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Renovation Husbands

Breathing new life
into old Boston



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Renovation Husbands

Breathing new life into old Boston

David and Stephen St. Russell are husbands with a passion for bringing old houses back to life.

Their current project (and home), an 1893 Queen Anne Victorian in the heart of Dorchester, is the most recent example of how this crafty duo innovates and renovates forgotten homes. The best part, their perpetual virtual open house via their blog and social media.

The Dorchester renovation is not the first big project for the couple. In 2011, while still dating, they were notified of an unexpected rent increase in their apartment located in Fenway. They went in search of something more affordable in the suburbs and eventually bought a home in Walpole.

“The Walpole house was really where we found our passion for home renovation. Over a two-and-a-half-year period we completed a major bathroom renovation, kitchen renovation, exterior renovation, and completed cosmetic projects throughout the house. Needless to say, we learned a lot of lessons from that house and it laid the foundation for our skill set. We often think about how we did specific things then versus how we would do them now,” says Stephen, now 30.



The Walpole home was a training ground of sorts for the couple who eventually married in 2016. It was a place where they could cut their teeth on DIY renovation projects. However, the Walpole house paled in comparison to what was in store for them in Dorchester. Where their first home was more typical in terms of needed updates, the Dorchester house was anything but when they acquired it in 2017.

Starting-from-scratch husbands

“After selling our Walpole home we took a year off as renters in the South End. It was really a full circle moment when we decided rent was too high and started looking for a more affordable place to live (again). We were on our way to lunch with friends in Dorchester and incidentally drove by this beautiful, but derelict house,” recalls David, 32.

“While at lunch our friend pulled up the real estate listing: ‘Here’s the house!’ A week later we had put in an offer,” adds Stephen.

When the two describe their house as a “shell,” they truly mean it. Prior to their

ownership someone had purchased the house and completely gutted the interior. There was no plumbing, no electric, no walls. Luckily some of the original details were saved like the paneling in the entry, the stained-glass window and a couple mantels. Otherwise, they were starting from scratch.

“The first major phase of the renovation was bringing the entire home up to a livable standard; systems, insulation, some interior framing, plaster and floors. We moved into the house with only a tiny sink and toilet installed in the first-floor half-bath. We showered at the gym and cooked on the grill for months. We then took on one room at a time,” says Stephen.

Serendipity husbands

How they found the historic Queen Anne is a story almost as serendipitous as how the couple found each other. The two met in high school when they both lived in the town of Longmeadow in Western Massachusetts. Although they were acquaintances in school, they didn’t actually start dating until David was studying at nearby

Springfield College and Stephen was finishing his senior year.

When Stephen graduated, he moved to Boston to attend Massachusetts College of Art and Design where he graduated with a degree in architectural design.

“My degree definitely plays a more direct role in our home renovation experience. Not only in the ways I learned to approach design, but also in the repertoire of tools I have to visualize and bring design concepts to life,” says Stephen.

David moved to Boston after finishing his masters in science from Springfield College. This was the same year they got their first Fenway apartment and started their very first DIY project.

“We really wanted to make the apartment our own. We painted, put up shelves and made an ottoman. I think it was the ottoman project where we found that we really enjoyed working together in this way,” recalls David.

Influencer husbands

That ottoman project has now evolved into a robust online presence. When the two began working on the Victorian, they





recognized an opportunity beyond making a beautiful home together.

The domain name should be no surprise: www.renovationhusbands.com. There you will find the blog where the two regularly post information about the progress of current projects. It features wonderful photographs for followers to view more closely the “befores and afters” of the Queen Anne revitalization. The website also includes information on some of their favorite things like essential tools. Items range from tape measures to dutch ovens, and all are Renovation Husbands tested and approved.

They can also be found on Instagram and TikTok, both at the handle @renovationhusbands. These platforms provide regular snippets of the DIYers in real time. Their Instagram following boasts 29K followers with another 11k on TikTok.

“When we found our Dorchester house, it felt like a great opportunity to document

the process from the very start. Up until that point we had shared projects and updates with family and friends on Facebook. We started an Instagram account and bought the domain,” says Stephen.

“It grew pretty organically from there. There was already a pretty large DIY and ‘Old House’ community on Instagram, and we were able to learn from others and engage with people doing similar things. For us, Instagram is a source of constant inspiration as well as an engaging way to keep us motivated,” says David.

Honey husbands

The two have also cultivated their own brand of honey from their very own beehives. It is aptly named “Dot Honey.” Although both men participate in the honey endeavor, it is usually David who you will find talking about the bees.

“Beekeeping has become a true hobby, one thing in my life I do for no gain other than the fun of it,” says David.

Dot Honey is currently out of stock, but close followers of the couple are quick to snatch up the local honey on the rare occasion it becomes available.

“Oh, honey! Summer 2019 yielded more honey than we could have imagined, and we offered it for sale via Instagram. This season’s yields were fewer and we distributed the honey among the families at the community garden. We have high hopes for 2021, so keep an eye out!” says David.

Brand husbands

Their online presence has helped to create a burgeoning Renovation Husbands brand, although the two are reluctant to call it such.

“It’s funny to even think of ourselves as a ‘brand.’ We started our Instagram and blog



as an opportunity to share our renovation process with our family and friends. Over the last three years it has grown into a community that we truly love interacting with,” says Stephen.

That being said, it is clear that they have developed relationships with other vendors that they frequently give credence to on their blog and social media platforms.

“Sharing our renovation lives on Instagram has introduced us to so many amazing people and has also provided us with the opportunity to work with some great brands. While the type of relationship differs from brand to brand, we really only agree to discuss brands and products we believe in and would use in our own home,” says David.

Helper husbands

Renovating a home, especially when you’re doing it on your own, can be time consuming and costly. But when you have your best friend and husband by your side, it can be an endeavor that builds a deeper relationship as well as a home.

“There are certainly lots of costs associated with home renovation. This is one of the reasons we started doing the work ourselves. We save a lot of money performing projects and prefer to allocate our funds to materials and finishes,” says Stephen.

They have learned a number of lessons over the course of their relationship.

“During our first home renovation we were on a very strict budget and we often cut cost on tools. This meant buying the cheapest one possible or forgoing a tool altogether. As we started collecting the correct tools for the job this became very apparent to me that having the correct tool can make a job way, way easier,” recommends David.

“I think one of the biggest lessons we have learned over the years is where our skills, strengths and value lies. While we do most everything ourselves, we have also learned which tasks we would prefer to delegate to either skilled trade or labor. For example, we recently hired someone to install a small amount of wallpaper. While we could have learned to hang wallpaper, the amount of time it would

have taken to achieve the level of finish we wanted made the cost well worth it,” says Stephen.

Farmer husbands?

At some point, perhaps in a more distant future, the renovation of their historic home will come to an end. If history is prologue for the Renovation Husbands, it would stand to reason that they would sell their completed home and move on to another big project. However, they aren’t looking that far ahead.

“We don’t tend to plan those things out very far. We intended to stay in our first house much longer than we did but things changed along the way. I will say, this house is truly special to us and I think it would be great to hold onto it, whatever our next project may be,” says Stephen.

David adds. “Stephen is right. Whenever we make a long-term plan, it shifts, so we tend to look only to the next project. We do occasionally discuss building something from scratch, in the woods, with ducks... and cows.” [x]

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