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EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



Rehab and Revival

From derelict to upstanding citizen, a historic mansion is again the pride of a neighborhood

WRITTEN BY MARIA KARAGIANIS • PHOTOGRAPHED BY GREG PREMRO

“Don’t go in there,” architect David Amory warned his wife and business partner Sukie Amory. It was 2011, and Historic Boston Incorporated (HBI), a nonprofit preservation organization that restores properties in Boston, had just acquired from the Boston Redevelopment Authority a 178-year-old 6,000-square-foot Greek Revival mansion in the Roxbury Highlands neighborhood that was, literally, falling down.

“Only two of the six 20-foot columns out front were still standing,” recalls Sukie Amory. “Everything was so wet and moldy — it smelled awful. I was afraid to walk inside because I thought the roof would cave in. Everything was sagging.”

The Amorys’ Duxbury, Massachusetts, firm, Amory Architects, was hired to do the preservation work on the house, which had been

abandoned for 20 years. Now, three years and \$3.9 million later, the 1836 Alvah Kittredge House at 10 Linwood Street is breathtaking, an important architectural treasure carefully re-purposed as five new residential units — two apartments on the first floor, two on the second floor, and one in the basement — with two designated for tenants who meet affordable housing requirements.

Each unit has two bedrooms and a bath, is around 1,000 square feet, and enjoys great light from the mansion-size windows. The first floor also boasts 11-foot-high ceilings. A spiral staircase winds from the basement to the third-floor roof, where an octagonal cupola offers views over the tree canopy in every direction — including toward the

ONLY TWO OF the six 20-foot columns were still standing when Historic Boston Inc. began the renovation of the Alvah Kittredge House. The portico ceiling is painted sky blue; terrace planters are from Artefact Home|Garden.

PRESERVATION



skyscrapers of Back Bay. In addition to funding by charitable foundations and individuals, a combination of city, state, and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits and grants that made the renovation possible dictated the units be rentals for at least five years, explains Lisa Lewis, HBI's senior project manager. After that, HBI has the option of converting them to homeownership.

Originally positioned nearby in the center of a large rural estate, the mansion was built for Alvah Kittredge, a furniture merchant, alderman, and deacon of the historic Eliot Church,

FRONT WINDOWS IN the first-floor apartments reach to the floor (ABOVE LEFT) and capture glimpses of the huge front columns in their frames. **Open floor plans** make the kitchens (ABOVE RIGHT) part of the main living spaces, and details such as the mouldings used for mopboards and window frames tie the areas together.



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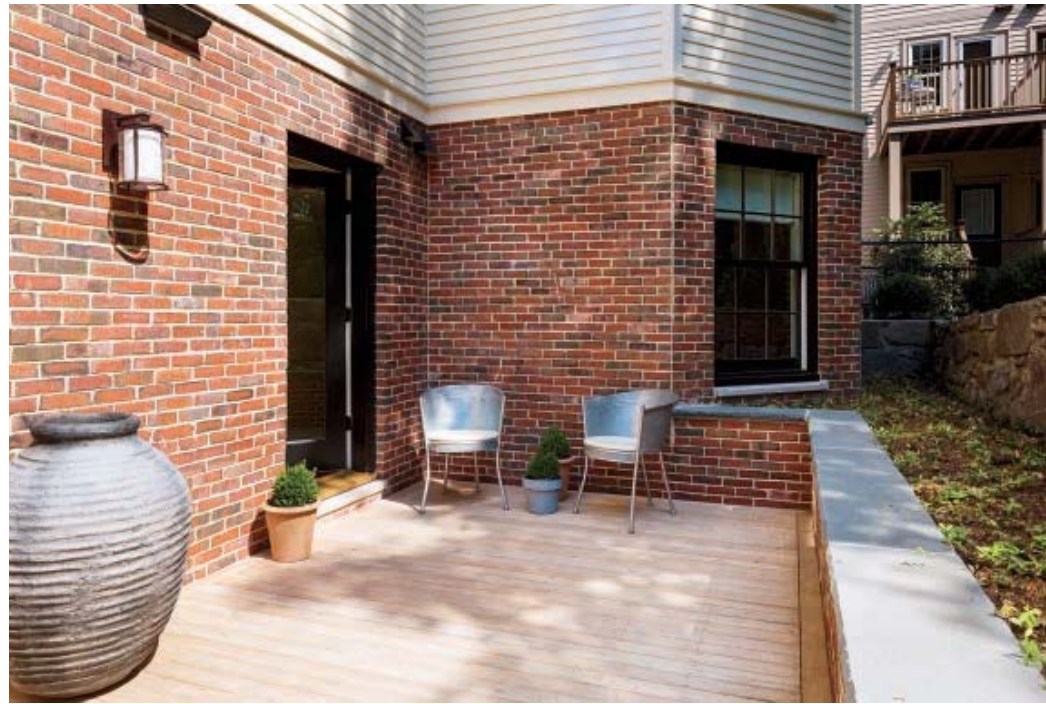
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LOOKING FROM ONE unit across the main foyer into a neighboring apartment (ABOVE LEFT) draws attention to the details of the restoration of the 1830s house. Mouldings were carefully replicated and paint colors curated for accuracy. The new rear terrace (ABOVE RIGHT) offers private outdoor space for the basement unit.

also in Roxbury. Built in the Greek Revival style popular in Boston and elsewhere in America in the 1830s, the Kittredge House is one of the many examples of such architecture found around the area, including Boston's Custom House Tower and East Boston Savings Bank, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Later in the 19th century, as Boston expanded and the city grew in around the mansion, building lots were carved out of the original estate and sold off and the house came into the possession of well-known Boston architect Nathaniel Bradlee. He had the house lifted and moved by oxen to its current location. In

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PRESERVATION

THE CEILING in the entry foyer is glass, back painted in a marbled pattern and framed by Victorian dark-stained ornate moldings and arches. The design was most likely introduced by Boston architect Nathaniel Bradlee, who owned the home in the late 19th century.

keeping with the Victorian style in vogue at the time, Bradlee is believed to have added the painted glass ceiling and ornate dark stained moulding in the foyer.

While David Amory calls Greek Revival architecture “streamlined and pure,” in this project, design challenges were abundant. From determining authentic paint colors to creating a lighting scheme for a mansion that was completed when whale oil still lit buildings, the project called for both creativity and flexibility. “We obviously wanted to honor the past by introducing design features that were compatible with the existing structure,” says the architect, “but we clearly had to design an artistic whole.”

It was not an easy path, and a fixed (and tight) budget didn’t help. To accommodate the basement apartment, which opens to a private terrace at the rear of the house, crews dug down 6 feet. The gracious spiral staircase, which was extended to the new lower level, had to be rebuilt, its elegant railing re-created using the single 6-foot curved piece of the original found on the property as a template.

On the front facade, all of the bases and four of the columns are new, crafted from Spanish cedar. All of the capitals are

reproductions made of plaster resin. Inside and out, wooden window trim was meticulously reproduced, as were the beautiful wide mouldings that add architectural grace to all the rooms. “Keeping original details and new design elements was key to the spirit of the house,” says Lewis.

“Restoring significant architectural features like the colossal columns, the Victorian glass ceiling, and the elegant four-story open spiral stairway was high priority and necessary for project funding,” adds Sukie Amory. “Yet the real challenge was rehabilitating this grande dame to make five apartments for 21st-century life.”

As important was creating a house that is a good environmental neighbor, so the updating was done to the standards of the US Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design or LEED Silver certification, though budget restraints kept the team from obtaining the official designation.

Work by Metric Construction of Boston began in August 2013 and was completed with a ribbon-cutting attended by a crowd of city officials and neighbors last August.

No longer a dangerous eyesore inhabited at times by vagrants, its basement and backyard used as a dump for trash and old furniture, it has become a source of pride in this emerging neighborhood, says Lewis.

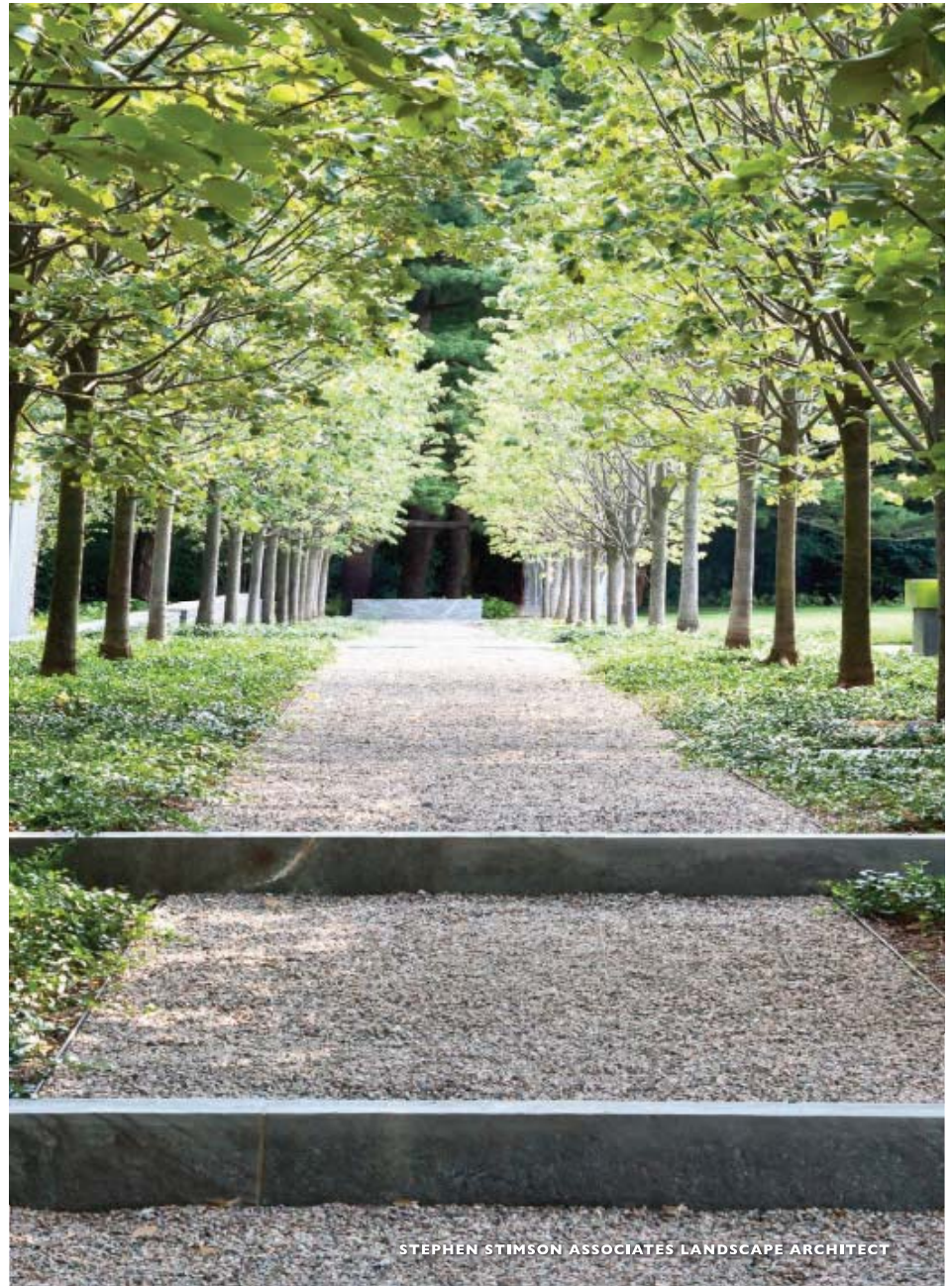
The project “underscores the reason we exist,” says Kathy Kottaridis, executive director of HBI. “Some buildings are so forlorn and have deteriorated so badly that a normal developer would not get involved. You need an at-risk or nonprofit developer (like HBI) that is willing to take on these sort of subjects that are in the wider public interest.”

In many ways, the Alvah Kittredge house is an architectural storybook of Boston history — from the exuberant prosperity of the early 19th century to the expansion of the city during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to urban flight and deterioration and finally to regeneration in the 21st century.

“It’s a great story,” says Sukie Amory, “and it was a very fun project — all of us, so many people working together to make it happen.” ■

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RESOURCES

to the expansion of the city during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to urban flight



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