



# LIVING IN THE PAST

## Character, durability sells older isle homes

By BOB WHITBY  
The Daily News

**GALVESTON** — It's a labor of love.

Remodeling or restoring, Victorian or Greek Revival, fixing up those old houses is a popular way of putting roofs over the heads of many Galvestonians.

Their reasons are almost as varied as the island's architectural styles.

Some say the homes of yesteryear have an individuality lacking in the cookie-cutter houses of a modern suburb.

"It is almost like these kinds of houses have a personality or something," said homeowner Mary LeFlore. "They have so much character."

Others say old houses are well-built and have withstood the tests of time and hurricanes.

"All I know is that that wood is so darn hard, any time I try to nail into it is hard," said homeowner Hilary Swann. "The termites have not touched it."

Even smaller 19th century homes feature architectural touches that set them apart from their modern counterparts. Pocket doors, window seats, china closets, beam ceilings and decorative trim are a few details that are rarely found in modern construction.

Whatever the reason, all agree that Galveston is a buyers' market when it comes to finding a 100-year-old fixer upper.

Randy Pace, director of residential preservation programs for the Galveston Historical Foundation, said that east of 40th Street alone, there are about 300 historical homes now on the market.

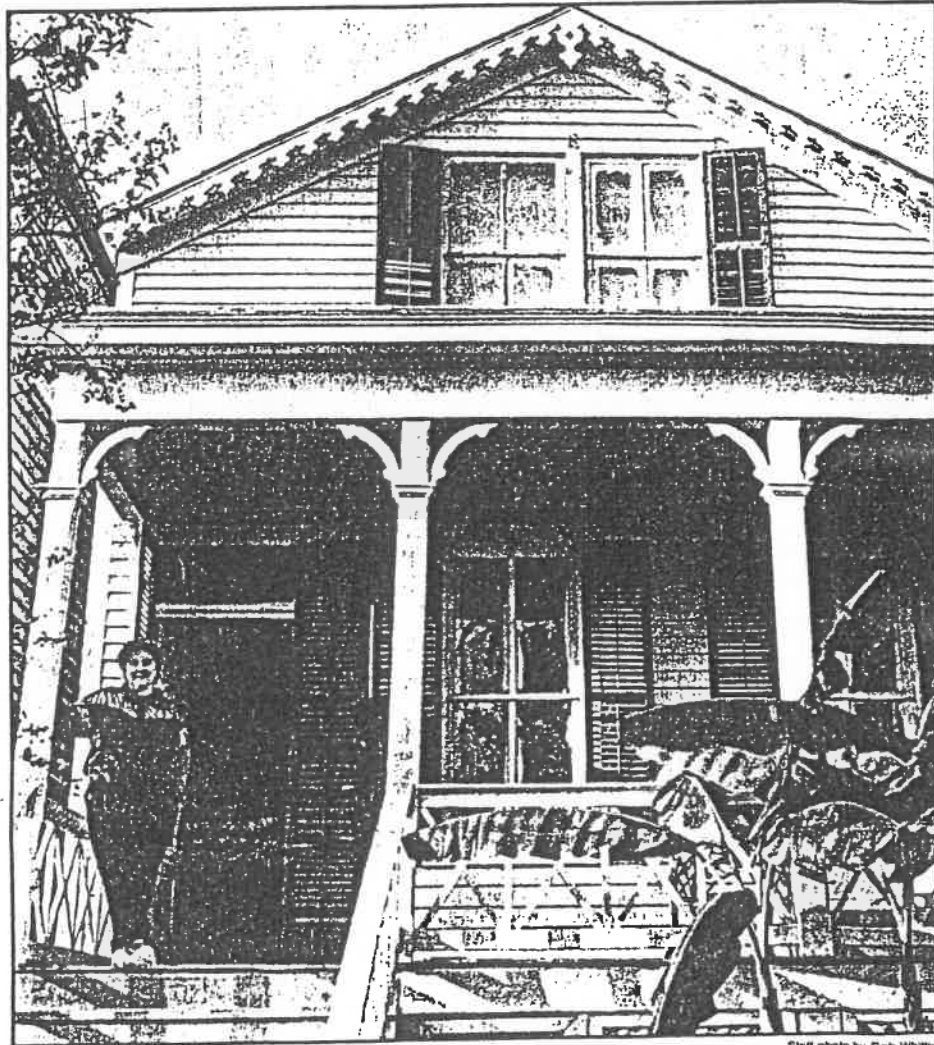
"We have an abundance of historic buildings that are available and the prices are very affordable."

But price alone cannot be the determining factor when buying an old house, because restoration work is expensive and time-consuming.

The GHF has a number of programs that help homeowners and potential homeowners research, finance, paint, locate and restore homes. Pace said detailed historical documents exist for the majority of the old houses.

Above all, restoration takes patience, LeFlore said, because somehow the job just doesn't seem to get finished.

"Never. You are never finished with these old houses. You think you are but you will always go back and say, 'Oops, this needs fixing,' she



Staff photo by Bob Whitby

Mary LeFlore stands on the porch of her renovated home

## Get an expert opinion before buying

**GALVESTON** — Restoring an old

home is time-consuming and expensive. Experts recommend hiring a professional to look over a house before making a final decision, but there are some things to look for on an initial walk through that indicate what shape the house is in.

• Pay close attention to the condition of porches. Because they are easily damaged in storms, they are often repaired with cheaper wood such as pine. Pine is susceptible to termite



• If you are serious about a home, have a professional check it for damage from termites and wood-boring beetles. Both are common in Galveston.

• Old houses that have not been repainted recently often have lead-based paints on them. Removing the paint is expensive and can be hazardous, but painting over is often not an option.

• Check to see if the wiring has been updated. The knob-and-tube wiring systems used in old construction is not up to the task of supplying the power modern families require. The ceramic knobs used as insulators are one way to determine if the house has this type of wiring.

• Make sure the foundation is lev-

el. If doors and windows don't operate properly inside the house, it may be an indication of an uneven foundation. Because most older homes are elevated, foundation leveling is not as difficult as it would be with a house on a concrete slab.

• Inspect the windows and ceilings to make sure the house is weather-tight. Look for water damage to the ceiling.

• Old homes in Galveston are built very close to one another. If a part of the roof is shaded by an overhang from a neighboring house, check to see if the roof can dry adequately.

• Look at the lay of the ground around the home. It should be level or slope away to drain water.