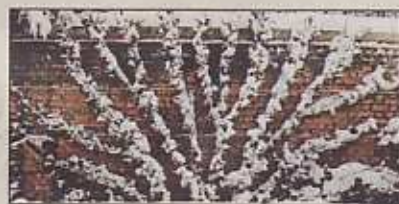


FIX



Fireplace for holiday hosiery

By Karen Klages
TRIBUNE REPORTER

There was significant fireplace activity at the Kimball residence in Woodstock late last December. And jolly ol' St. Nick was not the perpetrator.

Beau Kimball and Nancy Bean Kimball (husband-wife and partners in business) were. They decided to give their fireplace a face-lift moments before Christmas Eve—which is not something these two would sweat.

They are owners of Kimball & Bean, a shop that specializes in high-brow garden antiques and architectural artifacts. They have made a career out of mining things such as cast-iron urns, metal horse troughs and fancy marble mantels from old buildings and their gardens. And they know how to turn these pieces into something glorious again in another setting.

Which leads to the story of their own digs and that



The Kimballs' fireplace renovation: In the beginning, **BEAU KIMBALL**

Christmas-born fireplace.

The two did some renovating of their lives about 15 years ago when they decided to move from the city to greener pastures in far northwest suburban Wood-



The white stucco fireplace, stripped of bricks and flanked with built-in bookcases, served the Kimballs well for several years. **BEAU KIMBALL**

stock, where they bought a turn-of-the-century Victorian and rehabbed her.

(Kimball was managing partner of Salvage One, a big name in architectural artifacts in Chicago. Nancy had

worked for Leslie Hindman Auctioneers.)

Five years later, in the late '90s, they were hooked on the countrified life and decided to start a business, farther out yonder.

They sold the Victorian, found a bigger homestead (10 acres of verdant countryside on a winding road between Woodstock and Crystal Lake), and came up with the concept for Kimball & Bean.

The property came with a mid-19th Century white-farmhouse and barn—although neither came pretty.

"It was the first time we bought a place *not* because how much we love the building, but because how much we liked the location," says Beau, noting the "beautiful circular drive" and "big trees out front."

He also notes:

That "the smell [inside the house] would make your hair stand on end."

That it was really two mid-1880s houses that were joined haphazardly sometime in the 1930s.

That at some time, the pieced-together farmhouse was turned into a boarding-house.

And among many other horrors, that an incontinent Chihuahua also lived here.

The couple hunkered down (soon with a newborn son, now 11) in one of the two liveable apartments in the barn while they gutted the place. (They later converted the barn into their antiques shop.)

Save for an electrician and a roofer, they labored alone—and at a fiendish pace. Four months after stripping the house and redoing the floors, the plumbing, bathrooms, staircases, plaster work, etc., they moved into one side of the house and rented the other.

White paint was their dearest friend. They went through about 70 gallons, coating every wall, door, ceiling, piece of trim work as a way to make everything look gads better, quickly.

And that included the fireplace in the living room, the centerpiece of the room.

"The worst thing about the house—given the type of business we're in," says Beau, is that "when we gutted the place and cleaned everything, we found *nothing* that was of use to us or was attractive."

Nothing. Not even the marble mantel that folks around here had told them once existed in the house.

"By the time we moved in, there were these terrible 1960s brown bricks" covering the fireplace surround and ugly "sliding screens" (circa 1970s) covering the firebox opening, Beau says.

And completing the gracelessness were white melamine panels with gold sparkles that covered the chimney chase.

Without much ado, they stripped off those 1960s bricks and the melamine.

Then Beau parged the brick face of the fireplace surround (there were original fire bricks under the cheesy 1960s brown bricks). Parging is the process that gives the effect of stucco. White paint followed.

So did beadboard over the chimney chase. And built-in bookcases (built by Beau) flanking the fireplace. And again, white paint. Finally, the couple was happy—for now and for several years to come—with their white

stucco wonder, albeit with no mantel. They were inspired by the severe, rustic/elegant fireplaces that they had seen in cottages in Scotland and England.

It may have been unfinished but it worked visually, says Nancy, and "we figured at some point the right mantel would come along."

It was actually sitting in their shop all along. But we will get back to that.

In the years that followed, they altered the furnishings in the living room and painted the walls cherry red.

Sometime late last year, though, Beau got a hankering for a mantel.

"I wanted a place to hang [Christmas] stockings," he says. "Every year, we complained about it. So we would have our tree in [the living room] and then we would go to the family room" in the part of the house where an old fireplace still exists with a non-glorious mantelshef. "We'd hang our stockings there."

Out in their barn/shop, though, sat the perfect addition for the living room—a vintage slate fireplace they bought in Michigan five years prior.

It fit their fireplace opening. And it fit the look and age of their room as well, with five handsome, red-and-green English Minton tiles inset into the slate.

There were some small pieces missing from the fireplace, which is never minor when it comes to vintage goods. Beau was able to make it work by splicing in parts from another slate fireplace that was lying around the shop.

And so, two days before Christmas with his new tile saw in hand and slate dust flying about, Beau "cut and pasted" the stone pieces to fill in the missing parts.

And then he assembled the slate fireplace like a jigsaw puzzle. Pieces are secured by copper wire into the wall and plastered into place.

"We love it," Beau says. "People walk in here and think we have this beautiful original fireplace."



A vintage slate fireplace and mantel suitable for inviting St. Nick.
ANTONIO PEREZ/TRIBUNE

Renovation Nation

Project: Giving a fireplace the "vintage" it deserves.

Project cost: \$800 total (includes \$500 for the vintage slate fireplace).

Time frame: About one week for the first part of the project, which was done years ago and involved stripping off the old 1960s bricks and melamine chimney chase, doing stucco work, adding beadboard and building bookcases. Then about two days to retrofit and install the vintage slate fireplace, which was done for Christmas 2007.

Show and tell us

If you have an interesting story of renovation/remodeling, we would like to hear from you. We're looking for projects both big and small. Send a short description of your project and no more than five digital pictures (including a "before" shot if you have it) to: kklages@tribune.com