

FRONT DOORS 3 in 1: Art gallery, studio, home

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In giving new life to a 19th-century structure in downtown Bellevue, Tyler Hildebrand also preserved some architectural elements from venerable landmarks in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. Hildebrand's project partner was family friend Terry Rasche, a real estate agent and historical preservation contractor, who salvages usable elements from deconstruction projects. He was high on Hildebrand's list of people to call when he purchased the property at 400 Fairfield Ave.

"I had a shop down the street for about a year and a half," Hildebrand explains. "I was itching to buy something to house my art gallery. This building had been a tanning salon that was abandoned five or more years ago; it was pretty nasty. I think they walked out in the middle of the night."

Hildebrand's goal was to restore the 1889 storefront building to its original use as a combination retail and living space, keeping the structure as historically accurate as possible. He and Rasche gutted the crumbling interior and started from scratch in February; the project was complete in June.

"It's been fun designing things that are appropriate for this building," says Rasche. "We saved \$20,000 to \$30,000 by reusing materials, and we saved those materials from (going to) the landfill."

The large room that comprises most of the main floor was ideal for the art gallery. Hildebrand and Rasche literally took out a large chunk of the store's front wall, replacing ugly brick, small windows and an undersized door with larger, more architecturally appropriate windows, a door with transom, and "Rookwood-look" tile on the remaining exterior wall surface.



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Above: Emily Neal and Tyler Hildebrand pose in Hilde's Gallery. They operate the gallery and live upstairs. **Below:** The eating area in the kitchen.

Using planks left over from another of Rasche's jobs, the men installed hardwood floors in the gallery. The "new" front door came from the old Johnson Murphy shoe store in Newport. The interior door to the back room, along with window casings and rosettes, originally graced Newport's Willis mansion. In the transom window is a leaded glass design created by Rasche from stained glass removed during the demolition of the Little Sisters of the Poor Convent in Cincinnati. Hildebrand's gallery lights - bowl-shaped fixtures suspended from the ceiling - came from the Canargo Racquet Club in Indian Hill. Similar-looking gooseneck lights mounted on the exterior brick were salvaged from a Norwood factory demolished in the 1960s.

The building's mezzanine level was

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Old Bellevue home has it all for artist

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converted into a studio for Hildebrand, a versatile artist whose work ranges from caricatures of sports stars and other celebrities to Cincinnati street scenes to non-representational paintings. Artistry of a different sort, however, was required to repair the ravaged hallway and staircase leading from the studio to the third floor.

Rasche rolls his eyes when he remembers the difficulty he and Hildebrand had in removing badly damaged incrusta wallpaper, rewiring, drywalling and painting the new surfaces. Three spindles were missing from the antique staircase, but Rasche found similar ones taken from a Newport mansion. He managed to lengthen them to fit the required space.

With some imagination, architectural restoration, and elbow grease, the two men transformed the derelict apartment on the top floor into comfortable quarters for Hildebrand and Emily Neal, his girlfriend of several years.

The living room, with pale green walls, white trim and unusual diamond-shaped window, is decorated simply but attractively with beige and white furnishings - several from Ikea, several refinished by Neal. A selection of Hildebrand's colorful works provides visual punctuation.

Neal, who chose the wall colors, went bold in the master bedroom, painting the walls a dark blue, contrasting with the white woodwork. The deep color works, thanks to large windows and high ceilings which preserve a feeling of spaciousness. In the center of one wall is an original fireplace, made of oxidized cast iron with a decorative pattern stenciled on it. The mantel shelf is slate.

Hildebrand and Rasche built closets on either side of this fireplace and ripped up the carpet. They were able to restore the hardwood floors in this room and the living room by sanding and staining them, then coating them with polyurethane.

In the kitchen, the two men installed salvaged cabinets, topping them with white laminate counters. New black-and-stainless-steel energy efficient appliances completed the room.

Neal's distinctive eye for color is seen again in this area, which has walls of orange, maroon and white.

"Emily and I had different ideas for the colors of the upstairs," Hildebrand explains. "I let her win on that, and I'm glad I did. The colors turned out nice, and, looking back, I realize my ideas were pretty awful. Now, I let her do the interior designing, and I do the labor."

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