

WHISKI KITCHEN & RENAISSANCE RESTORATIONS

Opening Doors to History

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REGIONAL FEATURE | Whiski Kitchen & Renaissance Restorations



When homeowners Bill Luchi and Lori Gonko first walked through the doors of this stunning 100-year-old Tudor home in Detroit's Joseph Berry neighborhood and saw the amount of work that had to be done, they thought, "There's no way." This wasn't even where they were looking to buy; their realtor had just brought them here on a whim. But when they went to breakfast after looking at some houses, this was the home that kept coming up. Bill couldn't stop talking about the big, beautiful wooden doors. Lori saw something special in the cool, old details. But they wanted to make sure it was sound, so they called in the expert.

Jamie Craig started Renaissance Restoration in 1998 because he loved architecture, history, and he loved Detroit. His business focuses on restoration, not renovation, and preserving the history of his projects. When Luchi and Gonko brought him in, Craig saw that the home had a good foundation and good bones, but five decades of neglect. He knew many people had looked at the house and passed on it because of the condition, but observed that it was worth the investment. And he, too, was crazy about those three-inch thick, custom solid oak interior doors with arched tops and hammered wrought iron hardware.

Luchi and Gonko, like Craig, felt strongly about being a part of the revitalization of Detroit. When they bought the house a year ago, one of those details was love at first sight for Gonko, Pewabic tiles throughout. Pewabic tile is a vital part of Detroit history- and one of Detroit's most notable contributions to the International Arts and Crafts movement. Pewabic tiles are known for a unique iridescent glaze. These tiles grace the fireplace, windowsills, and powder rooms, and dress the foyer floor to ceiling. The colors range from navy blues to pale yellows to an Egyptian theme in the master bath. Renaissance had their tile specialist come in to clean them, removing years and years of wax buildup, without harming these precious artifacts. Project manager Jeri Lathum notes, "You see this tile sometimes in older homes, but the amount in this home was very distinctive."



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Renaissance also had their work cut out for them in the master bedroom. The former owners had a huge walk-in closet that closed in the room, and old carpet that had to be removed. When they knocked down the walls to open up the room and pulled up the carpet, they discovered oak floors that had been stenciled, then painted over again. Renaissance not only sanded those down to their original beauty, but they also matched those narrow planks to the kitchen and living room.

Perhaps the biggest triumph comes in the kitchen where the design firm Whiski Kitchen was brought in to lend their expertise. Despite numerous challenges including an odd footprint that included a butler's pantry, and a floor that had sloped almost a foot over the years, this center of the home turned out to be one of the most spectacular features in a house that is brimming with them. There are many unexpected things that come up when renovating, and most of them are not pleasant, but the homeowners got a happy surprise when they discovered that under the crumbling plaster was an old chimney. After Renaissance cleaned it up and repaired it, they now have an exposed brick wall that is one of the homeowners' favorite parts of the house.

As for the design? "Whiski Kitchen really knocked it out of the park," says Latham. They kept the classic details like subway tile but put their own stamp on it by using an aqua color. They kept the cupboards historically tall but did white on the perimeter and a grayish-brown stain on cherry for the island. The countertops are white quartz with gray accents. Rebekah Tull, co-founder of Whiski Kitchen and designer on this project, loves the custom island. The



shape is intuitive and table-like while providing tons of counter space and storage. But it's the details that set it apart. Furniture legs disguise six-inch wide spice pull-outs, and a wine refrigerator keeps vino at the perfect temperature. "It was the most efficient design appointment ever," says Tull, "we selected all the finishes in fifteen minutes." This ease and conviction translated into a style that is classic but updated and oh-so-beautiful. Renaissance added all new floor joists, and a recessed side door that goes down a step to address the sloping floor, and a strategically tiered ceiling with different cabinet heights corrected the ceiling issues.

The homeowners couldn't be happier. By honoring the historic beauty of this gem, Renaissance Restorations is bringing back Detroit's glory days, one house, or rather one door, at a time. □

WHISKI KITCHEN DESIGN STUDIO

Whiski Kitchen Design Studio is a company that specializes in helping ordinary people with a vision to create extraordinary kitchens. The company opened in 2015 and has since crafted hundreds of kitchens from ultra-modern to rustic traditional to historical inner-city homes. As an active participant in the National Kitchen and Bath Association, Whiski Kitchen has the resources and "outside the box" ideas to create dream kitchens for people in every walk of life.

Our kitchens have been described as unique, edgy, aesthetically spectacular and functionally ideal, whether using reclaimed wood from an 1800's Detroit guesthouse or the sleekest of cutting edge Italian products. Whiski Kitchen reaches deep to present a different mindset or head-turning design while understanding the emotional connection clients have with their kitchen. Our designers use 3-D interactive renderings to describe how space will look.

Along with providing several levels of quality products and unmatched service, we are ever appreciative of the relationships we have created with our manufacturers and local contractors to create kitchens your dinner guests will be talking about.

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