

At Home

NEW HAMPSHIRE
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ROGER AMSDEN PHOTO

A modern kitchen next to the open space living area in the former Wilmot Flat Fire Station.

Station identification

Dana Dakin saw potential in the old Wilmot Flat fire house and turned it into a showplace



ROGER AMSDEN PHOTO

This sign, once at the entryway of the Wilmot Flat Fire Station, is now displayed on an interior wall of the renovated building.

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By ROGER AMSDEN
Union Leader Correspondent

WILMOT — It would have been difficult to find much of a future for the former fire station at Wilmot Flat when Dana Dakin first looked at it 14 years ago.

But the native Californian who was enjoying a successful career as a marketing consultant to international investment firms saw something in the run-down station with its peeling paint, broken windows, dark and gloomy interior and oily concrete floor.

"I saw lots of loft-style homes in the SoHo section of New York when I was working there back in the late 1960s and I'd always wanted one," said Dakin, who saw the potential of the 3,500-square-foot building with its high pitched roof and wide open spaces.

Her realtor nearly fainted when she said "It looks like a loft. I'll buy it," she recalls.

Dakin had come to New

Hampshire in pursuit of love. She arrived in 1993 and spent two years in Sunapee with her significant other until their relationship dissolved.

She was on the verge of returning to her native state when she saw a bookstore display of the works of poets Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon and decided that she wanted to live in Wilmot, to feel the sense of being connected to the land and its past and the community of people who live there that was evident in their writing.

"You don't have that in California. It was something that I had grown to appreciate and love and why I wanted to make my life here," said Dakin.

She bought the building for less than \$100,000 and for the next two years camped out inside, living in a tent she bought at Wal-Mart pitched near the giant boiler that heated the building.

The only running water she had was cold. She cooked on a two-burner stove. The only

furniture was a table with a broken leg that the firefighters had left behind.

Two years later, after consultations with an architect and interior designer, the renovations began. The concrete floor was jackhammered and removed, the drop ceilings, which hid the original wood beams and ceilings, were removed and the roof was lifted to allow insulation to be installed above the ceiling.

"The wood came from the woods right around here and was milled on the site before the station was built in 1939. The beams are marked by the workers to show where they were supposed to go. I didn't want to see that covered up," Dakin said.

Radiant heat replaced the old heating system, a modern open kitchen and appliances were installed and a mix of furniture and decorative pieces ranging from wooden African figures, moose antlers and wicker furniture were brought in.



ROGER AMSDEN PHOTO

Decorative objects from many cultures blend together in the home Dana Dakin renovated.

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"If it's weird, it works. If you love it, everything will come together," said Dakin, who describes the decor as "everything from trash to high end." Many of the most treasured items came from her family, including a carved chest that was built in California in the 1920s and looks like it came right out of Renaissance England.

The table, which was in the building when she bought it has had its broken leg repaired and is now the centerpiece of the dining room, where wood floors replaced the oil-soaked concrete.

Judiciously spaced couches divide the wide-open downstairs into smaller self-contained areas, while the former entryway now is a sunroom with blue and white checkerboard squares and modern-looking office furniture compete with an old back-carried forest fire pump and other fire station memorabilia for attention.

A natural stained clapboard wall which separates the sunroom from the main living space downstairs has the old fire station sign mounted on it as a reminder of the building's past.

Upstairs, where the dominant feature for years had been a pool table used by firefighters, was turned into a second large living room with mirrors and a balustrade breaking up the vast space to make it appear smaller. A home office and a bedroom were located at the front of the upstairs.

The former fire house has now become something of a focal point for the town with a new community center located behind it — which Dakin helped shepherd to fruition — and the town post office nearby.

It is also the meeting site for gatherings of the New Hampshire Writers project and other organizations and in recent years has become the home base of the Woman's Trust, which Dakin founded in 2003. The award-winning microfinance program has over 1,000 loan clients, all women, in Pokuase, Ghana.

Several years ago Dakin decided to separate her work and personal life and moved to a small saltbox home not far from the fire station, which is once again at the center of life in the small, neighborly community.