



a home for the holidays

A meticulously refurbished Victorian house in New Bedford embraces the spirit of the season each year.

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DIANA HENRY always liked historic homes.

She and her husband used to walk the historic neighborhoods of New Bedford and pass one particular house. They remembered it not by any architectural feature, per se, although the house was quite elegant structurally. Instead, they referred to it as the home with a mysterious present perched for years in the upstairs window.

As years passed, the owner of the home allowed it to fall into disrepair, and it was long uninhabitable. The city was about to condemn the house and board it up. Diana, a local realtor, convinced the owner to sell, as she knew there were many people who would buy such a home in New Bedford as a project.

The designers of this house—a firm called Peabody & Stearns—were quite famous back at the turn of the 19th Century. They have dozens of iconic landmarks—churches, municipal buildings, residences—still standing all throughout the Northeast.

Diana took many people to see it, and one client showed real interest. But she and her husband had fallen for this home as well. The client balked at the end (Diana found her another historic home not far away eventually), and the Henrys made the purchase in 1999.

It was not the first home she and her husband had

refurbished. But it was certainly the most challenging. “We couldn’t move in,” says Diana. “There was no running water. We had to secure the roof, as that was about to fall in.”

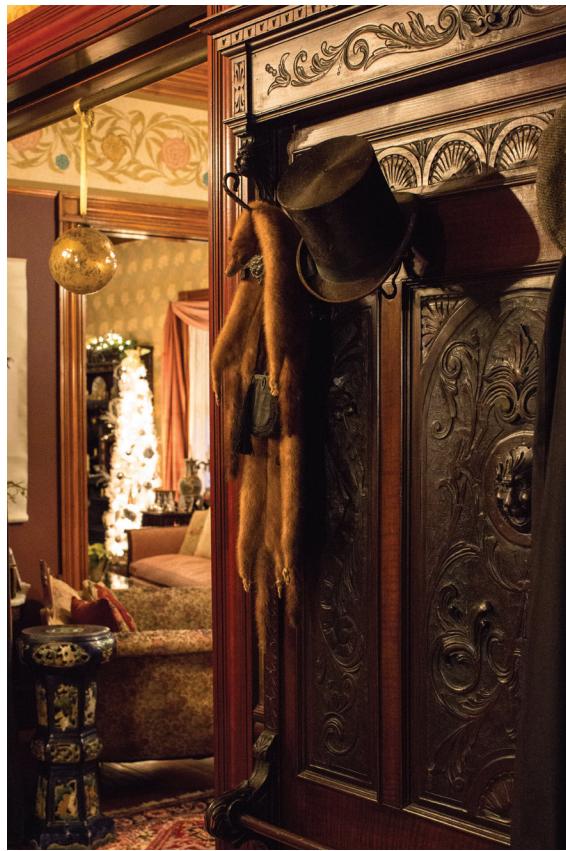
They loaded numerous dumpsters with furniture beyond salvage and brought in local craftspeople to reconstruct almost all of its historic features that had suffered from neglect. A chandelier that had been sitting on the floor was put back together and hoisted into its original spot.

The Henrys have lived here year-round for nearly two decades. It is the longest they have ever lived in one home. A cabal of similarly minded preservationists have flocked to New Bedford and socialize in many of the same circles.

The Henrys have built many of their own traditions here, including decorating the home for the holidays.

The ordeal takes about a month. Diana tries to have the trees and mantles done before Thanksgiving (“Anyone on the house tour knows you cannot celebrate Thanksgiving,” she jokes).

Over the years, every decoration has found its place, and emerges from carefully labeled boxes sometime in November or the first week of December. Her collecting has been going on for a number of years.





The New Bedford Preservation Society presents the 27th Annual Holiday House Tour on Saturday, December 8 from 4 to 8 pm for the Candlelight Tour and Sunday, December 9 from 1 to 5 pm for an Afternoon Tour.

She decorates the library, what she calls the music room, the living room, the dining room, a bedroom at the front of the house that houses the Victorian tower, a den and one of the children's bedrooms.

She has a fondness for bird ornaments, the more delicate and wispy, the better. Many ornaments are very old-fashioned; others, quite primitive, as they may have been made by her children years ago or even Diana when she was a child.

Each year, she gives her granddaughter the choice to take one. "This year, she took one of my favorites."

There are also numerous trees. None are real, as the falling needles would make too much of a mess. But all have a unique and memorable style. Some are short and squat; others are tall and pencil thin. She added two new ones last year—a white one and a silver one. The ornaments of those two match the trees' colors.

Last year, because her house was on the tour, Diana had her friend, artist Nicky Soares, put together a dress made of sheets of music for one room's centerpiece. It was one of the most talked about features of the entire tour.

"It's a great beginning to the season," says Diana of the tour and the concert at Grace Church that follows. "As you walk through the houses and then listen to the music, you can't help but feel the spirit." 