



ABOVE
Now lush and full of life, the yard was "a complete disaster" when David and Stephen bought the house. The eye-catching arbor arching over the grass was a find from a local landscaping store—it wasn't for sale, but they asked if they could buy it and the owner said yes.

OPPOSITE
The wallpaper, Florencecourt by Cole & Son, was chosen to tie together the blue and green rooms on either side of the dining room.

LISTEN TO THE house



When "Reno Husbands" Stephen and David St. Russell (@renovationhusbands) moved into a well-worn Victorian in Boston, they learned to let the house guide the design. And the results speak for themselves.

BY SARAH Z. WEXLER ♦ PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSICA ANTOLA

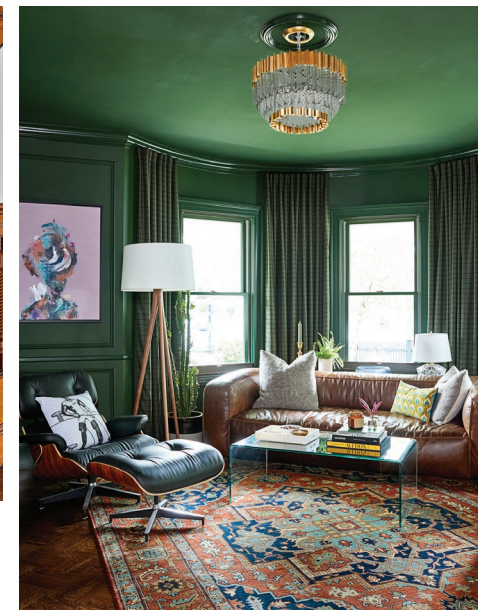


LEFT David and Stephen uncovered—and fell in love with—the original ornate tile of the fireplace when they removed a brass cage that was covering it.

ABOVE To make the new built-ins feel like they'd been there forever, the guys used salvaged trim from old windows as vertical columns.

THE FIRST THING TO KNOW ABOUT Stephen and David St. Russell is that they were definitely *not* in the market for a new house in early 2017, a year after they got married. They were looking for a new apartment in Boston because the rent for their place at the time was going up. But everything changed on their way to lunch one day: En route to meeting a friend in the Dorchester neighborhood, they happened to drive by an old Victorian in a sad state. “It looked derelict and it didn’t appear to be on the market,” says Stephen, 31, an architectural designer. “But we brought it up at lunch and our friend looked up the address...and it was for sale. The pictures on the listing were astonishing because it had been totally gutted inside already.”

While the thought of buying the home, built in 1893, was tempting, it was also frightening. They’d renovated and flipped a house before, but nothing near this scale. “We were terrified because the price of the house was higher than we were looking to spend ▶



FAR LEFT While neither David nor Stephen plays piano, they were thrilled when a neighbor offered to sell hers to them: “We just felt like the room needed it.”

CENTER “The entry is what sold us on the house,” says Stephen. “The wood was all dirty and dusty, but you could see it had so much potential.”

NEAR LEFT To create a moody, masculine vibe, David and Stephen painted every surface in the parlor Colonial Verdigris by Benjamin Moore.



◆ With lots of bold colors on the main floor, David and Stephen went for a neutral, calming palette upstairs, layering textures to keep things interesting. The area above the molding is grass cloth, and the walls are Roman clay (a plaster finish that adds texture to smooth walls).



at the time, and it didn't even have a working toilet," says David, 33, a consultant. "But we went away on a road trip that weekend, and the whole time we were driving it was all we could talk about. It had always felt impossible that we could own a single-family home in the city, near public transportation, with a yard, so we somehow decided buying it would be an okay thing to do!" Within a week they were under contract.

To say the house needed work is an understatement. "We were lucky that our lease wasn't up for another four months—it gave us time to get the house to a point where we could even live there," says David. That meant putting in plumbing, electrical, and insulation; plastering the walls; and finishing

the floors. "We also had a sink and toilet installed, but that's pretty much it. We found a grill on the side of the road and cooked our meals in the backyard, and we'd go to the gym just to shower," he says. They shared the journey on Instagram as @RenovationHusbands, amassing 113,000 followers.

Once they moved in, David and Stephen started tackling the rooms one by one. First the kitchen, then two bathrooms, a bedroom, the living spaces on the main floor, and finally the main suite upstairs, which is now their bedroom. While it sounds methodical, it was completely overwhelming to make every little decision. Stephen had the idea of a contemporary kitchen, so they started there. But once it was finished, it felt out of place, ▶

“ We handled almost the entire renovation ourselves, and I’m so proud of what we’ve done. —David St. Russell



LEFT The Aubrey Lounge Chair by Apt 2B is a perfect corner reading spot, with tons of light from the bedroom's windows.

ABOVE Connecting the bedroom and the bathroom, the closet is papered with a pastoral scene that looks like camouflage from a distance. The bathroom's Room & Board vanity is covered in a custom Carrara countertop.



◆ "Landscaping is my passion; it's the thing I love to do most," says David, who planted eye-catching lime hydrangeas along the porch.

RIGHT
The front porch is where the couple sit to people watch, sip cocktails, and relax with their two dogs, Dexter and Gemma. The curtains were hung to block the closeness of the house next door and help the porch feel more like a room.

like a mistake. So they hit pause to make a cohesive plan for the entire house. "From then on, we let the house and its history tell us what it should look like," says David. The previous owners had gutted nearly everything but left the entryway intact, with the original fireplace, some wood paneling, and a stained glass window in the stairwell. They ended up using that small area as inspiration for the whole project. "We took what details were retained and used them to shape the rest of the house," says Stephen. "So, for example, we would use the salvaged pieces to inform us what the baseboard height should be."

The result definitely leans a little more traditional than they'd planned. "We try to insert contemporary pieces in with furniture or finishes, but there are a lot of architecture and trim details that were dictated by the space," says Stephen. And they're now redoing the kitchen to help it match the rest of the rooms. "The new one will be more traditional with muted tones. We even found the old pantry doors in the basement and we're going to use them," says Stephen.

As painstaking as the process has been—two major kitchen renos in five years!—both Stephen and David are filled with a deep sense of accomplishment. "Every day when I take a shower, I still can't believe we built this home," says David. "We handled almost the entire renovation ourselves on nights and weekends, and I'm so proud of what we've done." ⚡
For resources, see page 94.

PROP STYLING BY CAIT GURY



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