yellow paint was peeling and it was in dire need of a makeover. The Brumbachs restored the foundation, replaced the roof, had the entire house sanded to its original wood, removed the old railings and rotted wood on the porch, and rebuilt the entire wrap-around porch. David's father helped to rebuild all the spindles, posts and delicately carved brackets to their original design. With the addition of plantation style ceiling fans, even the porch feels "lived" in.

With the help of their architect and friend, Louis Keen, the Brumbachs chose an authentic Victorian color scheme.

"We wanted to do something that would stand out in the area," says David. "Everyone had a yellow, white or gray house." They painted the main part of the exterior a terra-cotta color. Add to that browns like Tiny Fawn and Rootbeer, and Clair de Lune, an almost

hunter green, the house on Carpenter Street stands out among the crowd without being pretentious.

The front doorway was also reframed and returned to its original position on the house. They then added an ornate, solid mahogany and glass front door. Two beautiful stained glass windows, one next to the door and the other a few feet above on the second floor, were also added. Both the door and windows were purchased in Savannah.

Another laborious task they undertook involved tearing down a second dwelling in the backyard that had been added some time in the early part of the 20th century. The Brumbachs purchased the property and tore down the eyesore, salvaging anything that would be useful, including wood, doors and bricks. David's father made furniture out of much of the wood, including bedside tables and a queen size bed the Brumbachs proudly display in their master bedroom. The head and foot boards match the five panel doors they have throughout the house.

"We're turning this [home] into what it was when it was originally built," David explains. "We've restored the lot size. We've restored it back into a single family home. Now we're just in the process of finishing it up."

Once the condemned home was removed from the backyard, the

Brumbachs proceeded to add a wood fence they had replicated after seeing an example of it during a visit to Atlantic Beach, Florida. The fence is angled at the top with a diamond pattern cut in the center. They built their courtyard using the salvaged bricks.

Since purchasing the home, the Brumbachs have been remodeling the interior, room by room. Floors were



refinished, old wallpaper was removed, and ceilings were smoothed and primed. They've replaced and updated the electrical system and plumbing. A dividing wall on the first floor was removed, revealing a beautiful staircase. And what used to be a closet underneath the stairwell, which the Brumbachs converted into a much needed half

bath.

“Pretty much everything is original,” Mabry says. “One of the things we liked about this house was that all the woodwork around all the doors and windows was still intact and amazingly, when [the previous owners] made it into a duplex and they had converted the back, they still had these massive closets in the hallway. Fortunately, they

molding and trims and modernize it. None of that happened here.”

The Brumbachs added the crown molding to the top of the ceilings, and added ceiling medallions in the living and dining rooms. Mabry added a fresh coat of white paint to the wainscoting dominant in the entry way.

“We’ll probably end up painting [the stairway],” she adds. “We would have

loved to have gone back down to bare wood, but it was such a huge project.”

The house includes seven fireplaces, tiled on the outside and faux painted. At one point, the tile in the dining room fireplace had been replaced and Mabry has been on the hunt for its matching Kelly green. Eventually, they plan to convert the fireplaces into gas.

The Brumbachs’ d o w n - t o - e a r t h , eclectic style is revealed further in each room that boasts of bold color. The living room’s rich red walls lend nicely to the warm, inviting appeal. Brown paint, used as a base under the coats of red, allows the color to keep its warm tone, David explains.

A 1929 M. Schulz (Chicago) player piano that belonged to Mabry’s great-grandmother sits in the corner waiting to add its charm to the party.

The spare bedroom is even brighter and bolder with its vibrant blue, called Peacock Tail, painted on its walls. The fireplace and tall windows, prominent

throughout the home, add to its charm. They had their house decorated originally in Victorian style, but decided it was not a style that worked for them. Some furniture taken with them from their modern Chicago home, mixed with antique Eastlake style furniture, gives the Brumbachs a style of their own that lends itself kindly to the old Victorian residence.

One of the oldest pieces the Brumbachs own is a hall tree that greets visitors in the entry way. Originally given to David’s great-great Aunt Hettie, it has been handed down through the family for the last 125 years, still in pristine condition.

But the Victorian charm is still rampant throughout the home. The dining room, for example, is the only room with wallpaper — a floral black toile on an ivory background.

“I just liked it,” Mabry explains of choosing the design. “We saw the Victorian patterns and they were all the toiles, and I just didn’t really want it to be too fussy.” David is pleased they can put anything with the design.

The ornately carved detailing on the ceiling medallions in each of the rooms further add to the home’s charm. The high ceilings are another unique feature of the Victorian homes, and although the walls have been dropped a couple of inches in the Brumbach’s dwelling, typical in modernization, they still lend to the stately appearance of a Victorian home.

While there is still much to do in the Victorian, the Brumbachs are not overwhelmed and take each project in stride. To them, being good stewards of the home and having the responsibility to maintain it is important.

“I love the whole house in general,” says David. “It just keeps taking on more of our personality and becoming more of a really nice place to be.” ■



didn’t take down the stair railing. They took down just one tiny section which we had replicated, but realistically, everything is still here.”

“It really wasn’t taken apart, like some other homes,” David adds. “Unfortunately, people go in and strip out the light fixtures, tear out the