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THE VIEW FROM THE KITCHEN is of a small orchard (ABOVE) where a Buddha provides a meditative air. While there is a side door leading directly to the shady cottage garden (LEFT), the new, more public rear entrance is just outside the picket fence.

The owners of a
venerable Victorian
find harmony
between the past
and the present

WRITTEN BY REGINA COLE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAM GRAY

ARCHITECTURE BY
ANDREW M. SIDFORD ARCHITECTS

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE BY
KDTURNER DESIGN

RESPECTFULLY NEW

ARCHITECT ANDREW M. SIDFORD'S CLIENTS HAD A LOVE-HATE relationship with their new home. "We bought the house on sort of a whim," says Chuck Christensen of the 1896 Victorian in Newbury, Massachusetts. He and his wife, Beth Welch, were driving to Plum Island for a family visit in 2003 when an "open house" sign sidetracked them. "There are very few Victorian houses in Newbury, and this one had always caught our eye."

"We were especially taken with the carriage house and with the back lawn," says Welch, whose family has roots in the area. At approximately 1.5 acres, the property abuts protected farmland that sweeps down to the Plum Island marshes; views look to orchards, woods, fields, and distant glimmers of Plum Island Sound. "In a densely populated area like this, it's very rare to have a view that doesn't include another house," she says.

But all was not sylvan grace: an ungainly 1970s kitchen addition disfigured the back of the house and cut off interior spaces from their gracious



surroundings. “There wasn’t even a door to the backyard,” Christensen says. “I suffered terrible buyer’s remorse. When we came to sit in the kitchen, we decided that we didn’t want to live here.”

Instead of throwing in the towel on the old place, however, the couple, who also have apartments in New York and Boston, decided to renovate. “If we fixed it up, we’d put off moving,” Christensen says with a laugh. Friends linked them to Sidford, whose firm, Andrew M. Sidford Architects, is in neighboring Newburyport, Massachusetts.

Sidford’s approach to the creative process is to ask clients to concentrate on what they are after, totally apart from any given limitations. “People are taught to think within a framework,” he says. “I want my clients simply to articulate what they want, not to think about style or how any new construction might relate to what’s already built. I find that most people know exactly what they want; it’s my job to figure out what it is and to turn it into reality.”

Meeting with the couple, Sidford learned that they loved the elegance of the historic house; that Welch, whose self-professed therapy is cooking, wanted a modern kitchen, that Christensen, an avid collector of books, wanted a library, and that both wanted to integrate the inside and outside spaces.

To meet those goals, Sidford replaced the 1970s addition with a graceful new back entry that leads to a functional, light-filled kitchen and adjoining sunken sitting room. Stairs lead to a subterranean library that houses a collection of more than 8,000 volumes. A new central hallway connects the Victorian front rooms to the new rear section. Outside, landscape architect Kimberly Turner of KDTurner Design in Newton, Massachusetts, created a two-level courtyard garden, with the lower section accessible from the kitchen. The upper section, which is off the parlor, is designed around a massive old

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maple tree. “Stately and beautiful, it was the only thing there,” Turner says. “We built the bluestone terrace to provide entertaining space. The pavers, laid over stone dust, protect the tree and funnel rainwater down to its roots. The focal point of the lower area is a fountain that

Chuck, Beth, and I created out of antique pieces, including the rectangular stone base and, atop that, a beautiful 19th-century urn.”

From the kitchen table, the couple can see much of their outdoor art, including cranes, an antique bench, and stone books. “They’ve been adding sculpture ever since we finished,” says Sidford.

“White flowers and leaves provide light, while cool tones in dark blue and purple have an almost Victorian feel,” says Turner. “They play against rich tones of green in hostas, ivy, and rhododendrons.”

She balanced the long, dreamy view toward Plum Island with new apple trees that mimic an ancient orchard. Below a field planted with roses is a croquet court, which adds to the Victorian aura.

Close to the house, Turner took care not to obscure a new ribbon of ground-level windows that allows daylight into the new basement library. “The basement is a great place for the library because it’s the one area where there are lots of windowless walls,” says Christensen. Still, the room is inviting, filled with natural light thanks to the clerestories. “The windows give a long view of the backyard that, as you come down the stairs, makes the ceiling disappear,” says Sidford. “This is not just a space to store books; it’s a room you actually want to use.” With the structural and landscape changes, Christensen and Welch now want to use the rest of the house as well.

“Andy and Kim saw a vision for our house that we never could,” Welch says. And they found a sure cure for buyer’s remorse. ■



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT Kimberly Turner created a two-level courtyard garden. The upper section is designed around a massive old maple tree. The focal point in the lower section is a fountain created from antique elements. The tall double-hung windows architect Andrew M. Sidford used “work for the historic house in the way that a modern, 10-foot expanse of glass never could,” he says. Though the library (LEFT) is in the basement, it feels cozy and bright thanks to clerestory windows above the bookcases. **FACING PAGE:** Beth Welch and Chuck Christensen, at left in top photo, with Sidford in the new kitchen, where the breakfast area, bottom photo, has views to the rear lawn and side garden.



THE JAPANESE MAPLE garden, one of several themed spaces within the 5-acre estate, is a perfect spot for Sydney Folz, 9, to rest. The dark-stained oak Italian dining table (FACING PAGE) has a center crystal insert. The chairs are wenge with leather seats and backs.

