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ROOM

An eco of the past

Green B&B | History and sustainability are in harmony as Milan Doshi renovates the Queen Anne.

By Susan Clotfelter
The Denver Post

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POSTED: 02/19/2009 12:30:00 AM MST
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The big breakfast table, made of a sustainable wood veneer by Denver's Walnut Street Woodworks, beckons guests at the Queen Anne Bed and Breakfast to linger and chat. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

Milan Doshi never thought he'd return to the hospitality industry.

As the son of St. Louis hotel owners, "I was stripping rooms with the housekeeping staff when I was 10 years old," he says. After college, he did the standard thing: He put half a world between himself and the place he grew up.

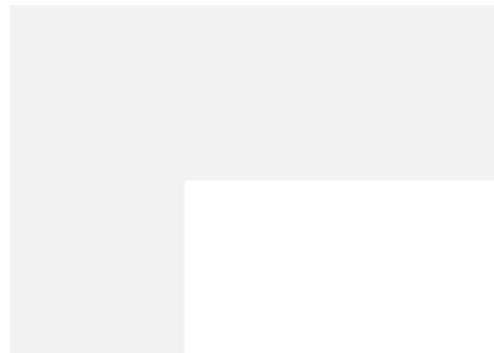
But at 28, he's now the owner of a work in progress, a slice of Colorado history and a property whose transformation is engaging all the disparate threads of his background: the Queen Anne Bed & Breakfast at 2147 Tremont Place, in Denver's Clement Historic District.

Behind the discreet facades of the lodgings' two Victorian homes are rooms that flow and breathe, a seamless integration of historic detail and Asian simplicity, artistry

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Owner Milan Doshi, 28, considers his Queen Anne to be community-supported hospitality. He was able to find most of the labor for his renovation within 10 miles of the inn (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

drama. It's what you get when a Midwestern son of Indian-born parents comes West via an economics degree in Missouri, sustainable agriculture and architecture institutes in India and New Zealand, and culinary school in New York: a fiercely local vision, informed by a global conscience.

During Doshi's two years working at Devi, an Indian restaurant in New York, he saw food costs increase astronomically and restaurant owners under continual stress.

"My parents were retiring and willing to invest in property. So I was asking myself, was the restaurant business really where I wanted to spend my time? Did I want to return to the hotel industry?" After a yoga retreat, the answer came to him.

"I always liked talking to people, and it seemed like modern hospitality took away from what travel should be."

If the modern model of hospitality meant checking into a room, flopping onto a bed, remote in hand, and ignoring the local town and people, then Doshi wanted something different. He wanted to create a place that harkened back to a more traditional idea of hospitality — but one that simultaneously and aggressively pursued his environmental ideals.

When his parents sold their St. Louis hotels, they had to

reinvest the proceeds within six months to avoid a huge tax bill. So the race was on to find the right spot.

The trio looked at 150 B&Bs before they found the Queen Anne. Its location five blocks from downtown Denver, across the street from Benedict Fountain Park and near a green-built condo complex under construction, made it ideal.

It turned out, though, that discovering it was the easy part. Doshi and his parents took possession a month before the Democratic National Convention in August 2008. The entire facility had been booked for the duration of the convention by Washington, D.C.-based political Internet magazine The Hill. The clock was ticking.

Royalty in the rough

"We did the whole first floor in five days,"



Doshi says. "Ripped up the carpet — where the original Douglas fir floor was rotting out — scraped that out, put in the subfloor, installed the furniture, put in new mattresses and bedding and did the painting. It was crazy. It was a week of 18-hour days."



The carved swirls of a Victorian couch contrast with the rugged grain of a burl maple coffee table, also from Walnut Street Woodworks. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

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Stripes continue across the ceiling and down the wall of a guest room, giving the long, narrow space drama and warmth. Two halves of a Parson's table, mounted on either wall, serve as space-efficient nightstands. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

When the magazine's editor, who had previously stayed at the Queen Anne, walked in the front door, "she was speechless."

With good reason.

Once inside the B&B, the surprises begin.

Visitors are confronted with a dramatic, zero-clutter space in the foyer. There's one spare reception desk, one chair, both perched atop a chunky rug of thick white, black and buff yarns. To the left, a huge, two-panel landscape mural by artist Rachel Znerold acts as a window

to a Rocky Mountain landscape.

In the parlor, another contrast awaits: A deep rust-colored Victorian sofa faces a coffee table made of a thick slice of swirled burl maple. The table's black, sculpted base blends into the dark floor, making it appear to float; the drama of its grain echoes the sofa's feminine curves.

Most striking of all is what's not there.



All of the inn's mattresses were replaced with greener products, many of which sit on platforms. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

No bookcases. No antimacassars. No doilies. No frou- frou. No florals.

There are only two matching carved armchairs, reupholstered in black leather, with a small reading table between them; a low table under the window with stacks of neatly organized magazines; a string of blown-glass vases that hangs from the ceiling. Addition by subtraction.

"As we progressed in moving



Innkeeper and interior designer Lindsay McBride is an army of one in the renovation of the Queen Anne's guest rooms. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

things out, the more we saw the beauty of the original building," Doshi says. "That was a first for me. So we took out all this stuff, took it back to absolutely nothing. Then we began adding back slowly."

Foundation garments

He repainted using only environmentally friendly, low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints. Then came the floor — a super-hard, stable material called strandwoven timber — in a luxurious, dark mocha color. It's made by Boulder company Sustainable Flooring of wood fibers compressed into a dense composite.

Then, in the dining room, came Doshi's most important investment yet: A 7-foot- diameter round table that seats 12. A table to fulfill the "breakfast" part of bed and breakfast; a table to echo the buxom swell of the Queen's big, south-facing bay window.

"We're surrounded in America by 90-degree angles," Doshi says. "But in Asian, European and especially Islamic architecture, what you see most is arches. In B&Bs you often see these long tables, where you might talk to one or two other people across it, but usually not to anyone else. Our idea was to create a community where there was more than a sporadic connection."

He found his table — as he'd found nearly all of the labor and materials for his renovation — close to home, at Walnut Street Woodworks. "He

came to visit and said, 'I've got about a month,' " recounts Walnut Street's Chris Connors, who owns the business along with Tom Diess. "He wanted a large table, but also to not have to tear out a doorway to get it in. We did have to remove a molding."

But it's not the table's size that wows. It's the striking gold and dark-chocolate grain, radiating out from a nearly pure-white center inlay, and the silken smooth feel of it. The material is called Italian ebony, a veneer that's man-made, like the floor, from leftover wood fibers.

"It's already got that color, so you don't need to use any stain," Connors says. In a deliberate nod to its Colorado origins, he chose aspen for the center decoration.

And when Doshi seats a visitor at the table and offers a glass of water, there are no coasters allowed. "They gave us a sample piece of the wood," he says, "and we smashed eggs on it, we ground peanut butter into it, we tried everything" that could possibly mar or mangle it. "We were conscious of it being a heavily used table," Connors says.

The base, a vase-shaped central pedestal made of a fast-growing eucalyptus hybrid, echoes Asian architecture. So in addition to the table's durability, nobody gets stuck straddling or kicking a table leg, and it's easy for guests to swing out their chairs to face one another.

Dressing a lady

The Queen's public spaces were stretching, breathing, reawakening.

"As soon as the table was here, within two weeks, you could feel a different energy," Doshi says.

It was time to tackle the rooms. Again, help was close at hand.

The previous owner had hired Lindsay McBride, 28, a former merchandiser and designer at The Furniture Room, as a housekeeper. Her first day was the day Milan and his parents took possession. "The more I talked to her and found out about her interior design background, we kept relying on her more and more," Doshi says. She was quickly promoted to innkeeper and designer.

In a long, narrow room that runs the width of the house, McBride put the bed at one end, then painted cinnabar and tea-colored stripes vertically up the wall and raced them all the way down the stretch of ceiling. At the window alcoves that interrupt the space, she echoed the cinnabar in single lengths of velvet drapes. At the bed, a black Parsons table split in half is mounted to the facing walls, with each side used as a nightstand.

In a room with an 1850s tester bed, McBride decided to take a playful approach. "The traditional Victorian look is just a lot of layers and patterns on top of each other. So we went with a traditional pattern, but we didn't layer up the accents and rugs." Instead, a giant black-and-white pattern tweaks the bed's sober elegance while a subtly shaded, but oversize pattern of diamonds adds interest to the top half of the walls.

McBride was recently working on installing renovations to a rooftop room that has its own deck and hot tub, in order to have it ready for Valentine's Day. Her challenge is that she's a one-woman design-install team. "I'm painting, I'm wallpapering, I'm woodworking, I'm doing it all." So she's grateful that so far, only one room has required extensive ladder work. "I didn't have any fingerprints left after putting all that tape on the striped ceiling."

Reconnecting

Doshi is proud that almost all of the labor for the renovation came from within 10 miles. He mined community connections and Craigslist for installers. McBride lives in the neighborhood.

Walnut Street Woodworks also built the B&B's new platform beds. To top them, he bought eco-friendly Keetsa mattresses made of recycled metal coils and memory foam infused with green tea extracts. Though they're from California, he's pleased that even for commercial use, they're warrantied for 20 years.

Organic cotton bedding and towels? Check. Green and nontoxic cleaning products and practices? Check. Commercial-property recycling service? Check.

In addition to low-flow toilets and shower heads, Doshi put toiletries from Jason Natural Products in dispensers in the bathrooms — no throwaway plastic bottles. Locally produced art that's for sale hangs on the walls of some rooms, and he has a 150-disc collection of music by area bands. At happy hour, he serves Colorado wines and Haystack Mountain Goat Dairy cheese.

Doshi can't wait to dig into the brick-bordered raised garden beds that connect the two homes that constitute the bed and breakfast.

"We're going to intercrop tomatoes and cucumbers and be able to use our own home-grown herbs for cooking," he predicts.

To that end, he's taking master composting classes and hopes to sponsor a teaching garden at Ebert Elementary School down the street. A crop of amaranth that he'll grind for pancake flour is in his plan.

He's investigating small-scale wind or solar power, at least to provide the Queen's hot water. In three years,

Doshi wants her to become the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified B&B in the country.

In fact, he wants the Queen Anne to go beyond LEED certification and achieve cradle-to-cradle certification — an industrial-design principal in which all materials cycle in a closed loop so that no pollutants are produced and nothing is wasted. He's scoped out plumbing systems that recycle gray water from the bathroom sink and use it to flush the toilet.

For now, the task at hand is continuing the renovation, room by room. Bids have been taken on pine-beetle-killed cabinets for the kitchen, where the floor will be recycled rubber.

For a soaring, three-story turret room — one of the last existing open turrets in Denver — Doshi has soaring enthusiasm.

"We're going to make this room crazy," he says with a grin, envisioning a painted crescent moon and stars and a crystal chandelier.

"It's such a fun process to do this with a house like this," he says. "It has its own personality. You wake up every morning and feel like it's telling you a new message."

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Besides such a wonderful place (my girlfriend won't stop talking about it!), Milan is one of the most well-educated individuals I know. When you visit this B&B, which obviously embodies Milan's philosophies, make sure to seek him out and have a conversation...about anything...you'll be glad you did.



trey sawyer | 8:39 AM on Thursday Feb 19



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