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The Wall Street Journal Digital Replica Article

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Friday, July 10, 2020

COMPARISON SHOPPING

Aging Gracefully

Historic homes need lots of TLC, but devotees say the charm is well worth it

BY ADRIENNE GAFFNEY

When it comes to real estate, shiny and new isn't always a plus. In cities like Boston and New Orleans, some of the most enviable (and expensive) homes were built in the early 1900s or before. Many buyers refuse to reckon with the realities of living in an older home, such as smaller rooms and less insulation. But others see historic properties as being filled with the kind of detailing and personality they would hate to live without.

"If you're in a house that was built five years ago and you're surrounded by houses that were all built in the last 20 years, it can lack the kind of character you have if you are willing to compromise and be in an older house," said Peter Pennoyer, principal of New York City's Peter Pennoyer Architects.

Romance aside, prospective buyers of historic homes need to accept that in centuries past, homes weren't built with the layouts and amenities that are commonplace today. In a high-priced 18th century-apartment Mr.

Pennoyer saw in Paris, for example, "you had to walk through the living room to get to the dining room to get to the bedroom, and there was only a tiny bathroom for two bedrooms and no powder room."

Home buyers should also consider furniture before purchasing a historic home, he warns. If you're dead set on having a king-size bed, a Victorian-era townhouse might not be right for you.

"You have to be realistic about your expectations," he said, and be "OK buying something that has flaws and quirks."

In renovating a historic home, Mr. Pennoyer recommended trying to keep or re-purpose the original elements of the house. "It's always going to be more interesting and have more character if you're weaving the old materials in with the new," he said.

To do that, "take all the doors and have the builder label them and number them and catalog all of the hardware," he said. "If you're working with an architect, try to get them to incorporate those old parts in the new plan, even if that means moving a door to a different end of the house."

\$15

MILLION

7,122 sq. ft., 6 bedrooms, built in 1803

BOSTON

FROM TOP: BOSTON VIRTUAL IMAGING; MIKE OBERLIES; CHRIS WHIRLOW; RICHARDSON LAGRANT GROUP

PHILADELPHIA // \$1.95 MILLION

912 sq. ft., 2 bedrooms, built in 1703

PROVIDENCE, R.I. // \$739,000

1,670 sq. ft., 2 bedrooms, built in 1869

BALTIMORE // \$499,000

3,680 sq. ft., 4 bedrooms, built in 1820





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