

BY LAWRENCE KREISMAN
 PHOTOGRAPHED BY BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER

The Victoria Apartments

At a Queen Anne landmark, gracious living has always been in style

EVEN THE NAME speaks of another time and place. It connotes aristocracy, dignity and long-held traditions. The Victoria Apartments was, from its opening in 1921, the last word in accommodations for people giving up their homes for apartments or not wishing to take on the burden of a large family home — but also not willing to give up some of the luxuries.

At the Victoria, you could still be catered to. You could bring your maid, who would live in a room in the basement of the building. You

could leave your garbage in the little closet that opened onto the hallway and have it picked up discretely. The dairyman would deliver fresh milk and groceries in the same way, so tradesmen needn't disturb residents.

While some of the services have disappeared (the maids' rooms in the basement are now self-storage and apartments), the Victoria is still a prestige address. Distinguished architect John Graham Sr. designed the handsome brick building in a U-shape surrounding a great landscaped courtyard that opens up

to West Highland Drive. During renovation in 1988, the building survived a fire that destroyed or damaged much of the west wing. Owner Lorig Associates invested \$3.4 million to repair and restore the Victoria. Even small details were not overlooked, such as restoring hand-painted crests on each door.

In 1995, the rear of the site, facing West Comstock, was developed into the Victoria Town Homes, a group of 10 attached English-style town houses designed by the Mithun Partners. At the same time, the 54 units in >



An antique apothecary case that the owners purchased in Paris is the centerpiece of the new kitchen, where Art Deco lighting illuminates marble counter tops.

An alabaster fixture in the music room adjoining the living room glows above the grand piano. On the far wall is a six-part Chinese scholar's screen. A Chinese Nichols rug from the 1920s is one of a number of such rugs that cover hardwood floors.



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A French chest with ormolu and marble top greets visitors in the entrance foyer. Beyond in the living room are English leaded- and stained-glass cabinet doors with fabric backing.

the historic building were transformed into condominiums.

While they had a perfectly adequate home in Madison Park, Linda Cody and Richard Nelson were captivated by the historic apartment building — so much so that they bought one unit in April 2000 and the adjoining one in June. By combining the two, they found themselves with 4,000 square feet of space and marvelous natural light from three directions — not to mention south- and west-facing views of Elliott Bay.

Their primary challenge was opening up walls and combining the two nearly mirror-image units with some sense of order and without losing the character-defining features of the well-proportioned rooms. In fact, the units were slightly different. The west unit comprised two bedrooms, two baths, library, living, dining and kitchen. The east unit didn't have a library or a fireplace.

The couple maintained the living room with fireplace and dining room in

the west wing and combined that kitchen and one of the bedrooms into an enlarged kitchen and breakfast area. The back hall leads to a guest suite and a powder room.

The former east living room became the master bedroom, where 19th-century taste is reflected in Scalamandré wallpapers and a canopied Edwardian bed with upholstered headboard and sides.

The adjoining dining room became an elegant dressing room and the former kitchen is now a marble-faced bathroom. Off the hallway in this part of the unit are a room for Cody and a "quiet" room for Nelson, a senior test pilot for Boeing whose erratic schedule and jet lag makes a "re-entry" room a necessity.

Designer Turner Helton managed to merge the units by removing only two walls, one between the dining and living rooms and the other dividing the two entrance halls. These are now combined into a gracious foyer with matching >

NORTHWEST LIVING

crystal chandeliers. Where once there were closets serving the two apartments, now there is a barrel-vaulted central space with cove lighting.

Working within the guidelines of the condominium association, dealing with the structural limitations of the historic masonry structure and discovering a few hidden surprises during the renovation process provided challenges and opportunities for the owners and designer. Not the least of these was discovering that ceiling joists were inconsistently run in different directions from one location to another and that they were randomly spaced. Neatly laid-out plans for lighting quickly shifted to drilling holes in various locations to see where the lights might go.

Similar surprises awaited when it was time to plumb for the new bathroom. Because the east apartment was located above one of the building's entrance doors, the space they expected to find below the floors just wasn't there. They had to re-route plumbing through an adjacent bedroom, which was to be Cody's study. The built-out sections of the south and east walls that encase the plumbing line inspired a creative solution: custom bookcases and a ledge below the windows.

The owners had lived for some time in (and were accustomed to) sun-drenched Texas, and Helton was challenged to maximize the natural light and to augment it with a large amount of artificial lighting. East, south and west exposures already provide wonderful day-lit rooms.



The living room is an eclectic mix of traditional furniture, antiques and Oriental rugs. Views are to the south and west.

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Helton took his cues from the original arrangement of windows in the Victoria hallways abutting the stair halls. He incorporated a variety of interior leaded windows and French doors to have natural light from rooms filter into the hallways. By choosing opalescent, gold-toned and mirrored glass for various purposes, his goal of providing light while maintaining privacy has been achieved. He also tackled what had been long and monotonous hallways by breaking them up with portals crowned with leaded glass transoms.

Helton's talents in salvaging leaded- and stained-glass doors and finding appropriate period lighting and hardware show off in every room. Beautiful crested stained-glass doors have been added to a cabinet in the living room. Original solid doors were doctored with leaded-glass inserts and reused.

The various rooms are tied together with a warm color palette ranging from yellows and mustards to sage and olive greens.

"I am not interested in something modern, clean and sterile," says Cody, a pharmacist. "It reminds me of hospitals where I have worked." ☐

Lawrence Kreisman is program director for Historic Seattle. He serves on the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board and is author of "Made to Last: Historic Preservation in Seattle and King County."

Viewpoints on Seattle

The Victoria Apartments will be featured in an hour-long Focus tour May 17, part of the 2001 Viewpoints walking-tour program of the Seattle Architectural Foundation. Other Focus tours will look at Harbor Steps in Seattle, Ballard High School, Millennium Tower, the Microsoft Conference Center, REI headquarters, University of Washington Fisheries and Ocean Sciences Building and the Seaboard Building in Seattle. The program also includes three-hour Explore tours of Belltown, Ballard, Columbia City, Fremont, Capitol Hill, downtown Bellevue, Ravenna bungalows and the rehabilitation of Sam Israel's property holdings in Pioneer Square. Viewpoints also plans to offer a new series of 1½-to-2-hour weekly tours in downtown Seattle. For information and a program brochure: 206-667-9186 or www.seattlearchitectural.org.

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