



## Becoming The *Iron Victorian*

WRITER | KIM HYTINEN PHOTOS | THE IRON VICTORIAN, KIM HYTINEN, AND JACKIE PALMER

Cristy Mazaris and Michael Pack weren't scouting for a Victorian mansion to renovate. They were actually looking for birthday cake, but when they stumbled upon an 1880s Italianate villa for sale in Howell, they were intrigued. The couple drove past the house with the huge "For Sale" sign but didn't have time to stop. They immediately looked online but were disappointed to find no interior images with the listing. The next day, they drove from their home in Sylvan Lake for an impromptu property visit and climbed their way up for a peek through the tall windows, using cinderblocks found near the carriage house. They fell in love with the place and quickly made an offer.

Captivated by its stately presence, they drove the 80-mile round trip almost daily that week to check on the Greenaway-Ballard mansion as if it was already theirs. As fate would have it, they became the official new owners of the grand home on September 25, 2018 – exactly one month after they first laid eyes upon it. They renamed it The Iron Victorian in honor of George Greenaway, the blacksmith who had it built for his family more than a century ago.

### Restoring an old home can be riddled with challenges

"We knew this was going to be a big project, and that was a little intimidating, but we both have

experience restoring old homes, and we saw the potential in this one," said Pack, a Garden City native and graduate of Wayne State University. "Something like this comes with a lot of challenges. And, truthfully, some of the challenges have been bigger than we imagined."

Mazaris and Pack moved into the mansion, temporarily making a bedroom out of a parlor. They love living in the home even as it is a work in progress. Getting acquainted with the house has been an adventure as each room reveals its own particular character – from the super-clean multi-room basement to the cupola, where many visitors have left signatures and messages on the walls. Ornate wallpaper adorns the 11-foot walls, some of which are beyond repair. Chipped paint, stained ceilings, and outdated fixtures were in every room, and layers of glue, tile, and old carpet masked the original hardwood floors. The upstairs bathroom floor begged replacement entirely.

"We place a lot of pressure on ourselves to make sure this home is restored in a way that is respectful of its history, but we also want it to be a reflection of who we are," said Mazaris, who grew up in Livonia and graduated from Mercy College in Toledo.

With both Mazaris and Pack working full-time jobs, exhaustion has become a daily companion, but they find their project immensely satisfying. Work on the home began with gusto and contin-

ues at odd hours, fitting around careers and family. Difficulties aside, their commitment to and love for The Iron Victorian has not wavered, and they are rewarded as its history is revealed through their hard work.

### Blending century-old architecture with modern stylings

Vacant for a decade, the mansion still maintained a substantial and majestic presence on its large lot – the only things taller than the house are the magnificent old trees lining the property. Many exquisite architectural features were intact, including a 10-foot-tall sliding door, a slate fireplace, plaster medallions, original solid doors and hardware inside and out, Victorian sash window locks, a grand wooden staircase, elegant radiators, and many of the pine floors. Tucked away in the attic and carriage house were 140-year-old corbels, marble sinks, pieces from a porch torn down years before, and all sorts of fittings original to the home that are now being reused in its restoration.

"One thing I love about Cristy is she is always ready to start a new project – no fear or hesitation," said Pack, marveling about his fiancé. "She just jumps on with her beautiful creative mind and work ethic and makes it happen."

Mazaris and Pack do most of the work themselves, with help from family. They love bringing beauty to anything old and tired; their style is a little grunge paired with elegance. So far, the couple has painted the exterior a fresh white and decorated outside with greenery, black rugs, topiary urns, and angel statues on the steps.

In the kitchen, a 1800s library table from France serves as a kitchen island amid appliances artfully covered in cement. A custom cement surround has also been applied to the fireplace. Huge, rustic ceiling beams are exposed and dressed with multiple chandeliers for dramatic effect. Gold-colored faucets and a unique stove hood made by Pack from a Victorian bed bring warmth to the space. The result is stunning and inviting.

"Michael likes to create things that don't already exist," said Mazaris. "That's what is going to make this house so stunning when finished."

Work is also complete on the main-floor bathroom, with its original marble sink nestled into a vanity handmade by Pack from the same antique bedframe repurposed for use in the kitchen. The updated floor features a large natural and white painted checkerboard pattern in contrast to the horizontal shiplap walls. Antique mirrors collected by the couple are hung high and low behind a salvaged galvanized tub circa 1800.

"It's almost scary how alike we are," said Mazaris. "We laugh all the time because there is nobody to 'keep us out of trouble.' We pick up junk we don't really need, drive around for a week in a rented U-Haul scavenging for antiques, and start projects at one in the morning. But that's why this works ..."

Mazaris and Pack share their restoration journey through Instagram, Facebook, and a webpage dedicated to the mansion. Much work is yet to be done, but, room by room, they are restoring The Iron Victorian and enjoying every minute. □