



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Architect Mark Primack, left, designed the carriage house for George Ow Jr.

Carriage house complements Victorian

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DRIVING UP Highland Avenue from Mission Street, it's difficult miss the stately plum and turquoise Victorian-era at the corner of Escalona Drive.

Not only are the exterior colors stunning, but the French Second Empire-style home has a matching garage.

The home of George Ow Jr. and Gail Michaelis-Ow was built in 1882; the garage came in 1989.

Theirs is a perfect example of a garage that complements an older home.

Architect Mark Primack said he aimed for a structure that could have been existed as a carriage house 107 years ago. He prefers to call it a carriage house.

The garage's exterior mimics the home down to the pattern of the decorative siding, the shape of the windows, the gingerbread bric-a-brac. It sports a mansard roof and windowed tower just like its taller neighbor.

But a closer look reveals that the fancy details are smaller in scale than those of the home.

"When the house was built, all this detail you could buy off the shelf because it was in style, but that's not the case now," Primack said. "We didn't want to rob (the impact) of the main house, so all the detail and trim on the carriage house is two-thirds the actual size.

"Victorians were very flamboyant, not symmetrical," he said. "I didn't want it (the garage) to compete, so we gave it a quieter dignity. Everything about the garage is symmetrical. It's like the quiet butler standing by.

The garage's mansard roof and tower mimic its older sister. It also appears that the side of the garage has a bay window like its taller sister. But the second-story "bay" is an optical illusion. The trim around the three windows is painted several shades of cream to give an appearance of depth.

Because the Ow's home is a historic landmark, Primack had to sell the idea of a carriage house to the city's Historic Preservation Commission.

He did his homework.

He found old pictures of the house to determine if it ever had a matching garage. It didn't, but in the 1940s, a modern garage was built on the property. A shed was behind the garage.

The old garage was near the house, splitting the residence from the back yard. The Ows wanted the new garage in the same place, but Primack suggested constructing it on a corner of the site, giving the Ows a larger yard.

In his research, Primack discovered that Victorians often were built with matching carriage houses.

"I call it a carriage house because traditionally, the carriage house had the carriages below and rooms at the top," Primack

said. These rooms often were occupied by the servants.

In this case, the Ows' two cars and their son's motorcycle take the place of carriages in the oversize, two-car garage. The walls of the garage are lined with cabinets "for all our junk," George Ow said. His office fills the space where servants would have slept.

The mansard roof posed an interesting problem for the second-floor office, Primack said. The sloping walls of the second story would make the room look like it was falling inward.

Primack solved the problem by lining the walls with shelves. Because the walls slope inward, the top shelves aren't as deep as the lower shelves.

The garage's tower, with windows on all four sides, acts as a skylight for the office.

"Highland Avenue is a busy street, so we didn't want to put in a whole lot of windows. So the skylight provides light," Primack noted.

The finishing touch to bring the garage into conformance with the house was a new coat of paint for each. The house, which the Ows purchased in 1975, had been several shades of beige.

The Ows hired Charles Prentiss to come up with a new color scheme. The main colors are a deep plum and a turquoise, but actually 10 colors were used to give the home and matching garage their stunning appearance.