

Bell-pulls that once summoned the maid to her mistress and speaking tubes through which the former received instructions for coffee or tea while the latter entertained visitors in the drawing room have disappeared over the decades from this late 19th century building in Belleville.

Except for a few, the Italian black marble fireplaces that were once featured on each floor of the original six three-storey luxury apartments at Bellevue Terrace on 10 Patterson St., too, have been discarded over time. In fact, if he were still alive today, Isaac B. Graham, a 19th century Belleville Front Street clothier, would have been truly amazed at the changes that had taken place inside the building that he had constructed a century and a quarter ago.

Originally called Graham Terrace, Graham had this historical limestone and brick structure built in 1876 at a time when row housing was an unusual sight in Ontario. A builder/architect by the name of James A. Davis carried out the construction. The structure was divided into six attached luxurious townhouses that only the rich and those with stature in the community such as doctors and businessmen could afford. After all they had running hot and cold water in the bathrooms — a rare luxury then in this community.

Outside, the building's eye-catching features included the sculptural quoins, the window hoods, the eave brackets, the scroll design of the frieze and the elaborately detailed porches. Portions of the exterior were done in cement, and the interiors in heavy plaster and cornices, which may still be seen today in some units. Inside, it exhibited opulence in the manner of fashionable Victorian traditions — a marble fireplace etched

and a coal stove which were of the three floors while heavy cornices decorated the ornamentings. The original design had the room divided by an arch supported by Corinthian pillars.

Obviously, such a home needed a complete picture. Since the and the dining room were in the front, the drawing and the sewing room on main floor, bedrooms and a room on top floor, bell-pulls and speaking tubes were necessary to call discreetly.

129; Bellevue Terrace was converted into 18 apartments. In 2000, it was converted into condominiums consisting of one bedroom and a bath. Today, the kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, plumbing, and insulation inside the condominiums have all been upgraded.

"When we moved in there was no fire-layer of wall had already been etched between the original wall and our interiors. The brick was not exposed anymore. I've since built a mantle on that location", says David Grills who with his wife bought one of the newly converted condominiums in February 2001. The Grills' condominium is a one level two-bedroom unit and he thinks that it is located where the kitchen originally used to be.

"The windows are wonderful from the inside. They are nice, deep bay windows. The actual functioning part of the window is newer. They have a rounded top and may be easily 6 feet tall while the ceilings are about 10 to 11 feet tall. The ceilings are pretty plain but we still have light fixtures from that era," he says.

Since 1980, this building has been designated as a heritage home and the unit owners are not permitted to make changes to the facade but can create the interior that they like as long as they do not make structural changes, says Grills.

"Last summer I pulled off the carpet and found the original oak-wood floor. The unit's where the kitchen used to be. We had the floor done in clear finish to retain the original colour. There are burn marks where the fire place used to be," he notes.

Reflecting on their decision to buy their condominium home almost three years ago, he says:

"There's just nothing like it in Belleville or anywhere near here. My wife was more motivated than I was because of the building's character value. I came around later. My favourite part is the exterior. It's just so different from others."

The structure was owned by the Graham family until it was sold to David Hurst in 1979. The renovations that Hurst started inside the building in the early '90s were completed by an engineer from Toronto about six years ago, says Colleen Finkle, who has also owned a condominium at the Terrace for the past two years.

What is the view from up there on the hill like?

Grill says: "We can see the bay bridge, the city hall from here. We can almost see the Farmers' Market too. Every summer we watched the fireworks from where we live. About 20 or 30 people — owners and their friends would gather at the front of the building and watch the fireworks."

A perfect view which suited the Grills and their two — a 3-year-old and an 11-month-old — children just fine.

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P. 02