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Local Builders Restore, Modernize Antebellum Langley Ordinary

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Matt Bronczek and Doug DeLuca were instrumental in refurbishing the circa-1842 Langley Ordinary in McLean. (Photo contributed)



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by BRIAN TROMPETER, Staff Writer | 0 comments

Touring the Langley Ordinary in McLean, it's hard to fathom that just two years ago the historic structure was tree-damaged and in a state of disrepair.

But thanks to Federal Home Co. founder and partner Doug DeLuca and president Matt Bronczek, the stately two-story home has been completely renovated and modernized.

"What Matt and I are really proud about is people wanted to take this house down and they just wanted the land," DeLuca said. "They couldn't have cared less about the heritage and the history of it. We really stepped in and put a full-court press on, maintaining the house and its integrity and building it to the standards that it once was."

"This was great opportunity for us to have an old house but make it as new as possible," DeLuca added.

The house briefly was the headquarters of Union Gen. George McCall during the Civil War and later served as a hospital and then an ordinary, or meetinghouse. Afterward, Langley Ordinary became a private house.

McLean resident Lindsay Aquino grew up in the house starting in 1957, when the area still was decidedly rural.

"My parents' friends thought we'd moved out to Mongolia," she said. "There was a farm where Langley High School is now. This was countryside."

Aquino's mother deeded to the house to the Potomac School because her children had attended that private school. Langley Ordinary later was uninhabitable for several years because of rot and neglect, DeLuca said.

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DeLuca and Bronczek took over the house in 2011 and immediately fell in love with its potential.

"The house when we bought first was completely uninhabitable, with lots of mold issues," said DeLuca, who has lived there since the end of 2012. "Three days before closing, a 6-foot-diameter tree fell on the house."

The pair took two years to restore the house, gutting it down to its studs. They took out horsehair plaster and faulty wiring, but preserved most of its original floors. They then added new plumbing, insulation, electrical infrastructure and heating-ventilation-and-cooling equipment.

"It's like 2013 meets the 1800s," DeLuca said. Before the renovation, "they literally had newspaper and fabric stuffed in as their insulation for the house," he said.

The pair tried to renovate the home in a way that was as environmentally friendly as possible, DeLuca said.

They also conducted a complete archaeological dig at the 2-acre site and documented everything found on the property, Bronczek said. This included bullets, pocket knives, nails, coins, pottery and belt buckles.

The building, located at 1101 Chain Bridge Road near Georgetown Pike, is now a functioning home, not a museum piece. The kitchen has massive Viking appliances, 2-inch-thick counters made of white marble and wraparound shelving evocative of an apothecary. There's also 105-degree steam shower upstairs and a recreation room in the basement, complete with television, treadmill, massage chair and bar.

DeLuca and Bronczek extended the house's wraparound porch all the way around the house and screened in sections of it to form outdoor living space, complete with a kitchen.

The house also is connected via the second floor to a three-car garage, above which sits a drafting studio used by the men. They usually work on about four houses per year.

A separate carriage house outside has an exterior wall covered with painted wooden American flags.

Bronczek and DeLuca also preserved signatures in the attic, which were made by soldiers during the Civil War and various people who resided in the house for generations afterward. Some of the attic's scrawlings were lost when the tree smashed through the roof, they said.

The property is on Fairfax County's list of historical sites. Although a sign out front dates the house to 1842, the county's listing pegs it as circa-1856 to 1861.

McLean historian Carole Herrick agrees with the latter time frame.

"George Walters bought 88 acres in 1846," she said. "The Langley Ordinary was later built on his property sometime shortly before the Civil War."

The house until recently had been painted yellow, but it now is white, which was its original color, Herrick said.

Aquino said she has no plans to visit her former house and is happy to remember it the way it was.

"It was just a wonderful house to grow up in," she said. "It had a certain amount of history. When you're a kid, it's your house. You take it for granted. You don't realize until you're an adult how special it was."

DeLuca and Bronczek also delight in historical properties and have formed Reclaimed America, a company that specializes in preserving materials from older homes and incorporating them into new designs.

The men also favor environmentally friendly lighting, insulation and building materials. Instead of using cheap, mass-produced materials from China, Bronczek and DeLuca like to give their business to American companies offering high-quality products.

"It's celebrating American heritage, as well as trying to sustain the American economy," DeLuca said. "I think it's everyone's job to try to do that."

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Susan Thomas, an associate with the McFadden Group of Washington Fine Properties, said DeLuca always collaborates closely with buyers to ensure a unique result.

"He gets very passionate about his work and works with each person individually," she said. "He doesn't do the same thing over and over."

The McLean Project for the Arts will hold its spring benefit at the Langley Ordinary from 7 to 9 p.m. on Thursday, May 16. For more information, visit www.mpaart.org.

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