

# THIS OLD HOUSE

## COUPLE AT HOME WITH OLD NEW ENGLAND FLAVOR

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Photos by Daria Bishop, for the Free Press

**W**hile working in Europe several years ago, Paul Dandurand fell in love with the solid yet elegant lines of the continent's architecture. It reawakened fond memories of his childhood growing up in Graniteville, a town close to Vermont's granite capital of Barre.

So it's not remarkable that when it came to finding a new home, Dandurand chose a house of stone. Nor is it surprising to discover that the house is almost 200 years old. Yet what makes walking into the house an incredible experience is the sense of having wandered into an old Dutch masterpiece.

From the 2-foot wide window embrasures and worn brick fireplaces to the bright yet sparsely furnished interiors, the 1815 South Burlington property is a walk into the past. And this suits Dandurand and his wife, concert pianist Annemieke Spoelstra, just perfectly.

"I've always had an interest in antique houses. I grew up in an old house," Dandurand said.

"When I was a child, I think I was drawn to modern houses and contemporary houses, but over the years my taste changed," Dandurand said. "All the houses you see today could be any place in America: the suburbs of Chicago or the Midwest, or Texas. But I think this house speaks more of New England."

The couple recognized this quality in the house as soon as they found it.

After buying it, they set about rehabilitating it with the help of Chris Quinn of Red House Inc. of Burlington. Their goal was to restore the



Deep window wells throughout the home accommodate the 2-foot-thick stone exterior and insulation added during the renovation project. The windows were painstakingly restored or reproduced to their original look.





Annemieke Spoelstra, a professional pianist, plays an Ibach grand piano (above) shipped from her native Holland. The music room is spacious enough for her intimate piano recitals. The vanity top in the basement bathroom (right) was made by the builder, Chris Quinn of Red House Inc., from antique wood salvaged from the property. A basement hearth (below) with a baking oven and original irons might once have been used as a summer kitchen. The internal chambers were built in a spiral to incorporate all five of the fireplaces on two levels. The home's original ceiling beam work was preserved during renovation.



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home's historic quality while incorporating modern elements to enhance its livability. Their success can be judged not only by the approval of the State Historic Preservation Office but also by the atmosphere of old grace blended with modern style.

One of the unique characteristics of the house is its chimney, a massive structure at the heart of the home constructed from 21,000 bricks made from clay found on the property. The central flue serves five fireplaces, including two that were used for cooking with original brick baking ovens, one in the basement and the other in the dining room.

The dining has a long wooden table made from old boards dominating the floor space in front of the fireplace. The floor has been worn into a dip on one side of the hearth; a deep nick cut into the fireplace brickwork bears witness to the knives regularly sharpened there. It's a fireplace that clearly played a central role in family life. With the restoration its usefulness has been re-instated: An original iron crane in the dining room hearth allows the couple to hook a kettle or cooking pot over wintertime fires, and they have experimented with an iron popcorn basket. Other original accoutrements for hearth cooking, including toasting forks, rest in one corner of the hearth, ready for use.

### Wood gold

The modern kitchen is a small room off the family room. While it boasts a contemporary gas cooking range, extractor hood and fridge-freezer in stainless steel, the wood finishes and old porcelain sink give the kitchen an older look.

"The whole kitchen is made from wood from the barns," said Dandurand, pointing out wrought iron handles and hinges that the couple carefully selected to enhance the feel of a traditional room.

The wood that the Red House crew stored in the barns was salvaged from the basement and second floor of the house, where it had been used as interior wall framing. Birdseye Building Co. used the wood to craft all the kitchen cabinets, while Red House did the bathroom vanities. The quantity and quality of the wood in the house was another huge bonus for the couple. While the home's massive 2-foot-thick walls were constructed from stone found on the site, all the floors, walls and other woodwork were built from hemlock harvested on the property and milled into planks 2.5 inches thick, some up to 26 inches wide. When the couple bought the property much of the wood's original beauty was hidden.

"So we stripped the paint off and found gold underneath," said Dandurand, indicating the refinished wood floors that gleam throughout the house.

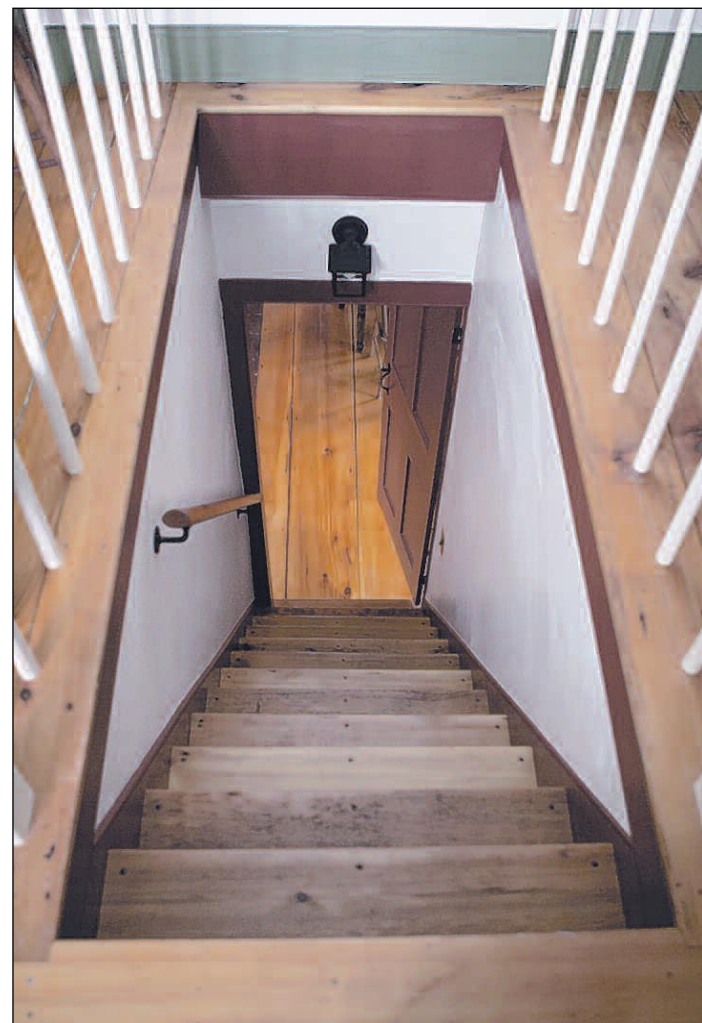
The walls were also given a new treatment: Master plasterers Lee Vercherau and his father, Wilfred, finished them with tinted plaster. Then they were neatly outlined with chair rails and baseboards in strong Colonial colors — barn red, mustard yellow, deep blue and earth green. The couple has completed each room with a few original paintings, including intricate ink drawings of architecture by Spoelstra's father, Titus Spoelstra, and several icons by her mother, artist Jenny van Harten. This style enhances the clean, uncluttered look of the sparsely furnished rooms.

"I don't think we want to have much else," Dandurand said.

### Special spaces

Besides the family room, kitchen and guest bathroom, the first floor has two large reception rooms, each with its own fireplace. One serves as a living room; the other is Spoelstra's music area, where she teaches, hosts performances and practices for concerts on the Ibach grand piano that she shipped from her native Holland on mov-





Punky, one of two family cats, walks into the dining room. The original wide-planked hemlock floor was restored and finished with Danish oil. The color scheme was inspired by an early 19th-century style.



The home's original staircase (top) connecting the upper level to the main floor was rebuilt to provide safety and comfort. The stair treads were salvaged from the building to replicate an early staircase pattern. Paul Dandurand and Annemieke Spoelstra's 1815 stone farm house (above) in South Burlington; a weathered light fixture (right) decorates the front entrance.

ing to Vermont. In between these two rooms (the house's original entry), Red House fashioned a staircase using salvaged hemlock. It spirals above the back hump of the huge brick chimney, leading into a hallway that accessed the second floor master bedroom, bathroom and guest rooms.

The basement was completely reconstructed and given a new cement slab base that incorporates radiant floor heating, making the 1,200 square feet useful living space. The room features a second huge cooking fireplace and baking oven that was probably used originally as the summer kitchen. To one side of this is a beautifully finished guest bedroom, while behind and beyond the chimney is a large area that Dandurand uses as his home office. The couple plans to hang photographs on the wall that runs the length of the basement.

The basement is usable space because Red House de-

signed heating and ventilation systems that keep the house dry and warm using a combination of radiant floor heating, original style radiators and an air exchange system that helps keep the fires going in the winter without drawing in drafts. They have retained the original windows, but to improve their insulation, Red House designed a system of interior storm windows, which match the original windows and can be removed in warm weather.

The couple is completely enamored of the house's charm and grace, even though the home has needed so much work.

"It's just like restoring a painting, only bigger," Spoelstra said.

"It has a friendly feel to it. The builders put a lot of heart and soul into it. You can tell how they cared about their work," Dandurand said, pondering on what he likes most about his home. "I feel like I'm just a caretaker. Hopefully, we're doing our part to help it along."