

SPACE OF THE WEEK | FEB. 13, 2020

Back to the Classics Interior designer Michael Garvey recently completed a nearly 13-year renovation of his 1880 house in East Williamsburg.

By Wendy Goodman
Photographs by Greg Endries



When Michael Garvey found his gem of an 1880 Greek Revival house in 2007, it had been in the same family for nearly 50 years. The interior was stuck in the '60s — with dropped ceilings, vinyl floor tiles, *faux*-wood paneling, and, naturally, wall-to-wall carpeting. The exterior's original 1880 cornice (seen above) is the only remnant of the building's history; the rest of the house was a pastiche of various styles. The new exterior reinstates the gracefulness of its original character. In order to buy the home and complete the renovation, Garvey, who had previously lived in an apartment in Washington Heights, gut renovated a one-bedroom apartment every two years leading up to the purchase in addition to working at his full-time job as an interior designer.



Before the renovation.
Photo: Greg Endries



Garvey completely redid the floor plan of the two-story house. This included creating an open living room–slash–kitchen with access to the dining room and beyond. The sectional is custom covered by Classic Upholstery of Norwalk, Connecticut. “My budget in 2007 led me to East Williamsburg,” Garvey says. “When I saw this one, I took in some of the interior dimensions, and a light went off — I went for it.” He created the mural behind the sofa using tape. Photo: Greg Endries



The enclosed dining room has the feel of a year-round outdoor venue, with glass sliding doors that open to an exterior that previously consisted of a (privacy-free) concrete slab surrounded by a short brick wall. The dining-room table was designed by Garvey. The pendant lights are by Barn Light. Photo: Greg Endries



The master bedroom



"I had a formative experience studying interior design in Kyoto in my 20s," says Garvey. "I fell in love with traditional houses and temples built around interior courtyards — it created a privacy, a calm, and a connection to the outdoors. Although my design work doesn't read as Japanese, I knew this was an opportunity to give a small outdoor space an oversize impact on the interior spaces." Installing a 12-foot-tall corrugated metal fence was essential, he says. "The material is common and industrial but reflects light in dynamic ways and provides privacy." Photo: Greg Endries



The outdoor lounge
before the renovation.
Photo: Greg Endries



The upstairs bar area leads to a rooftop seating space. "I reconfigured the floor plan entirely on both floors," Garvey says. "Every single surface has been redone since I bought the house." Photo: Greg Endries



To create the new roof deck, Garvey turned the pitched roof into a flat one, allowing him to connect the second-floor living space to the outside. "I haven't decided if I'm going to raise bats or bees, but this is where they'll live," he says. Photo: Greg Endries