

MANSIONS Heritage Montreal applauds plan

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"It's a big job, but I've worked on houses in Mile End that were in worse condition," said Villeneuve, a veteran designer as she showed me renderings of what the two houses will eventually look like.

The pair are relying on vintage photographs, interviews with old-timers and visits to other homes in the area to glean insight.

They also benefitted from a few unexpected gifts – one of the original pewter doorknobs mysteriously reappeared one day. It was a godsend to the restorers, who are having new pewter knobs and hardware made to match.

Villeneuve is casting her own plaster moldings to match the original designs throughout the houses. Everything that can be matched – leaded windows, mosaic floors and elaborate woodwork – is being recreated. They are using limestone, blue stone, walnut, slate and onyx.

"Only the most noble materials," Villeneuve said.

Elsewhere, they are adding luxurious modern refinements – a ventilated cigar lounge in one house, a wine cellar, a home theatre and designer kitchens, including one with a floor made of 300-year-old limestone blocks imported from the Languedoc region of France. The bathroom of the Thompson house might have the showstopper, though – a bath tub carved from a single

piece of limestone-like travertine. The oval tub weighing about a tonne, measures seven feet in length and five feet at its widest point and holds 145 gallons of water.

They are justifiably proud of the work they are doing and were eager to share their vision of Fan Na Greine with those who had opposed Canderel's condo plan. Vision en Vert sent detailed drawings and plans to Heritage Montreal and Les Amis de la Montagne, both of whom approve of the redevelopment.

"It's certainly a welcome commitment by the developer to work towards renovation rather than construction of a tower on the site," said Dinu Bumbaru of Heritage Montreal.

For Rashi, the work has an added layer of meaning. He grew up on Trafalgar Place, just across the road from Fan Na Greine. He's watched the houses' slow deterioration over the decades and is delighted to play a part in bringing them back to life.

"I don't want to sound all mystical, but it is interesting to note that anyone who has tried to destroy the houses over the years has failed.

"The sun really does seem to shine on them."

See www.visionenvert.com on the Web.

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RENDERING COURTESY OF VISION EN VERT INC.
When completed: This is what the Thompson house will look like.



MARCOS TOWNSEND THE GAZETTE
Now: Only the "most noble materials" will be used in the restoration.