

BEFORE

The old house appeared to be worth nothing more than scrap. It sat derelict for years, attracting squatters and gaining a reputation for being haunted.



AFTER

Refurbished, the St. Helens cottage has a new roof, new plumbing, and new electrical and heating systems. But it also sports many of its original parts — such as the porch columns, wood floors and charm.



RESCUE MISSION

Husband-wife architects save Aunt Hattie's house before it goes up in smoke

THE STORY

Harriet Sobieski lived in the modest house on 17th Street in St. Helens for more than 40 years, beginning in the '50s. When she moved out in 1995, it was boarded up with all her belongings inside. Stories swirled about the old house being haunted, and it almost became a practice burn for the local fire department.

But Al and Kannikar Petersen saw something

worth saving in the 1910 house. The architects and owners of Akaan Architecture + Design also had a familial tie: Sobieski was Al's Great-Aunt Hattie, who died in 1996.

THE PLAYERS

Al and Kannikar met in Houston and later lived for several years in Kannikar's native Thailand. When they returned to the states, the

RECLAIMED HOME

High ceilings and ample windows give the small house a big feel. The uncovered hardwood floors show some age, but rightly so; the house dates to 1910.



couple settled in Al's hometown, St. Helens. The name of their firm, Akaan (pronounced: AH kahn), is the Thai word for "building."

THE PROJECT |

Aunt Hattie's 900-square-foot house had sat vacant for a dozen years in a neighborhood of working-class homes. The Petersens decided in spring of 2007 to remodel it piece by piece and reuse everything they could rather than razing the old structure.

They found good bones buried under layers of flooring, paint and wallpaper, including gems such as oak floors, five-panel solid interior doors, glass knobs and walls constructed of 1-by-8-inch cedar boards behind the drywall.

"It's like a cedar-closet home," Al says with a laugh.

The floor plan was simple, but complicated by a tiny, closed-off kitchen that had four doors: one to the living room; one to the bathroom; one to a bedroom; and one to the screened-in back porch, which was hanging by a thread. The two bedrooms and front living room were solid, but they needed to be cleaned up with some drywall and cosmetic touches.

THE WORK |

The Petersens took down the wall between the living room and the kitchen. They closed off the bathroom door along the kitchen's back wall, which created much-needed space for countertop and cupboards.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE



THE ARCHITECTS | Al and Kannikar Petersen

THE FIRM | Akaan Architecture + Design

YEARS IN BUSINESS | Three

SPECIALTY | They are proud to be generalists, able to serve the many needs in a small community. In addition to his degree in architecture, Al has a certificate in historic preservation. Both are LEED-accredited (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) architects.

PHILOSOPHY | Al and Kannikar want to make the connections a small community affords.

CONTACT | 101 St. Helens St., St. Helens; 503-366-3050, akaandesign.com



▲ A defunct wood stove and an electric range shared one corner of the cramped kitchen. The Petersens removed the stoves and the door just visible on the left, and they opened the wall between the kitchen and the living room. They installed a much-needed closet with a storage cubby above where the wood stove once sat.



◀ Salvaged wood from other parts of the house was used to rebuild the porch and stairs. The porch columns were saved, and the railing got some decorative balusters.

Before photos courtesy of AKAAN ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

FROM PAGE 7

It also allowed the tiny bathroom to grow by about half.

They enclosed the back porch, adding a row of windows and turning the space into a laundry room. They salvaged some of the original kitchen cabinets and hung them above the new washer and dryer.

They replaced all electrical and plumbing systems and installed a high-efficiency heat pump.

THE EXTERIOR

They tested the paint and found it did not contain lead. With face masks in place, they "scraped and scraped and scraped," Kannikar says.

The front porch was a total loss, so they jacked up the front of the house and rebuilt the porch. They salvaged wood from other parts of the house to create balusters and reused the original porch columns.

The new roof is made from recycled metal and coated with a polymer that reflects sunlight and reduces solar heat during the summer. Al says he chose a metal roof because it outlasts an asphalt shingle roof, and the metal can be recycled at the end of its use.

ALL WRAPPED UP

Insulation was blown into the exterior walls and ceiling, and under-floor insulation went into the crawl space. Double-pane, low-E windows went in all around the house.

BOTTOM LINE

The couple spent about \$50,000 — not including their labor — on Aunt Hattie's little charmer, which they are renting out. The neighbors are thrilled with the remodel, but the kids on the block are a tad disappointed they missed out on a practice burn. •

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SMALL AND EFFICIENT | A door to the bathroom used to be to the right of the sink. Closing off that doorway created a stretch of wall for the cabinets and countertop, making a user-friendly kitchen.

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