

Ask Your House What It Wants Done Or First Do No Harm

By Allen Hazard and Janet O’Dea

Many new homeowners who never owned an old house before ask the same questions that my wife and I did after moving into our bungalow several years ago. Now what? How do I do this and how do I do that? Sometimes it can seem overwhelming when you first move into an 80-100 year old house.

The first thing you should do is nothing, *like a physician treating an old but healthy patient; follow the Hippocratic oath ...*”first do no harm.” You have probably heard this before, live in your house for at least one year before you do anything. Get to know the house, you will be amazed by how much will be revealed to you through everyday living and how much you will change your mind. So, go ahead, write down some notes about your initial plans and put them in the back of your calendar. My guess is that you would do most any project substantially different than what you initially planned if you hold off during this first year.

The plans that I gladly threw away involved painting the battered columns of my California Craftsman three different colors. While that may be cool for a Victorian, it is definitely not appropriate for a bungalow. Thank goodness, I didn’t do it. Instead, we restored the pulleys in all of our double hung windows so that we could use them and made other non-destructive restorations. Of course, repairs to the roof or structural systems or such as shoring up the foundation, while not sexy are important and if necessary should not have to wait the first year while you are getting to know your old home. But avoid the temptation to change everything that has been in place for the last 80-100 years and start with those other basic, yet important items – keep the bones of the house in original condition. Save those sexy upgrades for after your first year and you will be glad that you waited.

My wife and I, with the residents in Mission Hills, submitted the first residents sponsored/completed historic district to the City of San Diego. Our neighbor, Richard Jacobs spearheaded researching guidelines used by cities across California and across the nation. The guidelines that we finally produced provide examples on how you should maintain the appearance of an older home within the Mission Hills historic district but are relevant to most anywhere. You can review these guidelines by clicking this link:

<http://sohosandiego.org/histdistricts/mhguidelines.pdf> and the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation guidelines (which are the national guidelines that professionals refer to for restoration of old buildings) by clicking this link:

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/rhb/index.htm>

Allen Hazard and his wife, Janet O’Dea live in a historically designated bungalow in Mission Hills and have just launched a new online resource for antiques and fine reproductions of the early 20th century called Hazard Decorative Arts. www.HazArts.com