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# Circa 1860 Sag Harbor Home Renovation And Staging Celebrates House's History



Brendan J. O'Reilly on Jun 14, 2021

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Where thoughtful renovation and designer staging meet in the hot Sag Harbor housing market, a house can sell at lightning speed.

That's just what happened at 47 Howard Street, where a circa 1860 village house found a buyer before the listing was even live.



Part-time Sag Harbor resident Ethan Feirstein purchased 47 Howard Street in 2019 with a vision to update it in a way that highlights its historic elements. He sought out previous owners who could clue him in to how the house used to be.

“I was able to reach out to some of them to get their accounts of life in the space and what the house looked like over the years,” he said during a recent interview.

“I found one on Facebook who was in Florida,” he recalled. That owner had grown up there in the 1960s and 1970s. He also met up in person with a couple who still live locally and owned the house in the 1970s and 1980s.

He learned quite a bit about the house and in his research also uncovered old photographs that showed what the house looked like historically.

It appears that 47 Howard Street had started as a simple one-story house, one that had been added onto and renovated a few times, including the addition of a second story, he explained.

“It was a historic house that had been modified here and there over the years but still retained its historic village charm,” he said. “It just needed, sort of, a cohesive updating in a way that highlighted those historic elements.”

He enlisted Sag Harbor architect Anthony Vermandois for the project. “He has a lot of experience working on historic houses in the village, so he knows what works best and looks best,” Mr. Feirstein said.

Mr. Vermandois said 47 Howard Street’s style is typical of the Sag Harbor vernacular of the late 19th and early 20th century, and has some Colonial Revival features as well as classical Victorian features.

This was Mr. Feirstein’s first time taking on a top-to-bottom renovation, though he is familiar with working on a historic home. He and his partner, Ari Heckman, the CEO of ASH NYC, a development and staging company, purchased an 1850 home on Sag Harbor’s Redwood Road about seven years ago and have had minor renovations done.



The renovation of 47 Howard Street was Mr. Feirstein's solo endeavor, though he did bring in ASH NYC's staging arm, ASH Staging, to prepare the house for showings.

Mr. Feirstein chose the fixtures and finishes, the paint colors and hardware, the bathrooms' Moroccan-style tiles, and the kitchen's La Cornue range, cabinets and stone countertops.

Among the historic elements that he brought back were the corbels, a type of decorative bracket. Corbels were present on the sides of the house when he bought it, but at some point the ones fronting the street had been removed.

Based on old photos, he knew they belonged on the facade as well. "We were able to use the side ones to replicate them and put them back along the front," he said.

Indoors, a staircase leading to a second-floor photo studio was removed, reclaiming the area for living space. The photo studio, which was basically an empty loft space, was turned into the primary suite, Mr. Feirstein said.

Removing the stairs also had the benefit of opening up the view from the front out the house into the backyard. In the dining area off the kitchen, the doorway to the rear yard was widened, making the view even better through glass and steel doors.

"One of the things we wanted to do was open the back up a bit to let in more light, so that opening got a little bit bigger, and those steel doors were installed," Mr. Feirstein said.

The original floorboards, which had been covered up with newer wood, were uncovered. "We exposed the historic floors and re-milled them and laid them back down," he said. The floors now have a natural matte finish.

To add some ceiling height and to further emphasize the home's historic character, the original beams in the ceiling were exposed.





The front door, with a large window surrounded by red and gold stained glass panes, was retained and painted black.

To give the basement the illusion of more height, Mr. Feirstein designed board-and-batten walls.

In all, the house has four bedrooms, four full bathrooms and one half-bath, with 2,825 square feet of living space, inclusive of the basement.

Mr. Vermandois noted that a previous owner had replaced the historic windows with cheap Andersen windows. To dress the windows up a bit and make them look more appropriate to the house, trim was added on both the inside and outside, he said.

Outdoors on the 0.13-acre property, existing patio space was reduced and replaced with greenery, and a pool was added.

ASH NYC partner and head of staging Andrew Bowen led the home staging of 47 Howard Street. He said the design aligned well with the house's character while celebrating the work that Mr. Feirstein had done, "which was really special."

Mr. Bowen said this was not the typical "Hamptons renovation" but something more significant, worldly, thoughtful and collected.

The furniture, art and accessories chosen for the staging have strong European and American influences while creating a sense of place and being appropriate for Sag Harbor, he said.

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People who spend time in Sag Harbor tend to be "of the world" he said, so a number of antiques, found objects and treasures from the East End and all over were incorporated.

One of his goals in staging is to create "memory points" that will leave an impression on visitors. One of the most interesting and unexpected memory points at 47 Howard Street is what Mr. Bowen dubs "Narnia."

During a walk-through of the house, they realized that there is an extra closet inside a bedroom closet, he explained. This discovery led to an idea: The main closet would serve as a gateway to a magical world behind it — like in "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

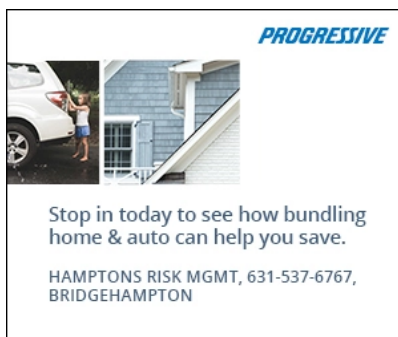
"We said, 'Let's just make it fun and interesting,'" he recalled.

“To us, every square foot matters, and why not make it usable?” Mr. Bowen said.

This staging project was a collaboration, he said, crediting Mr. Feirstein for both the design of the house itself and his input on staging decisions. He noted that often ASH picks paint colors and light fixtures while staging, but on this project Mr. Feirstein made those decisions.

Mr. Bowen added that Mr. Feirstein is detail oriented to a rare level and has an excellent design eye.

“Overall, I was very pleased with how the house turned out,” Mr. Vermandois said, comparing the transformation to “turning a sow’s ear into a silk purse.”



In spring, the house was added to Compass’s “Coming Soon” feature with associate brokers Cee Scott Brown and Jack Pearson.

“We got an offer within days before we had fully hit the market,” Mr. Feirstein said.

It went into contract shortly after, when there were still punch-list items to get done and permits to be obtained.

With one experience of renovating an investment property behind him, Mr. Feirstein said he’d like to do it again.

“Prices are crazy in Sag Harbor these days, so it’s hard to find an opportunity that makes sense for someone like me,” he said. “But I’m looking.”

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