

# A venerable mansion goes under the knife



**Built in 1929 for a department store magnate, the Glenedgar was a grand old home in need of grand renovation, JANE GADD writes**

**T**he Glenedgar always was, and always will be, a trophy house. But the Rosedale landmark shines differently now.

When the Tudor-themed mansion built at 136 Glen Rd. in 1929 for Simpsons department store magnate Charles Luther Burton was snapped up last year by building company Fairmont Properties Ltd., the grand old dame came under the knife for a major facelift.

Today's trophy-hunters are not satisfied with historical cachet alone -- they crave light (180 pot lights in this case). They want open spaces, a spot for their 100-inch TV screen, and inch-thick bundles of high-tech wiring in the walls so the home can be managed by remote control.

When the Glenedgar went on the market in 2005, after the death of Mr. Burton's second wife, Norma Joyce Burton, the interior had barely been touched. The upside was that its extensive oak and mahogany panelling was of museum quality, and the unchanged layout of grand principal rooms beneath a warren of servants' quarters spoke eloquently of the social history of its time. The downside was that the plaster was cracking, the old carpeting was shabby, the hardwood was rotting, the kitchen was poky, and the hot-water radiator heating system was out of fashion.

When the home was listed for \$3.45-million in November, 2005, sales agent James Warren said "it needs someone who's going to come in and recreate a moment in time and love it the way it is."

As it happened, Fairmont, which specializes in updating and reselling eminent homes in Toronto's old-money neighbourhoods, bought the Glenedgar in June, 2006. Through holding company TYAC Holdings Ltd., it paid \$2.85-million.

In the past nine months, Fairmont has poured more than \$3-million into a renovation that balances historical accuracy with modern market demands for light, space, technological wizardry and creature comforts.

Fairmont owner John Emery says the company's strength is making new construction look like old and old construction look like new.

"The reality is Rosedale is now old," Mr. Emery says. "It's time to take the old buggy in and reupholster it and give it a new set of wheels because if you don't, it's headed for the junkyard." Revamping heritage homes is Mr. Emery's second career.

He began it two decades ago, after leaving a first career in high-rise and shopping-mall development that included projects from the Toronto Dominion Centre to the Scarborough Town Centre.

He had accumulated a number of Rosedale mansions and converted them into investment apartments, but the market was changing -- skyrocketing executive salaries and perks were creating an unprecedented demand for trophy homes, and a growing pool of buyers who could afford to pay millions.

The Glenedgar is the highest-quality home of the scores he has worked with so far, Mr. Emery says. "Mr. Burton did not spare any expense at all. He put in things that were revolutionary for his time." They include BX-cable wiring instead of the ubiquitous knob-and-tube, insulation made from sheets of cork, and a magnificent graduated slate roof.

The roof will be retained, but not the wiring or insulation.

Mr. Emery's team put in new insulation, and new wiring for all the pot lights and electronic bells and whistles, including a "smart house" system that controls lighting, heat and security cameras, and can be operated remotely.

That meant going into all the walls, which was not a problem where they had been demolished and new ones built to reconfigure rooms, but was quite a challenge with the original walls.

"You have to cut holes and fish the wire through," Mr. Emery says. "In a panelled room, you really take a deep breath. You don't want to disturb the panelling if you can possibly help it." Sometimes you can't help it.

Another major challenge was what to do with the home's imposing main hall, with its towering reverse staircase lined in rich oak panelling with linen-fold details.

"It was dark," Mr. Emery says. "If someone walks in and sees it's dark, they'll say it's fascinating -- but they won't buy it."

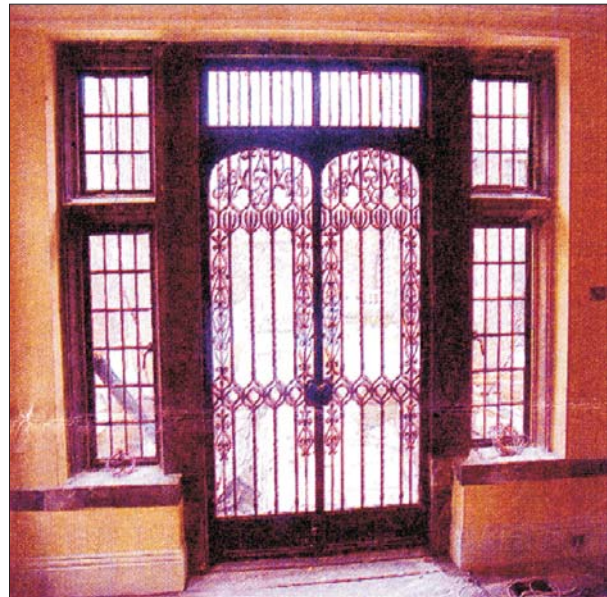
To preserve most of the panelling but add some light, Mr. Emery's team settled on removing the oak from the first-floor hall ceiling and replacing it with drywall and pot lights.

Site foreman Scott McPherson said there was a lot of debate about the changes, "but the ceiling felt like it was right down on your head."

Mr. Burton had wanted a castle theme in the main hall, and the doorways leading from it had a unique pointed archway design. These have been preserved; in fact, an extra one has been replicated to provide a second passageway to the rear of the house.

Also preserved are the original banisters with their barley-twist spindles and rose-emblazoned Tudor newel posts.

A panelled radiator covering beneath a leaded-window bay halfway up the stairs has been taken out (the hot-water heating system has been converted to forced air) but the panelling will be



TIBOR KOLLEY/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

**One of the mansion's beautiful features is the pair of arched glass doors with ornamental iron grilles.**

replicated "stick by stick," Mr. Emery says

On the second floor of the stairwell, a dark, bumpy rice-paper wall covering was stripped off and replaced with drywall, white paint and an ornamental cornice that echoes the dentil pattern on the edge of the panelling. The rice paper was a period detail rather than a historical feature, Mr. Emery says, and it has no appeal now.

In the 30-foot dining room, magnificent floor-to-ceiling mahogany panelling has been preserved, though there's one ugly little cutout for an electrical box right underneath a carved detail of a cherub that will have to be plugged.

The ceiling is drywall, spotted liberally with pot lights.

In the living room, plaster walls have been replaced by drywall, and new floral cornice mouldings imitate the old ones. A grand fireplace surrounded with carved limestone from Bath, England, remains.

In the conservatory, a stunning checkerboard floor of black and grey marble tiles now has holes along the edges for forced-air heat vents. Mr. McPherson says some of the holes were already there for radiator pipes, and the damage was minimal.

A pair of beautiful arched glass doors with ornamental iron grilles, and the original row of deep leaded windows along one side have been retained.

The kitchen, which was barely more than a scullery and pantry -- the domain of servants -- has been enlarged to gourmet size by knocking down the pantry wall and adding a



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OF FAIRMONT PROPERTIES LTD.

small extension on the back of the house.

On the second floor, space has been reconfigured to provide three large bedrooms, each with its own bathroom, and a library from which an open staircase leads up to the third floor.

This staircase used to be enclosed, and was strictly for the servants. It led to a warren of bedrooms where staff used to sleep, but no trace of the rooms remains now. Instead there are two newly framed bedrooms opening on to a common area. The third level would serve well as an in-law suite.

In the extensively remodelled basement, the home's family history has been erased. What used to be a large common space with a raised stage at one end (you could imagine children putting on pantomimes at Christmas) is now a set of drywalled rooms offering standard luxury amenities -- a wine cellar, a media room with a 100-inch roll-down TV screen.

The home has dozens of leaded windows, almost all of them original. To improve draft exclusion, Mr. Emery's team has added interior storm

# 'These things cost a staggering amount to fix up'



PHOTOS BY THE HAWK EYE FOR GLOBE AND MAIL  
 Far left top, wood carving in the dining room. Left, the original rose-embazoned Tudor newel posts. Above, the rear coach house undergoing repairs. Below, the open staircase that leads to the third floor from the second-storey library.



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windows, but that means most of them now can't be opened, Mr. McPherson says.

Where new windows have been added (mainly on the third floor), they are not "true divided" leaded windows, but have thin lead strips encased in thermo-pane glass -- an idea borrowed from the Royal Ontario Museum's makeover.

"From outside you can't see the difference," Mr. McPherson says.

The home's original quarter-cut oak flooring has been kept where possible, and when it wasn't has been replicated

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FAIRMONT OWNER JOHN EMERY

with closely matching wood.

The original brick hearths of the home's six fireplaces have been maintained but all but two have been converted to gas.

There are few original chandeliers or light fixtures, and Mr. Emery assumes they were taken out before he got there.

"We weren't privy to many lights," he says.

"I don't think there were many anyway. They liked gloom."

The Glenedgar is expected to be ready for resale in April, and Mr. Emery says

the price tag will be well in excess of \$8-million.

"This business is not always profitable," he notes, however. "These things cost a staggering amount to fix up."

He aims for a 10-per-cent profit when all the salaries, trades and suppliers have been paid.

"That's not much when you think Starbucks makes 20 to 30 per cent, and big investment companies expect 20 per cent."

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