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CLEANING & RESTORATION

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*2013 RIA Phoenix Award for Innovation in Reconstruction*

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2013 PHOENIX AWARD  
*for* INNOVATION IN RECONSTRUCTION

# CREATI CRAFTS



# VITTY & MANSHIP

*Platinum Restoration Returns a Fire-Damaged Historic Home to Its Splendor*

*By Morgan Buckingham*

Photos courtesy of Platinum Restoration



fter a large fire started by spontaneous combustion blazed through a historic home in the Chicago suburb of Wheaton, Ill., Platinum Restoration worked alongside the homeowners to rebuild the house to its pre-loss condition. The balloon framing of the home and the vintage construction caused the flames to quickly spread to the attic, leaving significant smoke and charring damage throughout the interior.

Platinum consulted with the homeowners and industry leaders to determine an efficient and cost-effective plan for the entire reconstruction process. The company had two objectives: Save whatever was possible and rebuild the home to resemble its appearance before the fire while saving the property owner and insurance company money and time.

The team ran into many issues with the reconstruction of the 3,600-square-foot home, which was built circa 1898. As with all restorations, Platinum began the mitigation process by preventing further damage to the home. The Chicago weather presented an immediate challenge after the November 2011 fire, which required rebuilding the porch and the roof.

### WINNING THE FIGHT AGAINST WINTER

The company needed to be innovative with the roof reconstruction. It would normally take more than two weeks to remove the entire roof, eradicate the smoke odor and replace the structure. This was not an option because of weather conditions. Another constraint was waiting for the necessary lumber to be milled. Platinum took every step possible to safeguard the home by drying the structure and removing smoke odors without extensive encapsulation.

The company determined that the best way to salvage the rest of the 15-room home was to build a new roof over the old one. Commercial scaffolding spanned the entire second floor of the home, and multiple tarps were used to keep out water and snow. Expert plasterers, carpenters and woodworkers handcrafted windows, doors and exposed joists that tied into the home's framing and historic finishes. Many of the wood and studs used were milled to achieve an aged appearance. It took dozens of carpenters and more than 1,000 technician hours to complete the roof alone.

Platinum also tackled replacing the second-floor joists over the dining room. Each joist was cut and chamfered onsite to prevent a collapse. The doors and windows were drawn out by a craftsman and built by hand to replicate the originals. Each window was detailed and

replaced with true restoration glass. On the hardwood floor in the dining room, the homeowner requested that the char marks be left as a reminder, another unique characteristic to this project.

### RESTORING THE HEART OF THE HOME

Then there was the construction of the porch. Unlike other areas of the home, Platinum had a difficult time measuring the porch because it was gutted during the fire. Engineers and carpenters followed the old foundation and outline of the house for reconstruction. They demolished the porch and rebuilt it using a poured foundation and glued laminated timber (Glulam) supports to keep its original appearance and strengthen the structure. The custom-built screens and exterior shades were strengthened as well.

"The heart of this house was the porch," explained Tom Barr, president of Platinum Restoration. "It had been almost completely decimated by fire. It was difficult to get the exact dimensions of the space and the intricate details of the trim and door parts. Photos were available but were not clear enough to get it exact. However the exterior trim was similar, and the homeowner's memory was invaluable."

The porch was originally built on a slight angle to allow water runoff from the roof to a small plaster swale through the porch wall and then into the garden. During reconstruction the Platinum team sanded, treated and primed the home's hardwood floors, so it was important for water not to damage the new floors. Workers took precautions and used a heavy-duty paint to ensure a good seal to the walls.

Platinum used creativity, perseverance and experience to overcome the obstacles of rebuilding this historic home. Because the home was constructed in the 1800s, Platinum was constantly challenged to determine how they could rebuild without compromising its authenticity. Sometimes that wasn't possible—or even preferable. For example, once they opened the walls and attic, the team discovered old knob-and-tube wiring—and some of it was live. All of that wiring was updated to meet current codes and regulations.

Platinum was able to clean and restore many of the walls and rebuilt most of the windows in the house. A number of plaster ceilings were replaced to prevent collapse. The team also cleaned and restored most of the doors and hardwood in the master bedroom and throughout much of the second floor.



The fire started in the porch, which had to be demolished.



To quickly protect the structure from impending wintry Chicago weather, Platinum constructed a new roof to cover the old one until it could be rebuilt.



The walls, ceilings and floors in the master bedroom were damaged in the fire.



The reconstruction in the master bedroom is a good example of the thoughtful attention to detail that was carried out throughout the house.

## THE WINNING COMBINATION

Platinum Restoration was awarded the 2013 RIA Phoenix Award for Innovation in Reconstruction for its inventive procedures and demonstration of value and cost savings to the homeowner and insurance company. Its efforts to safeguard the remaining areas of the home while deodorizing and repairing damage provided significant savings to the insurance company and gave the homeowners peace of mind. Their comfort was a major priority, and the company took every measure to meet their needs. Platinum completed the project in nine months, requiring the owners to relocate for only a short time.

The company demonstrated value by completing the objectives outlined by the homeowners while saving them money and time. “Most of our projects

have involved standard repair methods that use modern construction applications and current code upgrades,” Barr said. “This project was different in terms of replacing the wood framing and custom millwork. It took time to find the best craftsmen.”

The project was a “huge confidence booster and cause for celebration for all at Platinum Restoration,” he added “It gave everyone a firm sense of our capabilities. There is a method behind the madness when big projects come our way. Our approach doesn’t change even on the smaller projects; the procedures are the same, but on a larger scale.” **RIA**

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*Morgan Buckingham served as an editorial intern with C&R magazine.*