

Williamson A.M.

By Nancy Mueller

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FRANKLIN — A completely reconstructed historic cottage on Boyd Mill Avenue is almost finished and ready to be sold, much to the relief of the developer who was caught in a buzz saw of public criticism when his crews tore down the original home in 2006.

Bernie Butler and his D9 Development Co. will have a two-day open house this weekend at 415 Boyd Mill Ave. to publicly unveil the finished product. The renovation incorporates a meticulous re-creation of the original elevation, attention to period detailing inside and an addition that conforms with the standards of Franklin's historic overlay district.

"We have taken great care and spent more on it than we'll ever make back," Butler said last week as crews were putting in their finishing touches. "I'll probably lose \$200,000 on it. But if I've got to lose \$200,000 to make that house fantastic, I'll lose it," he declared.

Butler's company is invested in Franklin, particularly downtown Franklin. D9 Development is immersed in the final stages of building and marketing The Brownstones at First Avenue and Church Street, a collection of 26 luxury town homes with 19th-century architecture. The firm also is developing a mixed-use project at 131 Third Ave. N. that will combine office and residential condos.

PROJECT TAKES DETOUR

The Boyd Mill house was expected to be a small side project that Butler originally took on to help a friend launch a remodeling business. Instead, it turned into a learning experience.

In the early spring of 2006, Butler sent a crew to remove and raise the roof of the original house, having received permission from the city to do that. Then, he said, a member of the crew phoned him to ask what they should do about all of the rotten wood they were finding. Butler told them to discard it.

By the time they finished, most of the house, which was about 1,500 square feet, was gone.

"It was all rotten," Butler recalled, citing termite and water damage. "The house was just blighted."

The deconstruction came to the attention of the Historic Zoning Commission and Butler was hit with a stop-work order. Then some time was spent devising a plan for the historical reconstruction, but still with the addition.

Looking back, Butler compares what he went through to make this project right to "the parting of the Red Sea."

"The house didn't have a name, it didn't have an original name. It was 100 years old, so they called it historic, but there was very little about it that was historically of value," he said. "It was a kit house, built from a kit. There are several of them in downtown Franklin. It was historic because it was in that historic overlay district.

"The Historic Zoning Commission forces anything in that district to be scrutinized with a magnifying glass, and in my opinion, it's a good thing. The unfortunate thing is...just because it's 100 years old doesn't mean it needs to be saved."

After getting into a negative situation with the commission, Butler was determined to write a positive ending to the story.

“I wanted anybody who walked by that house or who rode by that house to look at it and say ‘Wow,’“ he said.

Now, almost two years later, the new 415 Boyd Mill Ave. home is ready for its close-up.

COTTAGE TRIPLES IN SIZE

People who come to the open house will notice that the term “cottage” or even “small house” no longer applies. Although the house maintains its cottage face out front, the 4,681 square feet is three times more than what was built in 1898.

There’s no doubt that W.L. Johnston, who built the original house, would be flabbergasted by the whole thing.

What would he think of the spacious, new kitchen, with its maple cabinets, granite countertops, Sub-Zero refrigerator, Wolf stove, oven and warming drawer and GE Monogram Advantium microwave? Or the central vacuum system? Surely he would be impressed with the adjoining family room with the cable-ready TV hookups over the fireplace with its slate hearth.

Present-day visitors will appreciate the sunroom adjacent to the family room. Butler’s plan had, at first, called for a screened-in porch, but he decided instead to glass it in, creating a 16-by-19-foot sunroom with an extra-wide opening that connects it to the family room and kitchen. The sunroom features a slate floor that matches the family room’s fireplace surround and hearth, ceiling-to-floor windows and sliding doors that give way to a wooden deck.

The first floor also includes a dining room and home office, a spacious laundry room with custom cabinets and sink, a powder room and a rear foyer that leads to the new two-car garage. There’s also a master bedroom with two walk-in closets, its own little side porch, and a luxury master bathroom with Jacuzzi Air Bath and separate walk-in shower.

Upstairs, there are three bedrooms and three full bathrooms. One of the bedroom suites, measuring 18 by 25 feet, creates a potential second master suite. There is also a media/playroom upstairs with a half-kitchen featuring a built-in cabinet with granite countertop, sink, microwave and under-counter refrigerator with ice maker.

All of the bathrooms, including the master bath downstairs, have tile in wet areas, custom cabinets and granite counters.

In the upstairs hallway between two of the secondary bedrooms, the builder has tucked a built-in daybed into a nook created by one of the three gabled windows. In addition to the front staircase, there’s a second, black-iron spiral staircase in the back to regain access to the first floor.

FLOORS REMAIN FAITHFUL

With the exception of the carpeted bedrooms, the tile or stone floors in the bathrooms and the slate floor in the sunroom, the floors in the house are 4-inch-wide white oak with a dark stain that is faithful to the period of the original house. Doorknobs and other fixtures are black iron, again to remain faithful to the period and farmhouse style of the home.

The front exterior of the new house is 4-inch cedar lap siding; the rest of the house is 6-inch Hardiplank siding.

“That front elevation is exactly like the old house,” Butler said.

They salvaged the decorative, wooden front door from the original house, re-milled and repainted it then reinstalled it. They also saved the front windows and Butler said the windows that are not original are from Pella’s architectural line.

In addition to the house itself, whoever buys the place will also gain possession of a 650-square-foot cottage behind the main house that contains a small kitchen, one full bathroom and three other rooms. The house and cottage come with a one-acre lot with a deep water well.

The exterior of the little guest cottage has been refinished; the interior has not. Butler said he will work with a buyer on how best to refinish the cottage.

Whoever buys this property will also receive a digital photo album containing hundreds of photographs that chronicle the construction process from beginning to end.

Butler said he wants the eventual owner to know “the love and care that was put into this home.”

“I’m happy with everything about this house,” Butler said, “except that I still own it.”