

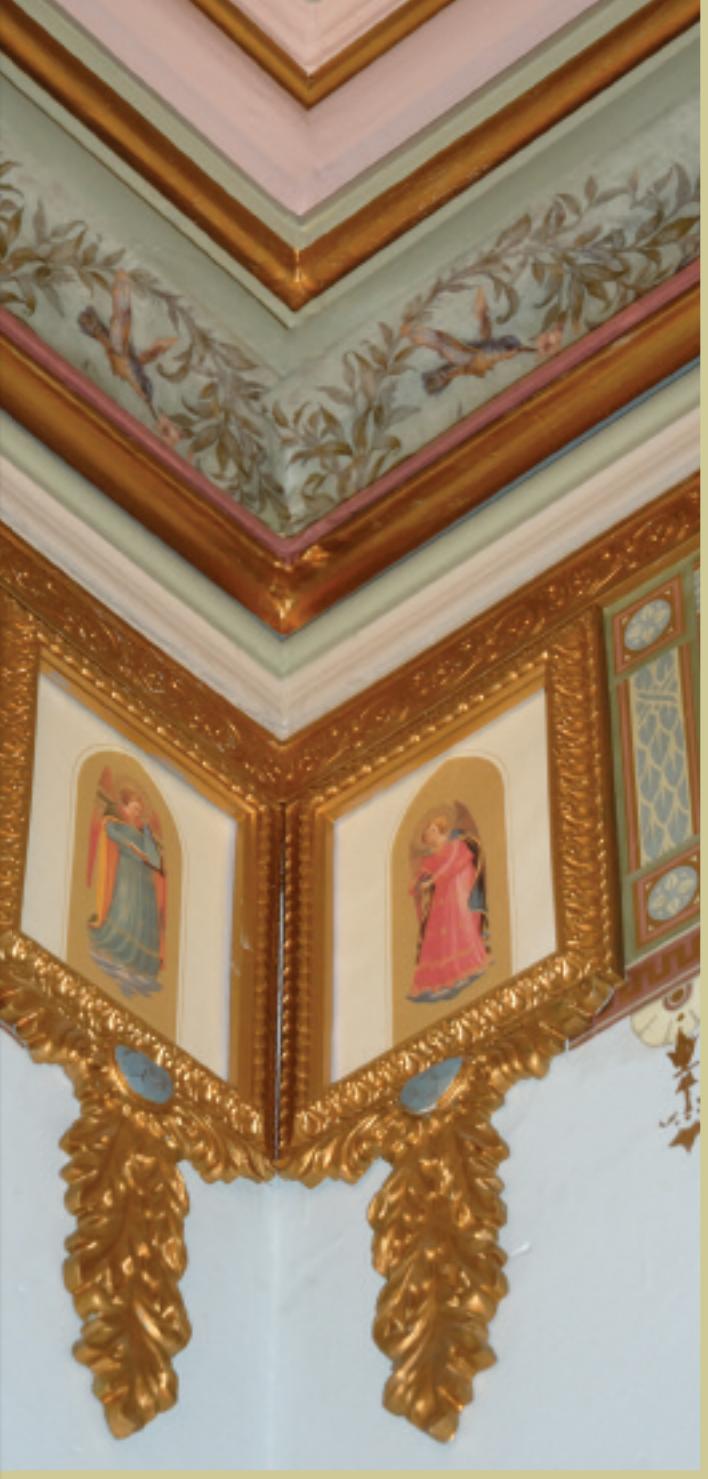
Hands-On Victorian

Wallpaper and border choices were key to remaking the Stegmaier Mansion.

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“I TRY TO MAKE THE BORDER THE DICTATING DESIGN ELEMENT OF THE ROOM UPON WHICH EVERYTHING ELSE EVOLVES, I.E., COMPLEMENTARY AND ACCENT COLORS, AND WALLPAPER ENRICHMENTS. I SPEND THE LION’S SHARE OF THE BUDGET ON THIS MAIN BORDER ELEMENT.”

—JOE MATTEO



The piano is not a prop or a decorative piece of furniture since the room also doubles as a music room. Among his other talents, Joe is an accomplished, professional pianist and will often play for his guests.



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ome architectural and design visionaries have radar for finding and rescuing unique historic properties. Once these homes are discovered, these intrepid restorers see beyond the dilapidated structure, chipped paint, sagging roof and sills, leaks, tears and crookedness. They simply look at the bones of the old house and visualize it as it stood in its heyday.

These restoration artists pluck the possibilities of the old buildings from disrepair and instinctively know what it will take to bring it back to its prime. They are immune to dissuasion, unfazed by the myriad tasks necessary in restoration and the seemingly endless labor and time-intensive projects that try the patience—to say nothing of stressing finances up to and beyond budgetary constraints.

First, they must restore (or sometimes create) the physical plant. Heating, cooling, electricity, windows, floors and roof are painstakingly redone and updated for suitable human habitation. For anyone who has ever built a new house with all new materials and found that task a challenge has probably never experienced the frustration of reworking antique materials. However, it is rare that the historical architect doing this has not found it worthwhile and satisfying in its completion.

For many, the fun really begins once the physical restoration is far enough along to begin to think about paint colors, wallpaper patterns, furnishings and art. Which brand or style of wallpaper, molding, trim and window treatment to use are normally the big questions. Sometimes, there is the rare artistic person who sees beyond those choices, opting for an even more creative route and, in doing so, branding the old house as their own.

One man who took a restoration to artistic heights is Joe Matteo, owner and restorer of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania's Frederick Stegmaier Mansion. When he bought the then-decrepit mansion, Matteo knew that once he fixed it up he would share it. So, now the

Opposite page: In the ladies' parlor, in the corner by the ceiling are some of Matteo's individual designs of decoupage wallpaper borders.



The Greek Key border is from Bradbury and Bradbury's Neo-Grec Roomset in Jasper Green. The floral accent is trimmed from a border Matteo found at Home Depot on a close-out sale. He added it to soften the overall look of the ceiling and give it a more feminine look. The relief in the center was found at a local craft store along with the rondelet frames. Matteo gilded them before attaching them to the ceiling. The prints of Putti, depicting the arts were glued to the ceiling, and then a protective coat of varnish was added. The stenciling was done by hand, and all the patterns were cut from original designs found in a Victorian-period stencil book.



The ceiling fill paper above is vintage stock found on eBay. The corner piece is a cutout of Venus trimmed from a spool of Italian border called The Birth of Venus, also found on eBay, and overlaid on a cutout from Waterhouse Wall Hangings, Inc. The dark burgundy stripe is trimmed from a roll of wallpaper purchased from Lowe's on a closeout sale. The corner block is made by overlaying a Bradbury and Bradbury Ivy Block Enrichment from the Anglo Japanese Roomset and trimmed down to form the cross pattern. The tailpieces are trimmed from the Waterhouse Wall Hangings border. The actual ceiling border was a garland pattern ordered online from a closeout sale, and the silver floral enrichment paper was ordered at Lowe's from a wallpaper sample book. The small aqua enrichment inset was trimmed from a vintage roll of wallpaper found at a local hardware store for \$3.

mansion is a bed-and-breakfast where his guests enjoy hospitality—as generous as the design of his rooms. Guests frequently ask him about his work on Stegmaier, and he is happy to share that story. A lifelong devotee of all things Victorian, Matteo knows that the best part of Victorian decorating is the “wow” factor. The star element in any Victorian room is drama, and Matteo instinctively knows how to create it.

Each of the rooms at the Frederick Stegmaier Mansion has been given the Joe Matteo treatment. Long before any paint was even purchased, he gave each space a great deal of thought.

Matteo describes his design approach: “First I decide what kind of overall look I want to achieve and then choose the main element on which to build the rest of the room. Usually,

I decide on the main color first and then pick the wall border or frieze that best fits that selection. I try to make the border the dictating design element of the room upon which everything else evolves, i.e., complementary and accent colors, and wallpaper enrichments. I spend the lion's share of the budget on this main border element.”

Once this major design decision is made, Matteo says, “I then choose a wall fill that is economical and complements the

Opposite: Myriad architectural nooks and crannies are among the features that make Victorian design so unique and whimsical. Here, in the ladies' parlor, Matteo created such an area using portieres and making the most of the historical stained glass windows already incorporated in the house. One can picture a musician wandering into this quiet spot to play some ethereal chords on a lute or violin.



The library's muted paper is the perfect backdrop to the room's windows and décor.



So much of the drama of a historic Victorian home is the layout of the floor plan. At the Stegmaier Mansion, one enters the wide hall with its magnificent stairway. But stepping further into the house, the ladies' parlor appears through portieres on the right, and the gentlemen's parlor (see *Victorian Homes*, February 2010) appears on the left.

border. Wallpaper closeout stores, eBay and Web sites are excellent sources.” Matteo suggests that when you shop for the fill-in material, you bring or have on hand at the computer a sample of the main border or frieze.

As for the ceiling, depending on budget and individual taste it can be painted a color that works with that main design element. He also recommends that when deciding on a ceiling enhancement you choose one that is nondirectional.

Matteo takes it a step further, saying, “I like to personalize my designs by cutting out certain elements and overlaying them in decoupage manner; this creates a custom look that brings the whole room together.”

Not only does his reinventing wallpapers and borders advance the Victorian design style by making rooms over-the-top luxurious and lush, it stretches the design budget by extending just a bit of high-end, expensive border to go a very long way.

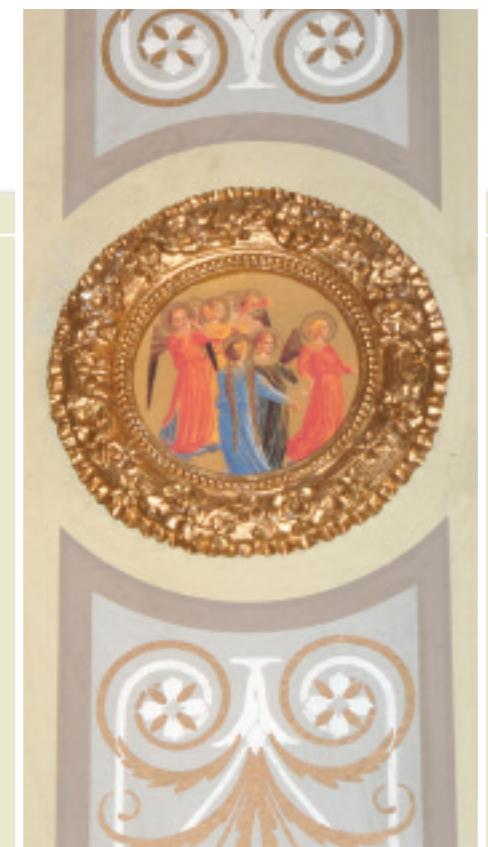
Matteo says he has had the best results from Bradbury and Bradbury papers as well as Victorian Collectibles Ltd.’s “The



The border above was bought on a closeout from a local wallpaper supply house for \$8. The Palmetto corner fan and Jena corner block are from Mason and Wolf Wallpaper and based on patterns from 19th-century designer Christopher Dresser. The cartouche is a framed convex oil on board, one of four found at the Brimfield Antique Show in Brimfield, Massachusetts. The wings and tailpiece flanking the cartouche are cutouts trimmed from the main ceiling border.

Brillion Collection” wallpapers. He cites these as lending themselves to picking a main frieze with ample elements to cut out and lay over walls or to enhance other borders. He suggests that one purchase enough border material to both apply to walls and to use as a cutout base.

For grandly passionate Victorian decorators—even those who don’t own a historic house—creative, exquisite design is doable, even on a budget. Think out of the box, beyond the bolt and wallpaper roll. Most of all, taking some cues from Joe Matteo, you can make Victorian decorating your own work of art. ☺



This detail is Bradbury and Bradbury’s Italianate Border in Jasper from its Neo-Classical Roomset. The centerpiece on the Bradbury paper is blank but circular in design, which inspired Matteo to add small prints of angels playing musical instruments since the Ladies’ Parlor doubles as the Music Room. The prints are the work of Renaissance artist Fra Angelico and are framed in small plaster rondelet frames Matteo found at a local craft store. The prints were glued over the Bradbury paper and then varnished. Next, the plaster rondelets were gilded and added over the Fra Angelico prints.

To book your stay at the Stegmaier Mansion, call Joseph Matteo, proprietor, at (570) 823-9372, or visit the Web site at www.StegmaierMansion.com. The mansion is located at 304 South Franklin Street, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18702.