

Denys Designs Builds Renovations

By Jane Heintzman

Paul Denys is well known in our community, and indeed in the wider Ottawa/Gatineau region, for his skills as a multiple award-winning master carpenter, designer and builder, with a positive genius in the realm of heritage restorations, where he manages to combine a keen eye for historical detail with the newest available technology. We're proud to say that Paul is one of the NEN's longest-standing advertisers, having grown up in nearby Manor Park and inherited his mother's enthusiasm for supporting the local community.

While Paul has a special affinity for historic restorations, much of his current business involves more modern renovations, or a fusion of the old and new. He notes that in terms of resale value, the biggest "bang for your buck" is now in kitchen and bathroom renovations, with additions and landscaping trailing far behind, and the replacement of windows at the very bottom of the list with payback only coming after 3 or 4 decades.

One of Paul's recent award-winning projects involved the renovation of a small (*very small!*) bathroom and a kitchen in MacKay House here in the Burgh, an extraordinary achievement in space-use efficiency and design which you can check out on his website at www.denys.ca. He also reports that after 25 years, he is at last applying himself to the renovation of his wife's 10' x 10' kitchen in their Ottawa East home. While the job is somewhat complicated by the presence of a staircase in the middle of the room, a wrinkle of this kind will no doubt be turned to advantage by Paul's legendary design ingenuity!

To keep up with the latest green building technologies and renovation/restoration techniques, Paul regularly attends international building and design shows, and every summer makes a pilgrimage to the Westford Symposium on Building Science, better known as "Building Science Summer Camp", where the best and the brightest forensic engineers, scientists and contractors in the commercial and residential building field gather to exchange reports on the latest innovations.

Paul recently acquired his license to work on the Quebec side of the river, and swiftly took on a major project on Champlain Street in Gatineau, where he completely restored and reinstalled the original windows (wavy glass panes and all!) in the Alexandre Taché House, a handsome Beaux-Arts/Italianate duplex built in 1911 by Ottawa contractor Joseph Bourque and acquired in the early 1940's by the Taché family. While the window restoration process was complex and painstaking, Paul notes that it ultimately proved cheaper than the cost of replacing the windows, and the resulting insulation factor is equally high. Perhaps most important of all, the current proud owner of the house has the satisfaction of preserving an important historical feature of the building, thanks to Paul's expertise.

Other recent projects on Paul's agenda have included the replacement of the columns in the exterior portico of David Eaton's **107 Fourth Avenue Wine Bar and Café** in the Glebe, and the restoration of the original windows in three of the 6 units of **Philomène Terrace** on Daly Avenue, a handsome limestone row house built in 1867, and one of the first heritage designated properties in Ottawa.

Perhaps the jewel in the crown of Paul's restorations, however, is the recreation of an ornate, two storey porch on the **Rochon House** at 150 St. Patrick (just off Sussex Drive), a decade-long project the last phase of which wrapped up in 2010. The porch was constructed in 1898 by master woodcarver Alphonse Rochon whose skills were renowned in his day, and who worked with his father Fliven on some of the magnificent wood sculptures in both the Parliament Buildings and Notre Dame Basilica. All that remained after the removal of the porch in the mid-1900's was a black and white photograph taken by the Rochons in 1908, and it was this image that Paul ultimately used as the blueprint for his painstaking reconstruction which began in 2000 and unfolded in stages through the subsequent decade.

The Rochon House may be familiar to some of our readers as the **Galérie d'art Jean-Claude Bergeron**, a small gallery launched in 1992 by Jean-Claude Bergeron, the owner of the building who commissioned construction of the porch, himself an artist and expert printmaker. Aficionados of Canadian art may want to drop by the gallery to view an exhibition of prints by Jean Paul Riopelle which runs until April 15th, and while you're there, take a moment to admire Paul's extraordinary handiwork at the front of the house! (Check out www.galeriejeanclaudebergeron.ca for exhibition details).

Samples from Paul's impressive portfolio of restorations and renovations, from heritage to modern and everything in between, can be found on his website at www.denys.ca. We wish him well with his home-based kitchen project, and look forward to seeing his ongoing handiwork in and around our neighbourhood.