

## Duo become 'Guardians' of Los Feliz legacy

By MICHAEL VENTRE

originally came to be, but they have a theory.

It was built in 1936 by brothers Frank and Eddie Testa, who were set builders at Universal Studios. The architect was Allen Ruoff, who worked in Hollywood as an art director

Tod Abrams and George Bamber aren't exactly sure how their four-bedroom, 4½-bath house in the Los Feliz neighborhood



**PHILADELPHIA FEELING:** Los Feliz home's federal-style facade bears influence of colonial era on Eastern seaboard.

around that time. Schmoozing on the set led to a friendship, then a collaboration, Abrams and Bamber surmise.

But there is no uncertainty as to whether the house was the house for them. They knew it the moment they crossed the threshold.

"I walked into the main hallway," Abrams remembers, "looked right, looked left and said, 'This is it.' 'Nobody had done anything to it. There was never a bad '70s remodel done.'"

Says Bamber, "Tod looked at open houses for five years, so he was completely prepared when he walked into this house."

The Testa family owned the formal federal-style home from conception until May 2002, when it was purchased by Abrams, who runs Alternative Marketing Solutions, which specializes in marketing DVD and homevideo for clients such



**DOUBLE DUTY:** A Classic O'Keefe & Merritt double-door range anchors the kitchen renovation adding stainless steel counters, glass cabinet doors and a cork floor to original 1930s elements.

as Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment and Warner Home Video, and Bamber, an assistant director.

Since then, because it has the look and feel of a classic East Coast dwelling, it has been used occasionally as a set for the CBS show "The Guardian." (It's the residence of the Philadelphia lawyer played by star Simon Baker.)

The solid craftsmanship and meticulous attention to detail, as well as the spacious dining and living rooms, indicated to the new buyers a house whose most important building material was love for family. Yet years of unavoidable neglect left Abrams and Bamber with a bona fide fixer-upper. So they set out not only to make the house a home for themselves and their infant son, but also to pay homage to the original owners.

"This was a shrine that they built to their parents," Abrams says. "This was their pride and joy. We recognized how much love this house was built with."

The duo began the renovation with a designer, David M. Plante of West Hollywood, with whom they'd worked on their previous home.

Their strategy was simple:

### WHERE TO GO

**Classic Stoves** (kitchen stove) — contact: Jose Romero (323) 566-2921

**Antiques Plus** (antique knobs for doors and cabinets) — contact: (310) 414-3966

**Ace plating** (hinges, vents, heater, fixtures, trim) — contact: (213) 627-7271

**David M. Plante** (interior design) — contact: (310) 659-5058

**Window Restoration and Repair** (windows) — contact: Ed or Scott, (562) 493-1590 or 477-2882

**House of Stainless** (countertops) — contact: (310) 320-4444

**Square Deal Plumbing** (antique tubs and fixtures) — contact: (323) 587-8291

**Fireworks Landscaping** — contact: Patrick O'Connor, (323) 662-2303

spend money on talent (Plante), develop a plan for the house, work on and complete one room at a time, and prowl flea markets and bargain shops for inexpensive materials whenever possible.

The kitchen, now finished, is a special gem. The previous owners had a simple, functional kitchen. Abrams and Bamber remained true to the era, but revamped it entirely, ripping out the linoleum, installing stainless-steel countertops with marine edges, redoing the glass cabinet doors, routing the doors, putting in a cork floor and generally adding panache to an ordinary space — but all the while maintaining the original 1930s glow. They also installed a pass-through between a small butler's pantry and the main kitchen, and topped it off with a classic, refurbished O'Keefe & Merritt stove.

In their hunt for materials — which is exhaustive and ongoing — Abrams and Bamber looked for items that replicate the period, or at least the spirit of the period, without busting their budget. They found bathroom tile that is true to the original decor. Instead of going directly to pricey boutiques for light fixtures, they patiently scour swap meets for small treasures.

The house features the original steel casement windows with cranks, but they were in disrepair, and replacements were difficult to find. Abrams and Bamber met Ed Sanchez and Scott Goldfarb at an antique home show, where they declared, "We can fix any window." They weren't kidding.

Abrams and Bamber don't expect to be moving soon, so the remodeling will be a painstaking process of one room at a time — not to mention a sprawling back yard — that likely will take years. That's OK with them.

"We bought the house with the intention of using every room," Bamber says with a wry smile in anticipation of the task ahead.