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In the midst of a skilled labor shortage, Djordje rolled up his sleeves to take the lead on the restoration process. He's become so involved that the contractors he works alongside sometimes didn't even realize they are deep in the dust and grime with the owner.

"Not only are we saving money by my own sweat equity, but I've also learned a lot," said Djordje. "I've spent a lot of time on YouTube. I don't think this project would have been possible 10 to 15 years ago."

"Djordje has personally inspected every square inch of this house," added Trudy. "From the crawl spaces underneath, all the way to the attic. Pretty much every surface that you look at has either been refinished, repainted, sanded down, shined and just everything pretty much is different."

Digging into the bones of a house built around the same time that houses were just getting electricity is expected to yield some surprises. Djordje joked that he hoped to find some stashed gold, but he didn't get that lucky.

"There was some demolition in the kitchen, where I was definitely hoping I'd find something," he said. "I found an old tobacco pouch, probably from 1905 when they originally built the front house."

"He found some of the original wallpaper up by the front door and even though it's all torn up we still kind of want to preserve part of it, just because it's some of that original history that you can't get back," said Trudy.

Preserving the old-fashioned charm is a major priority for the couple, who received assistance from Vintage Hardware in Astoria to furnish the new rooms.

"Our guiding principals were that we wanted it to feel really clean," said Trudy. "Because we've been to bed and breakfasts where you feel the bedspread has been used for the last 50 years. So we wanted all white linens, everything can be bleached. Everything that does have fabric on it feels clean. You can sit down and touch the pillows and everything."

Djordje added that they worked to create an aesthetic broad enough to appeal to a wide range of groups.

"Some bed and breakfasts have dollies and all that stuff," he said. "I just wanted — not a man cave, but I didn't want it too flowery."

An optimistic future

In the first few weeks of opening, the new Rosebriar Mansion hasn't had an empty weekend.

Visitors have ranged from a group of male friends who met for a weekend of golfing and fantasy football, to families gathering for weddings and funerals.

The Čitović's have set up the rentable



Djordje and Trudy Čitović stand in the newly remodeled Rosebriar kitchen space. They hope to use the open design for small events.



Djordje Čitović uses a crow bar to remove water-damaged walls in the Rosebriar.



Djordje Čitović prepares to knock down a wall in the kitchen to open up the space.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

A finished Airbnb room with bunk beds inside the Rosebriar Mansion.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The Rosebriar Mansion in Astoria was originally built in 1905.

part of the mansion to include seven bedrooms, each with a full bath, plus a large, private living and dining space and outdoor area

that will lodge up to 16 guests. They feel the group lodging allows them to fill a critical need in Astoria.

"The way Astoria is set up there's not many options for multi-room lodging," said Djordje. "I think we're unique in that if you have a group of 10, 12, or 15 people you can all stay together in one property."

The couple also lists the carriage house as a private Airbnb rental for up to four guests. The carriage house includes a bedroom area and common space. They are considering opening up some of the rooms inside the house for individual guests to fill a need for lodging during the week.

The Čitovićs are toying with several other options for the future. They hope to use the space for a variety of small events with up to 40 guests. Trudy is hopeful to eventually

team up with several local businesses to offer wedding packages.

"I could see how this could be a one stop shop," she said.

Her desire to hold weddings in the space may stem from her own family ties to the mansion. Her father, former Mayor Willis Van Dusen, married her stepmother in the back chapel at the Rosebriar Bed & Breakfast in the 1990s.

She hopes to carry the positive reputation and memories that people have of the Rosebriar Bed & Breakfast into the future.

"They did a good job the first time when they turned it into a bed and breakfast to keep some of the character," said Trudy. "And that's really our goal. Anytime there is character that can be brought back out, we want to do that."