

# CAREFUL RESTORATION PAYS RESPECT TO THE PAST

In the past three years, I have been fortunate to participate in two historic renovation projects: the Valentine



Apartments at 3724 Broadway and a four-story apartment building my husband restored at 4127 Locust St. Each was honored with a Preserve Missouri Award.

I have a reputation for modern design, but I loved participating in these restorations. There is something special about bringing these buildings back to life and honoring their sturdiness, quality of construction and attention to detail.

When I first walked inside the Valentine Apartments, all I saw were curved sheetrock walls, lay-in ceilings, fluorescent lights and mauve carpet. There were rumors of original plasterwork underneath, but not until demolition did we discover the true treasures.

Across the ceiling were acanthus leaves, vines and flowers. Beams were detailed with egg-and-dart molding and scrollwork. Molded vases with flowers adorned the textured walls. Detailed trim-work and iron railings surrounded the balconies. The original marble floor was unearthed and found to be in wonderful condition. Traffic patterns were worn into the marble, showing the paths of former tenants. This patina of wear and undulation creates warmth, unlike a new marble floor.

Sadly, many of these beautiful details were terribly damaged or missing. Holes punched into walls and ceilings accommodated ductwork. Entire sections of walls were missing, and trim rotted away. The developer, McCormack Baron Salazar, aspired to restore this gem to its original grandeur, working with Stark Wilson Duncan Architects.

Original photographs of the once luxurious apartment build-



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**Renovation of the historic Valentine Apartments was a balancing act of replicating missing architectural details and contrasting them with clean, modern details.**

ing showed the detailed dark-painted ceiling and wainscot, and these photos became an inspiration. Rau Construction assembled a team of artisans to replicate the missing parts. Plaster molds were cast around remaining details. Scaffolding filled the lobby and foyer for months as individual details were replicated and repaired. Tiny details and pinstripes were painted in seven colors. Ductwork was strategically placed to minimize interruption.

In historic preservation, there is a fine line between replicating in a quality, original manner with true materials vs. contrasting it with elements that are clean and modern. Often, trying to replicate the old means cheap imitations. The marble fireplace surround was intact, but there was no remaining fireplace mantel. Instead of trying to re-create what could have been there, we designed a large cast stone surround, focusing on scale and simple lines.

The same mix of modern and traditional appears in the furniture and fabric selections.

The furnishings are modern, with a hint of tradition. This is a common area, so all materials needed to be durable and stain-resistant. Fabrics with Nano-Tex finish and stone tabletops resist stains.

In Italy last fall, I experienced little alleys of cobblestone, ancient stone facades and weathered doors that opened to beautiful spaces of worn wood floors, ancient brick or stucco walls. Instead of being hidden behind a recent design trend, these details would often be left intact and exposed, celebrating the history behind the elements. To this were added modern furnishings and necessities. New with old, modern with ancient, making it livable for today, while honoring our past.

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