

House Beautiful: Home Remodeling & Decorating
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Old House-New Life
Update a Classic

A Victorian landmark gets a reprieve--and a restoration.

Built in 1845, this house in Portland, Maine, is an outstanding example of Victorian architecture. Samuel W. Van Dam, AIA, of Portland, who took part in the restoration of the house, calls it "one of our finest examples of American Gothic Revival Cottage Style."

Yet, to make room for a high-rise hotel, the house was once slated for the wrecker's ball. Greater Portland Landmarks and the state preservation committee undertook the task of saving this classic, moving it to a residential neighborhood. The 150-year-old structure made the mile-and-a-half journey with little more than "character cracks" in the walls.

No one could be more pleased about its rescue than the present owners, Marta and Norman Morse. They lovingly restored the house--replacing missing fretwork, stripping paint, and specifying custom-built, storm sashes to insulate the diamond-paned windows without hiding their beauty. One concession to the 20th Century: A skylit sunroom, designed by architect Van Dam, ushers in light and improves the appearance of the rear exterior. The addition blends so well with the original architecture that the Preservation Society approved it without pause.

Portland tour buses stop regularly so riders can view the peaked gable roof, carpenter Gothic details, and leaded-glass windows of the charming facade. In back, a glassed-in garden room replicates the original bay window on the side of the house. Movers carefully separated the house from its original foundation, positioning it on a flatbed trailer. Moving to the new site required an Army-surplus tank.

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