Victorian comes in way under budget

By Lauren Viera
TRIBUNE REPORTER

The search was born out of curiosity.

In July 2005, back when the economic environment was just peachy, I sank my life savings into my first house. It was one I was sure I'd stay in "as long as I live in Chicago," as I bragged to friends and family: a lovingly lived-in three-bedroom, 1 ½bath Victorian in western Logan Square with manageable front and backyards, a two-car detached garage and a shaded patio perfect for alfresco dining. I paid about $315,000—slightly more than I'd planned, but still, it seemed like a deal. And for that summer's market—and all those square feet of refinished hardwood floors—it was.

Nearly four years and numerous cosmetic and structural updates later (the most recent of which involved replacing the sewer—good times!), I began to wonder: Did I make a mistake? Is my house really *the* house? Is there an equally charming, 115-year-old Victorian in my neighborhood that is a bit less lived-in (read: less of a money pit) than the one I call home?

In the abundant buyers' market, I had acquired a wandering eye. I began to cruise the neighboring blocks in search of The One: scouring lawns for "For Sale" signs and slowly creeping past signage-free homes that *looked* abandoned, later Googling their addresses hoping for proof of foreclosure. Just like the first time around, I daydreamed of unearthing some dusty, abandoned, vintage bargain just waiting for me (and my handy dad) to fix up. And maybe this time, I thought, there'd be a perfect sewer beneath it all.

And so, behind my unwitting abode's back, the search began.

I rang up Big Shoulders Realty to survey the competition and was paired with Lee Diamond, a young, savvy North Sider who tinkers on his bungalow and leads historic neighborhood bike rides in his spare time.

Like me, Diamond doesn't stand for cheap, Mickey Mouse (as my dad would say) upgrades so commonly inflicted upon Logan Square Victorians. Diamond says that because condos are priced cheaper, they far outsell 100-year-old fixer-uppers in this neck of the woods. Still, many of the folks buying up the latter are house-flippers who wouldn't know good craftsmanship if it hit 'em over the head with a two-by-four.

We set the search parameters based on my home: three bedrooms, at least 1 ½baths, two-car garage and basement access under $350,000. Finding homes that fit the bill wasn't a problem; there were dozens. Trouble was, 95 percent of them were poorly renovated, poorly maintained or downright ugly.

Except one.

I had seen the listing for 3719 W. Shakespeare Ave., but based on the price (a full $100,000 less than my high end), I didn't get my hopes up. Something must be wrong with it, I thought.

Only, there wasn't.

Built in 1891, the three-bedroom house is a thoroughly modernized Victorian, updated refreshingly well. The typically partitioned living and dining areas have been combined into one vast front room that's flooded with natural light—an anomaly for typical Logan Square lots. In the 10 years that the owners have been in the home, they have updated the open-plan kitchen with new appliances, cabinets and counters; rehabbed the master bathroom to lovely results; added central air; built a smart, covered deck in back; refinished several of the original hardwood floors; and replaced every window in the house. Not bad for $229,000.

The only downfall is the bathroom situation. While the first-floor master bath received a beautiful rehab, that's all she wrote. A second full bath is in the partially finished basement, but both Diamond and I agreed it's too scary to use.

Nevertheless, at this price, waiting a month to move in while adding a second master bath upstairs would be a smart move. The cost of a brand-new bath—with all-Kohler appliances, my favorite—might bring the home to $250,000—still well under my parameters. Icing on the cake: The lot is oversize, the block is quiet and safe, and did I mention all that natural sunlight in the front room?

Seeing this place was enough to make me seriously considering leaving my own.

Almost.

The house after my heart

Where: 3719 W. Shakespeare Ave.
List price: $229,900
Details:
- 1,600 square feet
- 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms
- Gas, forced air/central air conditioning. Hardwood floors throughout living areas with new carpeting in bedrooms. Covered backyard patio.

Info: Amanda McMillan, real estate consultant, Prudential Preferred Properties, 773-572-7520, **amcmillan@prupref.com**

This modernized Victorian in Logan Square features an updated kitchen and a rehabbed first-floor master bathroom. LAUREN VIERA/TRIBUNE PHOTO OF EXTERIOR; INTERIOR PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRUDENTIAL PREFERRED PROPERTIES