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# 'A Dream Come True'

With an eye toward "timeless, simple elegance," a team of craftspeople led by **Thomas K. Fischer** transforms the first floor of a humble Bucks County couple's home.

**T**homas K. Fischer's story is one of timelessness and teamwork, of reinvention and second chances.

Fischer has earned his place as one of the area's foremost preservers and renovators of historic properties, though he is quick to share the credit with his crew of world-class craftspeople. Since founding his boutique firm in 1983, Fischer has revitalized countless structures throughout Bucks County and surrounding areas. Naturally, his walls are adorned with

accolades in recognition of the elegance, hard work, and unquestionable craftsmanship he brings to each job. He's likely too modest to say so out loud, but Fischer has accomplished more than he ever thought possible when he embarked on his career as a tradesman more than 40 years ago.

So, in 2020, when the pandemic essentially shut down the U.S. construction industry, Fischer did what a lot of people tend to do when life throws a curveball: He took some time off

to evaluate what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. He traveled to California and Colorado, cruised the islands, and "became very familiar" with the landscape of Tucson, Arizona, his new part-time home.

Fate intervened in February 2021, when a family in Bucks County called with an interesting proposal: Would Fischer be interested and available to renovate the entire first floor of their beautiful brick colonial in Newtown, to include a chef's kitchen and a playroom for his



grandchildren? Fischer's curiosity was instantly sparked, as he had worked with the family on a number of prior projects he found personally rewarding—renovating the master suite of their home, creating a distinctive home office, and qualifying an historic property on Newtown's Sycamore Street, a registered historical site Fischer later renovated to accommodate a foundation's offices.

"My clients are world traveled and successful in both business and philanthropy, but they're also very humble, born and raised in Levittown," says Fischer. "They wanted to redo the first floor as a platform for their adult children and grandchildren. They said, 'You're the only one who can do this. What you have done for us in the past is beyond what anyone else has done.' I said, 'OK, but only if I can get the materials needed to do the job right.'"

With the U.S. supply chain mired in unprecedented delays, Fischer had his doubts. He started making calls and before long had procured 90 percent of the materials he knew he would need. He spent the next few months mobilizing his team, from the architect needed to draw up the revitalized space to the craftspeople who would use their specialized expertise to bring the family's new first floor to life.

So, in June 2021, Fischer loaded his pickup with a generator, tools, and other equipment, and pulled out of his driveway in Tucson, the GPS coordinates leading him back to his roots in Bucks County.

### 'An Amazing Group'

Fischer grew up on his family's 250-acre farm

(circa 1692) on Creamery Road, caring for livestock and "baling hay and planting corn as soon as I could reach the pedals on the tractor." The work ethic he honed on the farm paired well with his creativity and perfectionist tendencies. For schooling, he went to Council Rock School District from first through eighth grade, and then matriculated to George School. While at George School, he did an apprenticeship with Francis Lovett, a leading authority on historical renovations. He then spent two years in art school, focusing on design and photography, as well as two years studying psychology. His skills, stamina, and eye for exquisite detail drew him into the construction industry; one of his first experiences was working for a firm that helped create Core Creek Park in Langhorne.

"What I learned from all of those early experiences I still use today," he says. "My approach to construction is to marry form, function, and finance. If it doesn't function well, it doesn't matter what it looks like, and you also have to consider the budget. With this home in Newtown, my clients wanted timeless, simple elegance, including a country kitchen in the Amish style—'Patty's Country Kitchen,' we called it. They had some ideas in mind, but they also said, 'We want your ideas.' It was a dream come true, because they let me run."

Considering the potential for supply-chain snags, Fischer opted for custom-made kitchen cabinets and doors—all built completely by hand. The existing kitchen cabinets would be reused and retrofitted for the laundry room, at



Photos of the renovated home prior to furnishing







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—Thomas K. Fischer

a savings of nearly \$12,000. For the hardwood floors throughout, an eye-catching medallion above the kitchen island, and other woodwork, Fischer chose high-quality repurposed materials of great historical significance.

“Installing historical floors is an art—finding the wood, milling it, kiln-drying it, installing it,” he adds. “I worked with a firm in Virginia to find an old barn that had been built with 200-year-old wood from first-growth trees that are 400 to 500 years old—and turned them into tongue-in-groove planks. It’s a \$100,000 floor. We also procured these beautiful beams out of an 1859 building in Manhattan and used those for the entries of the kitchen, the office, and the great room. Visually, it’s harmonious.”

With Fischer as the quarterback, an “all-star team” of craftspeople applied unparalleled expertise to every last detail: Ken Burkhead, elec-

trician; Russ Curtis, painter; Bob Edinger, tile artisan; Tim Gallagher, Christopher Hunt\*, and Roger Schaefer, master carpenters; Jay Glatz, cabinetmaker; Daniel E. Lloyd, architect; Russell J. Mort Jr., floor refinisher; and Ettore Troia, stone mason. Likewise, several locally rooted vendors played key roles in the renovation: Marvin Specialty Doors; Freedom Millwork of Pipersville, with special thanks to George Graham; Audiolab Stereo & Video Center in Fairless Hills; and two Lambertville, New Jersey-based suppliers, Finkles and Niece Lumber.

“It’s an amazing group, and they pretty much cover everything I might ever need,” Fischer says. “Without them, I couldn’t have done what I do.”

A few finishing touches aside, Fischer and his team completed the renovation of the clients’ first floor earlier this year. When asked if his clients are pleased, Fischer says, “These clients don’t gush, and they gush about the look and feel of their home.” More telling is the fact that the homeowners have enlisted Fischer to turn his attention to other

parts of the home, including the basement. Currently in the planning phase, the basement renovation will include some of the same distinctive touches from the first floor, as well as a 16-foot handmade Irish bar and a “hidden” room that can function as both a saferoom and a Harry Potter-themed playroom for the grandkids, similar to the one he created on the first floor beneath the main staircase.

The Newtown renovation has renewed Fischer’s sense of purpose and passion for his work. He is excited about future projects on the horizon, including the prospect of working with another client to restore an historic Lambertville-based theater.

“I feel so privileged to have been given a second chance,” he says. “With the team I have in place, everyone contributes, and all of their contributions add up to make an unbelievable finished product. Each member of the team feels like they are part of something integral, and the enthusiasm they have for what they do is contagious.

“As I’m considering other projects, I always like a challenge,” he continues. “I enjoy working with historical structures, but it could be 50 years old; it doesn’t have to be 200 years old. I want to create value with everything I do, so for me to take on a new project, the client needs to be as committed as I am to making the project one of a kind. When that happens, the sky’s the limit.” ■



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**\* In memory of Christopher S. Hunt**  
of Chris Hunt Carpentry in Langhorne,  
carpenter extraordinaire,  
who passed away in July 2021.