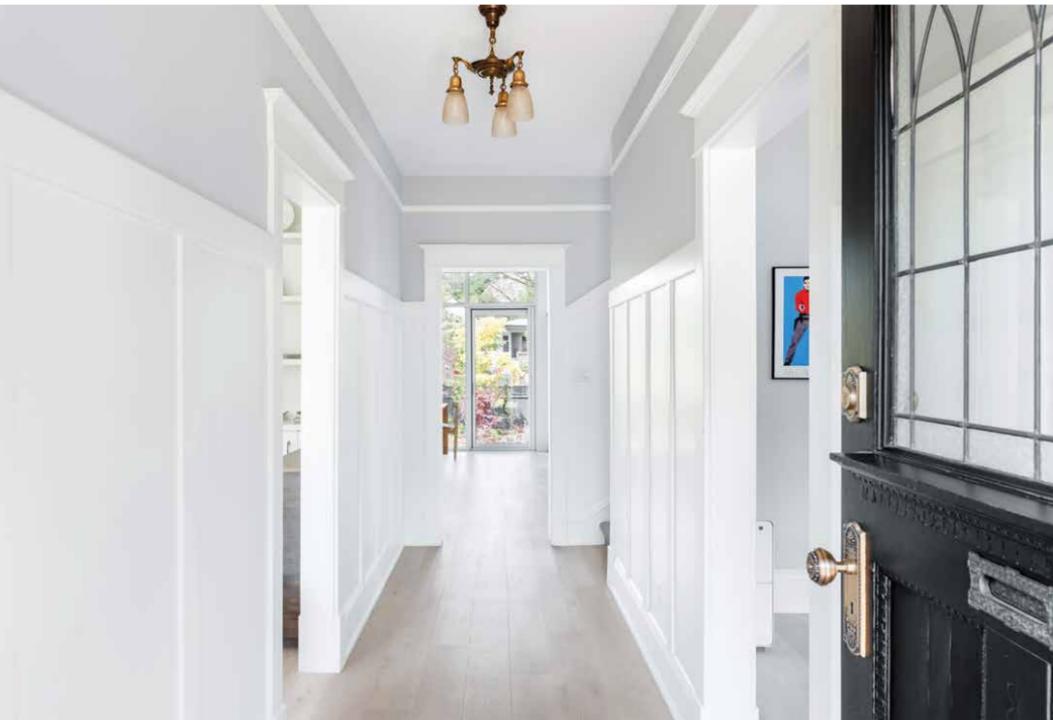


# Heritage Nouveau

A FAIRFIELD RENOVATION BRINGS A MODERN ESTHETIC AND FUNCTION TO A HISTORIC STRUCTURE.

BY DANIELLE POPE | PHOTOS BY DASHA ARMSTRONG\*



When Alan MacMinn first laid eyes on the historic building that would become his Fairfield home, he could see why it had been on the market for a while. The derelict 1911 Edwardian-style house had suffered years of neglect, displaying a sagging roofline and extensive structural damage.

Yet MacMinn could see more: ocean views from the front of the house, an expansive yard, ornate heritage features and the potential to start anew. He was visiting from Toronto when he spotted the for-sale sign, but the area held strong ties for MacMinn, who was born and raised here. As a builder accustomed to bringing older homes back to life, he accepted the challenge.

“What attracted me to the project were the elements that hadn’t been rubbed out,” says MacMinn, principal of MacMinn Contracting. “The house was dilapidated and falling apart, but the original front door was still there. For that to last over 100 years on a house was really something.”

With the luxury of time before the move west, MacMinn spent the next 18 months drafting the design for the three-level, 3,000-square-foot home, planning much of the work himself. As it sat unprotected by heritage designations, some may have considered a full tear down, or transformed it into a multi-unit development. MacMinn was committed to preserving every element he could, from the original ornate fireplace and mantel to the hallway millwork.

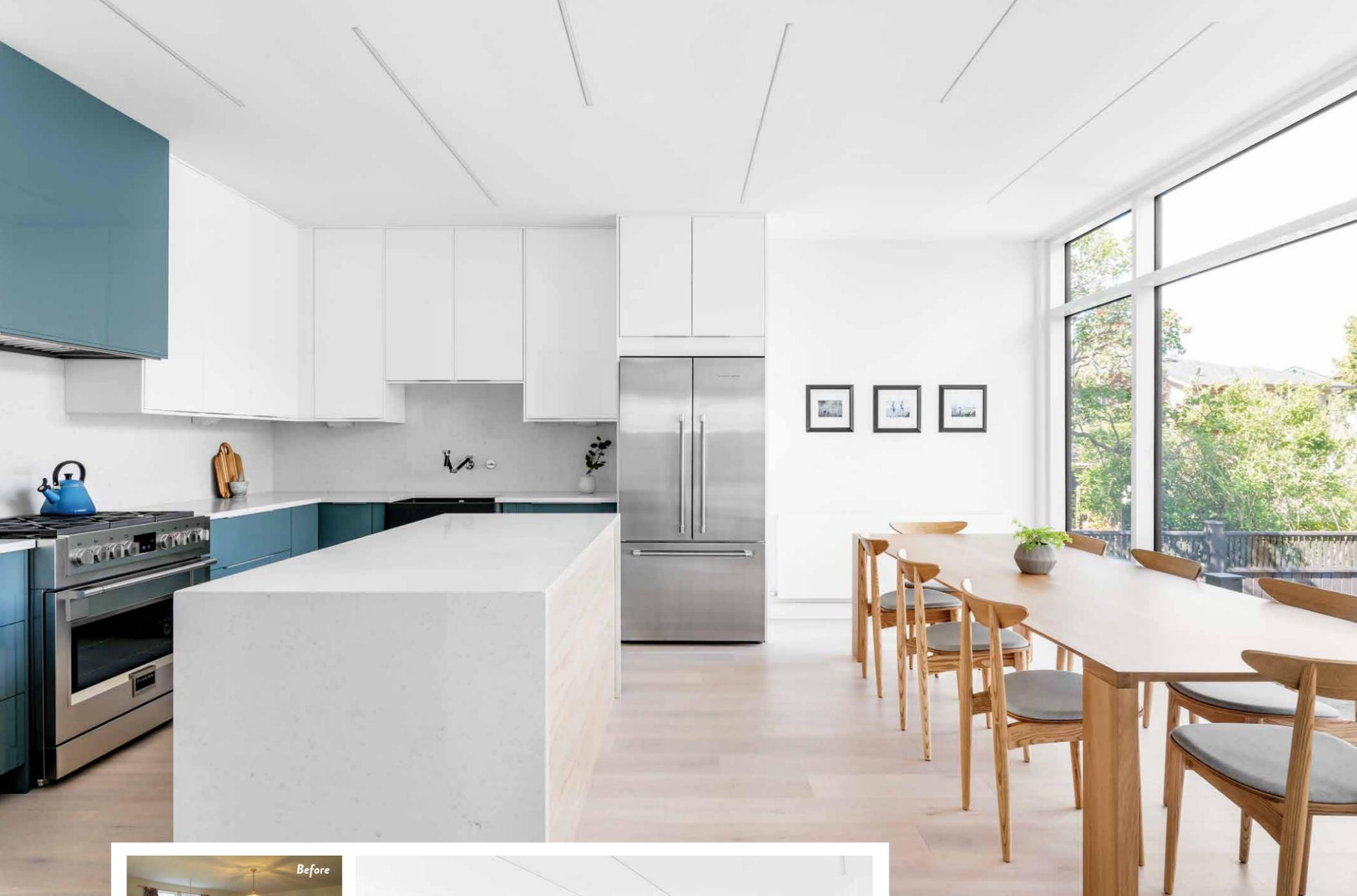
Before



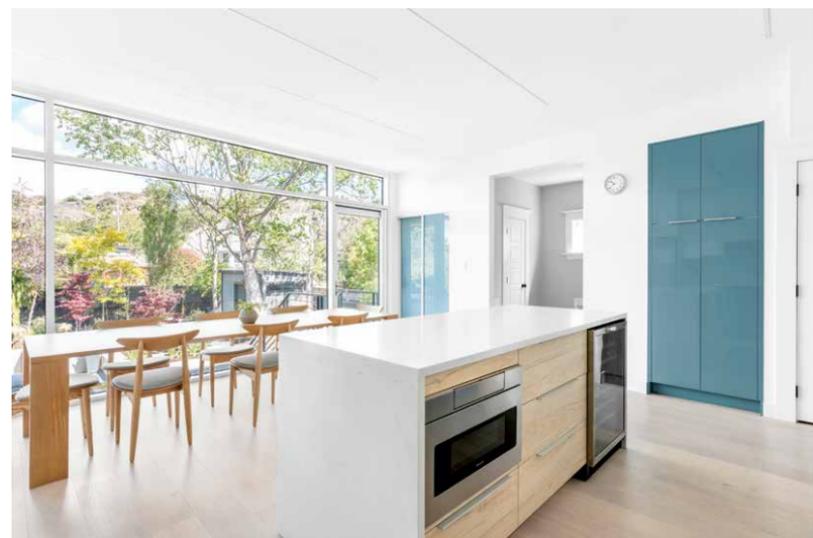
Builder and homeowner Alan MacMinn knew this renovation project would be a labour of love. His aim was to preserve as many historic elements of the house as he could while incorporating a modern, minimalist design. Overcoming the building’s sagging roofline and deterioration was one of the first tasks; another was obtaining custom-milled, double-drop Douglas fir siding that would match the original look of the 1911 structure.



\*Excluding before photos



The kitchen represents the biggest transformation of the home, as MacMinn turned a horseshoe cooking nook and dining room into an expansive minimalist space that opens onto the garden. Benjamin Moore Stonington Gray was used for the walls, with Benjamin Moore White Dove used for the trim. The cabinets are done in a high-gloss finish with white uppers and blue-green lowers, and the island is clad in a birch veneer, for contrast.



“I TOOK OUT THE BACK WALL BECAUSE, WHEN YOU ENTER THE KITCHEN, I WANT YOUR EYES TO CONTINUE STRAIGHT OUTSIDE INTO THE GARDEN.”



This would be no traditional restoration. With his own sense of convention and modernity, MacMinn incorporated a unique mix of Scandinavian minimalism that would earn him eight 2020 CARE Awards, including four Golds for Best Renovation/Restoration, Best Residential Interior under 2,500 sq. ft., Best Contemporary Bathroom and Best Heritage Project.

From heritage wainscoting and newel post details to the hidden TV cabinetry box on a motorized lift, historical and modern touches co-exist throughout the home. MacMinn brought in radiator heating, but livened the look with innovative Stelrad structures. The fusion appears through features like the kitchen’s oversized curtain wall windows, paired with the double-drop Douglas fir siding, custom milled in Chemainus to match the historic original.

While he kept most of the rooms intact and resisted an open-concept design, MacMinn transformed the pre-existing kitchen “nook” into a striking, modernist space complete with flush-mounted LED strip lighting (skipping traditional pendants), gas range, quartz countertops, high-gloss cabinetry and artistic features like the articulating Kohler Karbon faucet (mirroring the Canada Space Agency’s Canadarm).

“I took out the back wall because, when you enter the kitchen I want your eyes to continue straight outside into the garden,” says MacMinn. “The black stairs leading from the kitchen to the garden have an industrial vibe, but then you see this beautiful traditional siding. That partnership between old and new is everywhere.”

The commercial-grade curtain wall windows, installed by Allied Glass, was one of the most complex accomplishments of this renovation and required a team of eight to install. This could be considered the signature move that shifted the 1911 structure from traditional to modern, and now allows guests to dine at the Bensen Raddi European white oak table in full light, with beautiful views of the expansive garden.



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# “THE YARD WAS REALLY A BLANK SLATE.”

Another nod MacMinn received was a Silver CARE award for Best Outdoor Space, which he worked on with James Darnell, owner of Land Story Design. MacMinn noticed how spacious outdoor lots often stood unused in Victoria while, in Toronto, even small patios would be designed with elaborate features. He pulled on that inspiration, bringing in a porcelain patio, a contemporary water feature and an elegant fire element to the space.

“The yard was really a blank slate,” says Darnell. “I loved the way Alan was preserving history, but with this Euro-modern mix that blended perfectly. So, I thought, let’s do that with the landscape as well. The fire and water features are the dividing line between modern and heritage — where one world ends and the other begins.”

With MacMinn’s wife an avid gardner, the choice to keep the space evolving was an intentional one. The design made space for a pre-existing heritage birch and brought in plants like the Japanese wax-leaf privet, native serviceberry trees and soft Miscanthus grass for interest.



James Darnell, owner of Land Story Design, helped MacMinn evolve the backyard from an abandoned lot to an intentional green space — one MacMinn and his wife could enjoy year round. With a mix of heritage and native plant foliage, Darnell was able to create the perfect backdrop for outdoor hosting as well as a point of visual interest from the kitchen’s curtain wall windows.



With generous space for gathering outdoors, the garden landscape offers a balance of earth, air, fire and water. The Crossfire fire feature from Warming Trends complements the modern raised pond. Large-format porcelain tiles from Aristokrat in BlackStone give the patio a clean, minimalist look, while the industrial-style staircase and black and grey Ratana Vilano lounge furniture creates a modern vibe.





The restructured fireplace in the sitting room features the original tile surround in iridescent green, with new black granite inlay in front. The firebox itself, from Grate Fires in Georgia, was rebuilt with a replica coal basket. While it functions as a gas fireplace, the glass was removed for a more realistic experience. This maintains the room's historic feel amid the modern motifs.



Before

Kevin Zonneveld, owner of Zonneveld Contracting, says the home today is nearly unrecognizable from the structure they started with.

"When we began renovating, the sag from the rafters was so severe it was hard to even measure," says Zonneveld, who supported MacMinn with framing and structural work. "This project took some work, but we did it."

"I remember one moment when I was on my cell calling for lumber and realized the wood delivered to this house originally was probably delivered on horse and buggy. It's incredible to see where it's come to today."



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