



*A historic 1870 Roxbury house
is returned to its Second Empire glory.*

A Refined RESTORATION

BY JESSICA BRILLIANT KEENER // PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC ROTH

DOMENIC CALAUTTI OF RESIDENTIAL INTERIORS in Boston has a passion for bringing old homes back to life. "I love restoration," he says. "A lot of things are hidden jewels. People don't know what they have. They destroy, and replace it with something inferior."

In his own home, Calautti saved the intricate inlaid floors, original plaster moldings, and marble fireplaces; he renovated the kitchen and added a half bath. He set off the high walls with rich color and textural effects. The result of 18 months of work: an 1870 Victorian revived to mint condition and infused with 21st-century amenities.

The Second Empire house in Roxbury was a mess when Calautti and his wife, Mildred, bought it 2½ years ago. Used as a home for the elderly beginning in the 1950s, it had 10- and 11-foot ceilings that had been lowered to accommodate a sprinkler system. "The sprinklers burst," says Calautti. "That's when I came."

Only one room was stripped to the studs – the 400-square-foot kitchen at the back of the house. Calautti installed cherry cabinets, a granite countertop, a stainless-steel sink and appliances, and a breakfast nook.

The original French entry doors are mahogany; the insets of glass peppered with tiny etched flowers let in light but provide privacy. The foyer's parquet floor

– with a complex design of ash, oak, mahogany, cherry, and walnut – was in remarkably good condition, as were the other inlaid floors. "We just cleaned them up," says Calautti.

To one side of the foyer, double doors open to a parlor and adjacent dining room with matching marble fireplaces. "All the ceiling molding is original plaster, the kind that uses horsehair as a binding agent," says Calautti. "Usually people rip it out and put in sheet-rock. But we restore it."

To the other side of the foyer, the grand 14-by-32-foot living room has a pair of matching marble fireplaces, which Calautti fitted with ventless gas stoves. The 6-foot-tall windows add vertical balance to the oblong space, as well as plenty of light.

Calautti did most of the work himself, relying on 25 years of professional experience as a restorer and painter. He often employs special paint techniques to add luster and depth to walls. In the main hallway, for example, he added a glaze to a base coat of linen white and used kitchen plastic wrap wadded in his hand to give it an antique finish.

A classic curved staircase with mahogany balusters leads to the second floor, where there are now three bedrooms and two baths. Calautti took down a wall between a smaller bedroom and the master suite to



IN THE DETAILS The dining room and the parlor have matching marble fireplaces and intricate inlaid floors; the dining chairs and buffet table are from Cort, Cambridge (617-354-3358, cort.com). Facing page: The exterior restoration was finished earlier this year.



PRACTICAL UPDATE Owner Domenic Calautti enlarged the master bedroom by taking out part of a wall and creating an archway, allowing him to incorporate a small bedroom as a sitting area for the suite. Facing page: The view from the vestibule into the front parlor; the rooms have different patterns on the inlaid floors.



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create a sitting area. Using a technique he calls "schmoozing," he applied two-tone metallic paint to the walls, then, holding a plastic drop cloth, "schmoozed" the wet paint, moving his hands up and down and sideways. The resulting marbled appearance adds dimension.

In the sitting room, a mirrored fireplace mantel - relocated from the downstairs vestibule - is made of quarter-sawn oak, whose grain shows flamelike patterns.

In the guest bath, Calautti used Italian tiles with a border of decorative listello tiles. On the walls, he applied layers of peach, gold, and beige paint, then rubbed the wet surface with crinkled newspaper to achieve subtle multicolored tones.

The exterior of the mansard-roofed house required equal attention to materials and style. New handmade corbels were matched to the originals, many of which had been damaged or were missing. The front balustrades, which Calautti added, have hemlock balusters and mahogany railings.

"It was built right in the beginning," he says. "If you know how to restore these things, it'll last another 100 years." ■

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HOUSE HISTORY

Domenic Calautti (pictured below) and his wife, Mildred, bought their Second Empire house in Roxbury from the grandson of Jessie Gideon Garnett (pictured above in 1919), Boston's first African-American female dentist and the first African-American graduate of Tufts Dental School. Garnett (1897-1976) lived in her home even after it began to be used as a retirement facility and continued to work as a dentist in an office she built behind the house. In 1969, arthritis in her hands led her to retire. Garnett and her husband, Robert, a Boston police officer, had a son and a daughter. -J.K.

