

22 Kent

By Anne Lies

When you visit 22 Kent Street, ask to see the photo album.

The residents purchased this Cass Gilbert rowhouse in early 2004, and documented their first four months of ownership with impressive photos of its stripped-to-the-studs remodel. Even a brief glance through the images will help visitors appreciate how much it took to create the clean, open floor plan you see today.

Like the rest of Portland Terrace, this home's original design included separate living and dining rooms on the main floor and two staircases, one of which led down into the kitchen area. The kitchen stairs have been eliminated altogether, and the front staircase was reoriented to follow the wall, fully opening the newly expanded space. The brick fireplace mantle sports a marble top and base, and was added by the previous owner. It was built around the original fireplace, which was set at an angle, probably in the corner of the original living room

Now that the dust has settled, the dropped ceilings, acoustic tile and fluorescent lighting of decades past have given way to a contemporary style that accentuates, rather than hides, original woodwork and piano windows. Other details, such as the new, turn-style doorbell round out the home's mix of current and antique. The hardwood floor in the front room is original (rescued from under green shag carpeting), and patched with salvaged wood. Diagonally placed floorboards indicate where walls once stood. The kitchen floor is a warm and rustic mix of Southern Yellow Pine and fir, which was salvaged from the second floor of the house.

While rowhouse designs aren't known for abundant natural lighting, this unit's east/west orientation, with windows on three sides, is an exception. "[Gilbert's] design does a wonderful job of letting in a lot of light," says the owner, "in spite of being kind of boxed in by the neighboring buildings." The spot that takes greatest advantage of that light is the sitting area off the kitchen, and outside its east-facing door is a tiny fenced courtyard that looks as though it could just as easily be in London as in Saint Paul. In contrast to their neighbors' open, patio-style yards, this "secret garden" gives the rowhouse a sense of privacy and quiet that belies its urban efficiency.