



Mario Turchi has always loved Gothic Revival architecture and stone houses, so when a late-1860s home came on the market near him that combined both, he deemed it “kind of like a dream come true.”

He fell in love with the house—despite the fact that it harbored wall-to-wall carpeting over the original wide-plank flooring, a clumsily applied coat of stucco over original exterior woodwork, and an inappropriate addition. “The addition wasn’t at all thoughtful; it was a remuddling for sure,” explains Maria Turchi, Mario’s wife. “It had been stuck on there to create a second-floor bathroom with a coat closet beneath, and it destroyed the roofline of the house.”

The previous owner told the Turchis that the home’s designer had also built the stunning National-Register-listed train station in Tenafly, New Jersey (see “Original Vision,” page 51)—information that led Mario to uncover that the architect, Daniel Topping Atwood, had authored planbooks of house designs. It turned out that the Turchis’ home was not only a textbook example of Design One, the “Picturesque Stone Cottage” in

**RIGHT, INSET:** Before the project, board siding around the oriel windows was encased in stucco, and the home’s finials had been missing for years. **ABOVE:** An inviting reading nook inside the new guest room.



MARIO TURCHI PROJECT



## OLD-HOUSE INSIDER

The handsome house was built by Victorian-era architect Daniel T. Atwood as his own residence. In adding on to it, owners Mario and Maria Turchi felt a great responsibility to match the original details as closely as possible.

# Channeling Changes

The owners of a Gothic Revival cottage in New Jersey take cues from the home’s architect to create a perfectly matched addition.

STORY BY DEMETRA APOSPOROS ♦ PHOTOS BY ROBERT MANDOLENE



AFTER  
DURING



MARIO TURCHI PHOTO

Architect Donald Cantillo designed the addition to join the main house via a side porch—an original feature removed when a mismatched second-story bathroom addition had been placed on the house. To help the addition fit in and to underplay its scale, Donald stepped the building back, broke the garage into portions, and matched the bell-cast roofline on the original house. Omitting cutouts on the bargeboards was another way he helped signal that the new wing is a secondary structure.

## Original Vision

Daniel Topping Atwood was a New York-based architect who expanded his business to publish pattern-book designs for country houses, in the vein of A.J. Downing. He also dabbled in real estate development in Tenafly, New Jersey, after moving there in the late 1860s. Many of Atwood's high Victorian houses remain in Tenafly's Highwood Park District, but his most famous design is probably the Tenafly Railroad Station, a work that was misattributed to another architect for decades. The building, a stunning example of high Victorian Gothic Revival, is on the National Register. Atwood's publications include *Atwood's Country and Suburban Houses* (1871), *Atwood's Modern American Homesteads* (1876), and *Atwood's Revised Rules of Proportions* (1879).



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Atwood's 1871 book *Country and Suburban Houses*, but it had been built as the architect's own residence.

The discovery deepened the sense of responsibility Mario and Maria felt as stewards of the building. "From the beginning, my idea was to bring the house back to its former glory," Mario says, and Maria was of like mind. "I come from New England, where we love preserving old houses," she explains.

When the couple realized they needed more space for their family, finding the right person to map out the job weighed

heavily on them. "It was important for us to find a really good architect," Mario says, "one with sensitivity for the building." The search led them to New York-based architect Donald Cantillo (who worked with New Jersey-licensed architect Kevin C. Gore, the architect of record).

## Timing Is Everything

"I was impressed with Mario from our first telephone conversation," Donald recalls. "He asked me for a rough estimate of the work, and when I gave it to him he said that wasn't quite in his budget, and since

he wanted to do it right, he would hold off."

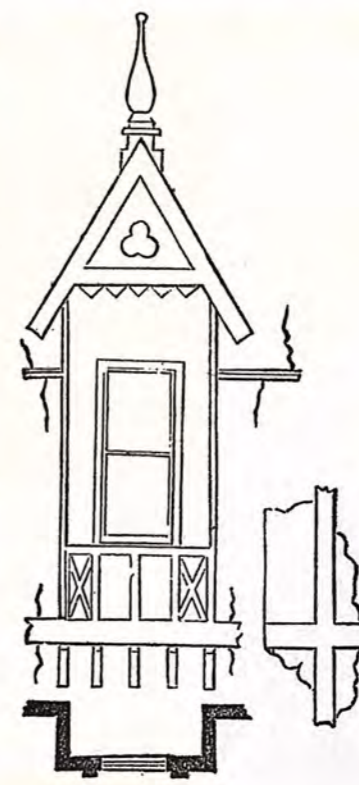
Two years later, Mario called back, and the men began plotting an extensive project that would add a great room, laundry room, garage workspace, and guest suite to the originally 2,000-square-foot house, in addition to removing the awkward second-floor bump-out, restoring the side porch, and re-creating the board siding around the oriel windows, which had been damaged beneath a layer of stucco.

In mapping out the changes, both men aimed to do justice to Atwood's initial vision. "Mario and I both studied Atwood's book, not so much as a guideline, but to get an idea of the spirit of the man who made the original house," Donald says. "We wanted to add a substantial amount, but we didn't want it to overpower the house in any way," Mario says, perhaps channeling this quote from Atwood's book: "Beauty of outline and proportion is as important in the design and construction of a house as the interior arrangement of the dwelling."

To help downplay the addition's heft, Donald stepped the garage and great room back from the original house. He created



MARIO TURCHI PHOTOS; ILLUSTRATION FROM COUNTRY AND SUBURBAN HOUSES



LEFT TO RIGHT: Mario Turchi poses with the new finials, which were copied from a window detail published in *Country and Suburban Houses*. Removing stucco that had been applied around the windows and entry revealed original board siding.



**ABOVE:** The great room gets plenty of sunlight from oversized windows; the shallow Rumford-style fireplace radiates heat back into the room. Mario selected the limestone mantel for its Gothic lines. **LEFT:** Chamfers on the built-in bookcases showcase the project's attention to fine-tuned details.



a number of sketches and massing models in order to test the best way to attach the new building to the old, finally settling upon a breezeway—an extension of the original side porch—as the connecting feature. The clever design not only sets the addition back from the street, keeping the original house as the prominent view, but it also makes a clear delineation between the original building and the new one.

### Learning Curves

One of the trickiest aspects of the design was matching the rooflines. “The roof’s shape was extremely iconic, and we wanted to emulate the original,” Donald says. Instead of a regular gable, the ends sport a little flourish that creates a graceful curve, a design element Atwood called a “bell-cast roof,” which was popular with builders of the day.

Replicating the curve proved to be a challenge, one that



**Inside the house, the old and new buildings are connected via a hallway and meandering staircase. It was important to Maria that the narrow strip of stone next to the green door—part of the home’s original foundation—remain exposed.**



called Mario’s expertise (he’s an industrial designer) into play. “I laid out the bell curve on a piece of plywood and copied it to size to give the workers a template,” Mario explains.

With rooflines in perfect concert, Donald wanted a device to help show that the buildings were from different timeframes. “While we made the bargeboard the exact same shape and size, we left off the cutouts to signal that this was a secondary portion of the building,” Donald says.

The choice of building materials serves the same purpose. Creating the addition out of stone would have appeared too similar to the original house (and would have been too pricey as well). Instead, Mario and Donald opted for board siding, which matches the original detailing they unearthed around the oriel windows.

Two other decisions on the roof help to meld the addition and return the home’s period authenticity. The first is the cladding—cedar shingles, as specified in Atwood’s book. It was a big financial commitment to cover both roofs in 5/8" quarter-sawn cedar, but Mario never wavered: “I knew there was one chance to do it right and make it unified.”

The second is the reinstallation of three finials, which had been missing for decades, above the windows. Mario pulled

the finial design directly from Atwood’s book and sent it to woodworker Steve Hanson, who precisely replicated the originals. “To me, it was a real moment of pride to see the finials back in place,” says Mario.

### In the Details

It’s that sort of attention to detail that made the project so special. “Sometimes people—even our builder—thought we were going overboard in nailing so many

**PRODUCTS:** Great Room: Ultimate double-hung windows, Marvin; Ultimate swinging French doors, Marvin; Limestone mantel, Atelier Jouvence Custom Stoneworks; Zonix ceiling fan, Fanimation; Ceramic sconces, Fabby Lighting. Hallway: Newel posts, Hanson Woodturning; Interior doors, TruStile; Glass lanterns, Pottery Barn. Exterior: Clarksville Gray paint (garage doors), Sussex Green paint (garage trim; porch posts and rails), Sweet Rosy Brown paint (doors and finials), Tree Moss paint (wide bargeboards), Benjamin Moore. Z-brace garage doors with British pintle strap hinges, Real Carriage Door Company; Exterior doors with beveled glass lites, TruStile; Finials, Hanson Woodturning; Nantucket clear glass pocket lantern (outside garage), Artistic Lighting Design; Porch lights, Pottery Barn; Cupola, TA Millwork; Large Halifax chimney pots, Superior Clay.



A beamed ceiling soars above the great room, which also features a wall of French doors topped by transom lights.



of the details down. Those were the things that cost extra, but they also give the project integrity," says Maria, whose experience as an accountant Mario credits for keeping the project's financing on track.

The house had long been considered a

neighborhood treasure owing to its provenance—it even appears on a bookmark handed out at the Tenafly library—and working on such a beloved house is often a tricky proposition. As soon as word got out that the Turchis wanted to add on, the local preservation commission vetted the plans very carefully. Mario presented the whole project, complete with drawings, to the commission at a public meeting. They were so impressed with the details that several months later, Mario was invited to serve as a member.

"I don't know if it's because I'm a designer, but before this project, every time I went up the driveway I felt things were missing," says Mario. "I just wanted to see the house the way it had been." Maria agrees that the undertaking was worth the effort. "I think it's always worth it to work with a house and bring it back to what it wants to look like."

**ABOVE:** The breezeway that helps connect old to new, an extension of the home's original side porch, boasts chamfered posts and distinctive cross-braced balusters. **INSET:** The finished garage serves as storage and studio space, as well as a play area for the kids.

The couple is thrilled with the finished project, and the neighbors seem to be as well. Passersby often ask Mario and Maria for details about the work they did, and will sometimes even venture to ask if they can come inside. "While we're private people, we realize that it's not just our house," Maria says. "It belongs to the community." 🏡

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Atelier Jouvence Custom Stoneworks:  
ajstoneworks.com

Artistic Lighting Designs:  
artisticlighting.com

Benjamin Moore:  
benjaminmoore.com

Fabby Lighting: fabby.com

Fanimation: fanimation.com

Hanson Woodturning:  
hansonwoodturning.com

Marvin Windows & Doors: marvin.com

Pottery Barn: potterybarn.com

Real Carriage Door Company:  
realcarriagedoors.com

Superior Clay: superiorclay.com

TA Millwork: tamillwork.com

TruStile: trustile.com