
Retaining Original Fabric

By John Dunn.

Our restoration solution for the basement doors has allowed us to retain the original fabric of our 1833 house while adapting it for contemporary living.



Previous owners had done some work in the basement of our house, but it was not in a good state. It was dark and damp. We did not know whether the concrete floor had been poured over the top of an original flagstone floor, and the rising damp this had caused in the stone walls had been rendered with more cement.

Dampness and neglect had all but destroyed what appeared to be the original double doors to the basement. Most of the panels were split, beading was missing, the bottom rails broken, the centre stiles no longer reached the threshold, they were rebated to accommodate large bolts top and bottom, and cut down to allow the doors to open outwards instead of inwards.

Should we replace these doors? Should we repair them and replace some of their wooden panels with glass to allow a little more light into the basement?

We thought whatever we did would be an improvement, but if we had replaced these doors or some of their panels, we would have lost a significant original element of the house.

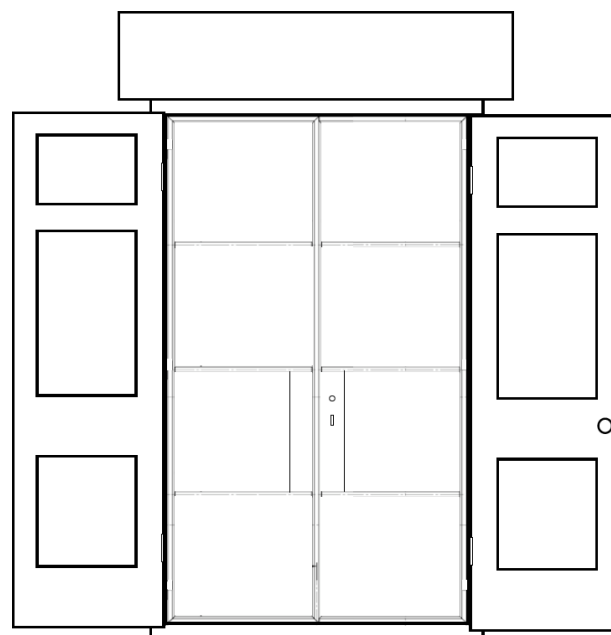
Instead, we proceeded with other work in the basement — removing the render and repointing the stone walls; and digging up the concrete floor to discover some of the original stone flagging which we numbered, photographed, lifted, repaired and reinstated.

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It was a couple of years before we were ready to tackle the basement doors, and by that time we had arrived at a solution: restore the doors but treat them as shutters that could remain open while new steel-and-glass doors would allow light into the basement.

The photos show the doors before work began, and the same doors before repainting but after dozens of scarfed and spliced repairs, and a sketch showing how the doors will act as shutters with the new steel-and-glass doors behind.

Ours is not a solution with which everyone agrees, but it is one that has allowed us to retain the original fabric of our 1833 house while adapting it for contemporary living.



exterior view, timber doors open