

Builder has passion for uncovering Aurora's diamonds ? in the rough

By Brock Weir

As the son of a Richmond Hill bricklayer, building is in Fred Flood's blood.

Flood, a resident of Aurora, got his start in the family business and he jokes being the oldest son, followed by two younger brothers, his father soon had a ready-made crew.

?That didn't cost him anything ? typical dad.?

The family business however, focussed on new construction and prefabricated homes, but when Fred moved just a little bit north to Aurora, local architecture inspired him to take his building in a different direction.

In the early 1980s, the then-employee of Vaughan Hydro arrived in town with some money burning a hole in his pocket. Saving for a home, he found just what he was looking for in a 2.5 storey brick home at 20 Catherine Avenue. Well, maybe it wasn't exactly what he was looking for. Underneath the layers of changes, he saw what was underneath and since then, he has been devoted to finding the ?shiny pennies? under many heritage homes.

?It was kind of bastardized,? says Mr. Flood of his first home in Aurora. ?At the time it seemed to me that a lot of the homes on Catherine Avenue, because they were of a certain size, were either duplexed or triplexed in the war years to bring more income in, but this was an effort to bring them back to single family homes.?

He got rid of what he described as a ?horrid? stone front porch that stuck out from the building ?like an air conditioner hanging out of your window? and restored its wood porch, added some ?gingerbread? accents to the exterior incorporating the initials of his soon-to-be-wife Maria and himself, all on a shoestring budget.

They stayed there until 1991 and by that time he was married with two daughters and had bought the house across the street, subjecting it to the same rigorous makeover as the adjacent property.

Since then, what started as a hobby has snowballed and his efforts have led him to many heritage homes in the area, including most recently a house on Gurnett Street. Taking off the pressed cardboard siding, he stripped it back to the concrete stucco underneath, but then uncovered bevelled pine siding underneath that.

He restored that, re-installed some of the original hardware, and added an addition in keeping with the rest of the house?and the rest is a new chapter in its history.

?I love architectural history,? says Mr. Flood. ?If I go to a city, I like to take in the architecture, especially in Europe and older cities like Quebec, Kingston, and Montreal. Somebody said Toronto boomed at the wrong time and it boomed when there wasn't a lot of great detail in architecture, but I do live shining up the old pennies and recognizing that there is something there.

?I don't have a hard time visualizing what I can do and ways to enhance it. I know what I like and sometimes it is an eclectic mix of one era and another. I just like the process and it is fun.?

Mr. Flood hopes to share this fun with the wider public this Wednesday, March 20 at the Aurora Cultural Centre with his lecture ?Hidden Gems in Plain Sight: Restoration Projects.? Here, he aims to share his tips, tricks, and ?valuable information to take on your own project.?

This is the third heritage lecture of the year hosted by the Centre and next month's event will focus on the Church Street School building's evolution to the Aurora Cultural Centre of Today with Mary Ellen Lynch of Lunch + Comisso Architects.

Looking ahead, Mr. Flood says he is keeping his eyeball on a few buildings in the area, but declines to give too much away other than they again focus on older homes and perhaps homes in old areas that don't really conform to their surroundings.

?When I think of Aurora architecture, I think of some of the original old homes that are still there like Horton Place and Hillary House,? he says. ?I think secondly of a bit of sadness that many of the old mansions and big homes that were there and taken down without much thought.

?In 1982 when I moved to Aurora, at the corner of Catherine Street there was a little pillbox house and it was John Fleury's original residence. On the church property there was a spectacular looking mansion and it was pushed down to make way for the new church. They probably could have one something to keep it and probably today it would not have been allowed to be pushed down.?

?Aurora has some nicer old neighbourhoods than some of the bigger towns do,? he added. ?They seem to have been maintained pretty well.?



Fred Flood gives a heritage lecture this Wednesday evening, March 20, at the Aurora Cultural Centre.