

MASSACHUSETTS Lawyers Weekly

Part of the BRIDGETOWER MEDIA network

SEPTEMBER 6, 2024

Boston lawyer, spouse breathe new life into historical homes

■ PAT MURPHY

Present Anthony T. Panebianco and his wife with an old house that has some history behind it, and the couple sees possibilities. In fact, sometimes they move right in and get their hands dirty making those possibilities come to life.

The couple shares a passion for restoring historical homes. Over the past decade, they've renovated five houses — three in Massachusetts, one in Rhode Island, and one in Texas.

Come the end of the work week, Panebianco, a shareholder at Davis Malm in Boston, and his wife, Rebecca, VP of an international luxury real estate company, trade their business attire for clothing suitable for driving

nails and painting ceilings.

"We both share a passion for history, seeing what was and what can be," Anthony says.



Anthony T. Panebianco



A before-and-after of a room in the Panebiancos' current project: a Victorian house in Providence

The last project they took on was on the Cape.

"It was built sometime in the mid-1800s," Anthony says. "I say 'sometime' because we don't actually know precisely when it was built. It originally was a one-bedroom beach cottage and moved many years later and expanded upon. We totally renovated that to make it look like it was still a beach cottage in the 1800s — with a little flair."

The Panebiancos' current project is a Victorian-style home built in 1910 in Providence.

"It probably hasn't been touched since the 1960s," Anthony says.

With land use part of Anthony's commercial and real estate litigation practice, he often finds himself researching the historical records for properties.

Rebecca, meanwhile, has 20-plus years in commercial and residential real estate to bank on.

“I really fell in love with homes and décor – the way that people thoughtfully and meticulously restore homes that are anywhere from mid-century modern homes to antique and colonial homes,” she says. “It is fascinating to me the way people can treat such homes with such reverence. We have the same respect for the character and the history of homes that we’ve purchased. In our efforts, we hope to bring them back to life.”

But they don’t just write checks to contractors. The two take pride in doing most of the work themselves, living in each home until the job is done.

“For whatever reason, the work has not been too intimidating to me,” Rebecca says. “I had a really handy mom. I go into these projects with the attitude that if I really mess it up, I can hire a contractor to come in and fix it. We don’t do plumbing and we don’t do the electrical work. Other than that, the only thing I can’t physically do is hang drywall. We usually bring someone in for that type of work.”

She says her husband has an edge for the jobs that require more “finesse.”

“He has the attention to detail and patience to paint, whereas I

don’t have that,” Rebecca says. “But I will absolutely demolish an entire bathroom in an afternoon.”

In restoring homes, Anthony says he and his wife try to strike a balance between their own style choices and being faithful to the original architecture.

“You have to work with both,” he says. “It would feel out of place to have just your own personal style within a home and not be mindful of the structure and age of the house. It doesn’t work.”

Living in each house as they work on it brings them to a closer understanding of those who lived there before. In restoring the house in Providence, the couple recalls stepping out the front door one morning only to be greeted by two well-dressed men drinking scotch.

“They said they were so sorry and didn’t mean to intrude but explained they were there to toast ‘Ginny,’” Rebecca says.

It turns out the two men were friends with the previous owner, whose first name was “Virginia.” They had just come from Ginny’s funeral.

“They shared that they used to come over and drink scotch with her,” Rebecca says. “We invited them inside to show them

the work we had done. They told us that Ginny just would have loved it.”

When they were first dating, the Panebiancos saw the 1949 classic “Adam’s Rib,” starring Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn as married lawyers who find themselves in the awkward position of being opposing counsel in an attempted murder case. Tracy’s character has a pet name for Hepburn’s character: “Pinkie.” And Hepburn’s character affectionately calls Tracy’s character “Pinky.”

The Panebiancos make it a point to have at least one feature in each of their restored homes in the color pink.

“We’ve had pink doors, pink fridges and a pink drinking parlor,” Anthony says. “We add one little touch of pink everywhere we go. Not every room because that would be overwhelming; just a little touch.”

The Panebiancos are dreaming of one day taking their toolboxes overseas with an eye toward purchasing and renovating a small apartment building in Italy.

“We’ve always loved Italy,” Anthony says. “The history is unbelievable. And you can find fantastic homes there that need some care and some thought.”