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Understanding the Use of Textiles in Historic Homes

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Understanding how decisions are made about changes to historic homes based on the parameters set by the Secretary of Interior's, and in this case the textiles in use and in disrepair. Through researching and understanding the significance of the historic home to help maintain its integrity as a historic property and in preserving it for generations to come through conscientious decision making and proper stewardship. Many historic homes utilize several types of textiles to decorate the interior rooms through the use of interior designers and personal research to reflect a specific time period, or in this instance, three different styles creating an eclectic historic home. Using the guidelines in place helps to facilitate the decision-making process in how we can handle the preservation of these historic textiles through the use of the technology we have today in selecting replacement textiles and liners to maintain the homes context and integrity along with its historical significance for the future.

Keywords: Textiles; Historic properties; Historic homes; Decision making; Drapery; Interior design; Period homes

Introduction

Working in and teaching Interior Design is never boring or any lack of opportunities to problem solve when it comes to designing and/or preserving the built environment. Compound that with historical preservation of historic homes and that brings in a wide variety of questions and issues. For my service portion of my tenure track in teaching and researching contract it is required to help our local communities, which is wonderful. I am fortunate to have several historic homes in my area. Currently, I am in my second year helping out one of these beautiful historic homes in Georgia, the McDaniel-Tichenor house. Governor Henry D. McDaniel was the 52nd governor in Georgia and was born in Monroe, Georgia where he lived and practiced law. The house was passed on to his daughter Emma "Gypsy" McDaniel and her husband Edgar Tichenor, and then

down to her son, Henry McDaniel Tichenor and his wife Emily. All three men contributed much to the state of Georgia and to the community of Monroe through the cotton mills that once flourished here. Additionally, with three matriarchs of the home, in which each have expressed their aesthetics through the use of textiles within this eclectic home spanning 103 years.

In working with a historic home such as this, it is necessary to understand the protocols for preserving a historic living museum and community event center. Historic properties fall under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards which has classifications for preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation. These standards are what architects, developers, and designers, etc., use in order to help maintain the integrity of the building. These standards

were developed in 1976, and then updated by the National Park Service again in 1992. All of this stems from the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 designed to help protect historic neighborhoods, buildings, and landscapes [1]. This act was passed into law by congress, and further helps to develop the National Register of Historic Places, which the McDaniel-Tichenor house obtained back in 1978 thanks to the foresight of Mrs. Emily Tichenor.

To further understand the significance of historic preservation, a clear understanding of what preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation means is vital to how decisions are made in order to care for a historic property. Preservation is defined as "...that a building continues to function for decades and perhaps even centuries without ever falling into disrepair or being substantially altered in any way" [1]. For restoration, which is a term that is most associated with historic preservation is defined as "...taking a building and its grounds back to the way they appeared during a particular period in its history" [1]. And the last significant term is rehabilitation, which is a form of adaptive reuse. This involves taking an existing historical building and changing its use by "...altering the building to suit its new function" [1]. For the McDaniel-Tichenor house, restoration is the appropriate term to use here since the home is a reflection of three generations that occupied the

home. The home has taken on an eclectic feel within the interiors and the goal is to honor the past interiors by keeping it as it was by the last heir to live in the home, Mrs. Emily Tichenor. Additionally, to help maintain the homes integrity, context has to be understood. In understanding and being aware of both time and space of a building and its interior is significant in preserving and honoring the past. (Tyler, 2000, p. 145).

Discussion

This now brings us to the point about a few of the textiles within this home that have to be dealt with in order to maintain context and integrity of the home and their use. This home was designed and built in 1887 as Italianate Villa style, and then remodeled in 1930 by Governor McDaniel's daughter, Gipsy and her husband Edgar to incorporate electricity, update the plumbing, and bring in HVAC and update the architecture to Neoclassical with a symmetrical entry and side porches utilizing the original brick and windows, see Figure 1. For the current day exterior, the addition of bathrooms and updating the kitchen to the existing four over four with a central hallway running from front to back, as most large southern homes did during the 19th century, helped bring the home into the 20th Century.



Figure 1: McDaniel-Tichenor House by M. Mazurek.

Despite learning more about the past occupants and their contributions to the state of Georgia and the local community, trying to preserve a historic home has been a challenging over the past thirty-five years. As mentioned previously, the home is on the National Register for Historic Places, and with that comes the responsibility of understanding the guidelines and recommendations to maintain not only the house but the property. We have been fortunate that the previous occupants were diligent in documenting changes as well as taking photographs of the home. One of the main challenges for the director and board members encounter is the question "Can we change/modify anything? If so,

to what extent?" These questions have come up repeatedly since the house is both a museum and event space which adds to the challenge of maintaining the home and its collections. Per the preservation guidelines, if a space is designated as "non-contributing" it can be remodeled (Wilson, 2005, p. 33). However, the guidelines for remodeling are straight forward in that the remodeled space cannot be passed off as a specific period to falsely match the home but can blend in with the style of the home. Additionally, it has to be stated clearly that the space was remodeled to meet the needs, safety, and building codes at the time of the remodel [2].

Once the last heir passed away in 1990, Mrs. Emily Tichenor, the house was bequeathed to the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation. In 1991, due to a tree falling on the southeast corner of the house, the upstairs bathroom and the downstairs guestroom and bathroom sustained structural and water damage, especially the custom wall to wall carpet in the guestroom, which was never replaced. However, in the guestroom, the drapes were salvageable despite being silk. They were able to obtain a close reproduction of the wallcovering since the guestroom was deemed significant in contributing to the historic nature of the home. The upstairs rear bathroom was severely damaged, and so the decision and the opportunity to remodel that bathroom to fit the current needs of the house being used for wedding events was completed. This decision to remodel the space was doable since the original space was deemed as "not significant" to the integrity of the home. As time moved on, the house eventually comes back to the private sector as a non-profit living museum for the community. Due to sun damage, interior UVA damage, and age, the original drapes for the guestroom which were part of the 1930 remodel and are technically 95 years old, the question has come up about can we preserve them, or should we replace them? Since they are silk, they are actually shredding, so due to sunlight, oxidation, and time they are not repairable. So, for this situation, it took time to research

and find current samples of pink silk to match the existing, which have faded over time. Through our research, we feel we found a silk that will work and since these drapes are significant to the home's history. We have applied for a grant to help cover the cost to reproduce these lovely designed drapes.

Here's the dilemma with replacing the existing drapes, they do have a specific detail on them that our drapery seamstress feels she can salvage these design elements and then reapply them to the new drapes. Doing this will save money and time in reproducing these design features since they have been protected from direct sunlight. See Figures 2-4, the pleated circles on the valance, and this is repeated on each panel at the bottom, see figure 4. With today's technological advancements in textiles, finding and using the best UV lining and insulating the new drapes could help the drapes last longer than 100 years. Decisions like this take time and research in order to make the best decisions for future generations and of course the due diligence of documenting these changes. A second issue with historic properties is you cannot pass off the remakes as original [2]. Therefore, in descriptions, articles, tours, etc., it will be stated clearly that they are reproductions. Once they are replaced, the originals are still kept in archival packaging to preserve what is left of the original drapes.



Figure 2: Guestroom Drapes c. 1930.



Figure 3: Shredding.



Figure 4: Fading.

For the library, we have a different situation in which the drapes are currently 65 years old (c. 1960) and believed to be a silk and cotton boucle and are holding up well due the insulated lining and protection from the windows being under extended porch roofs, but the liner is deteriorating, see Figures 5 (front) & 6 (back).

Again, with a proper cleaning of the drapes and taking them down to reline with better UV protection this will help extend the life of these drapes much longer, and in being optimistic that perhaps a 100 more years.

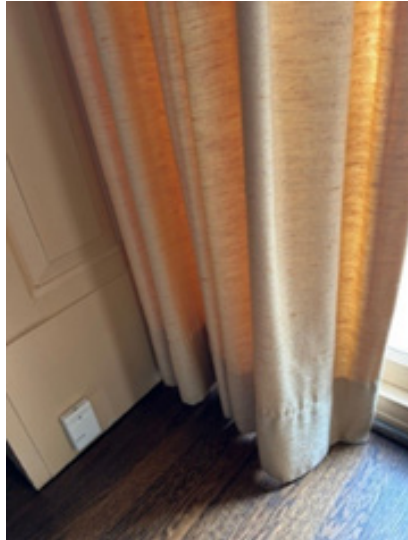


Figure 5: Front.



Figure 6: Back.

Conclusion

As designers, it is imperative that we do our due diligence and understand what is required for making the best decisions possible for protecting the textiles in historic homes. Fortunately for the McDaniel-Tichenor house [3], good stewardship is helping to maintain the rest of the textiles used throughout the house. However, based on historic preservation principles, primarily from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards of 1976 and then the National Park Service update in 1992, consideration for the design based on time and place in history that the drapes, for this example, are to be remade based on the 1930's style of the room to continue the context of the space as it was originally intended

[1] (Tyler, 2000, p. 245; Dedek, 2014, p. 260). Tyler states clearly that the "Contextual design accommodates buildings of both the past and the future" and it would be remiss to not do so. To help secure the historical context, by following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, especially Standard 2, "The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alterations of features, space, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided"[1]. This is what we want to do is preserve and conserve what we have for future generations. Same for the library in preserving these drapes by extending their life with better linings produced today it is just as important despite the time period being in the 1960's. This house is an eclectic blend of time periods (1887-1990) and

three generations of matriarchs that handled the interiors, has to be respected [4,5].

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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