

Renovating an Historic Home

Living in an historic home can be a labor of love. The history and the distinct architecture of historic homes draw buyers to such properties, but what historic homes have in regard to history they often lack in the conveniences of modern life, forcing many historic-home owners to make renovations to bring their homes into the 21st century.

Historic-home renovations differ from other types of modifications. According to the Victorian Preservation Association, renovation is getting a home back to where it may have been when originally built, but making concessions for today's lifestyle. Preservation is the act of maintaining a structure in its current historic state, and restoration is returning a home to its original state. Unless a homeowner plans to use an outhouse or live without electricity, the majority of work done on historic

properties is likely to fall into the category of a renovation.

Renovating an aging structure can be fulfilling and help to make a home more functional. But make no mistake, such a renovation is a major undertaking. Before beginning, it pays to hire a professional consultant with expertise in renovating historic properties. He or she can inspect the property to determine which areas of the home are safe and which will need to be upgraded. A professional inspection also can determine if any deficiencies lie hidden in the structure. Potential concerns can be toxic paints and other substances, building code issues, rotting, and structural settling. Professionals will know what to look for and guide homeowners accordingly.

Homeowners also may want to consult with a preservation association, community



Historic-home renovations require additional planning and a bigger budget than newer homes.

restoration group or general owner-builder group. These people can refer homeowners to the craftspeople and materials that will be needed for a job. Homeowners can request to see other historic properties in the area and learn what those owners did to maintain the integrity of a home when using newer materials.

Before any work is started, homeowners should find out if their home is listed with the National Register of Historic Places. According to the United States National Parks Service, property owners can do whatever they want with

their property so long as there are no federal monies attached to the property. However, the property owner should also contact his or her state's historic preservation office, or SHPO. The SHPO is the state agency that oversees historic preservation efforts in each state, and there may be state or local preservation laws that the owner should be aware of before renovating a historic property.

Craftspeople should have experience with historic homes and a sensitivity and appreciation of renovating older properties. Homeowners always should see examples of

❖ Paneling

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If you don't want the grooves showing between the panels, fill them in with spackle and sand down to create a smooth surface before painting.

Cover the paneling

Covering up the paneling is another tactic. Rather than coating the wall in paint, consider a wallpaper liner. Liners are essentially a thick, plain wallpaper that is applied on top of the paneling or used when dealing with damaged walls. In lieu of tearing down the walls and putting up new drywall, the liner will cover imperfections.

Many of these products can be painted directly and may not require priming beforehand. This can be great for homeowners whose goal is to cover paneling quickly and easily.

Those who prefer a patterned look on the walls can opt to cover paneling with a printed wallpaper. However, depending on the thickness of the wallpaper, this may be a two-step process. You may need to fill in the creases between the panels first, or first use a thick wallpaper liner to create a seamless surface.

Cut the paneling

If you desire a cottage or country look in a room, remove half

of the paneling, leaving the bottom portion intact. Then place molding or a chair rail where you made your cut, creating a wainscoting effect. The top portion of the wall can be painted, while the bottom portion can be left as the wood color or painted a complementary color.

Remove the paneling

The most labor-intensive way to give a paneled room a new look is to remove the paneling. Pry at a portion of the paneling in an inconspicuous spot in the room to determine which method was used to install the paneling. Some people only tack it into place with small, finishing nails, while others glue the

paneling to the wall for a secure installation. Glue will be much more difficult to remove and could further damage the walls and paneling in the process. If the paneling is too difficult to remove, covering or painting it may be a smarter option. Small nails can be removed by pulling at the panels. Spackle holes before painting over the walls. Paneling is an inexpensive decorating option that was first popularized 40 years ago. Though less popular now, paneling still shows up in homes and can be remedied with some relatively easy tips.

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