

WORLD ON A STRING

A LUTHIER BLENDS LIVING AND WORKING IN FEDERAL HILL

Many of the home's most charming artifacts were inherited from family and friends, like this 1956 Bakelite telephone and antique stand located in the foyer.



Phil's plumbing hobby has yielded an impressive collection of antique bathroom fixtures, like this restored clawfoot tub.



Teresa and Julianna gather in the family's second-floor kitchen, which looks out onto the sunny family room.



The first-story shop affords Phil some private working space, but his home is just a staircase away.

On a quiet Sunday afternoon, the small foyer of Phil Jacoby's newly renovated Federal Hill home is erupting with noise. His 6-month-old son, Philip IV, howls from his stroller; his dog barks madly; and his 5-year-old daughter, Julianna, giggles while bouncing on the stairs. Despite this near deafening cacophony, Phil, smiling, seems unfazed. After all, sound—in its various forms—is a familiar presence in this household.

As an internationally respected musician and luthier—a craftsman who makes or fixes stringed instruments—Phil, 35, makes his living custom-repairing guitars. After intensive study under some of the best in the trade, he serves a diverse customer base from the bright and unassuming shop located beneath his family's home on Fort Avenue. In addition to a philosophy of one-on-one customer service and an impressive array of tools and devices, Phil credits another key ingredient to his success: His customers are welcomed not only into his shop, but into his home.

The tidy shop contains the expected furnishings—numerous work surfaces, displays of guitar accessories, and precise tuning machinery—but it's the unexpected that suggests something livelier lurks beyond the store's wall. An overturned toilet

bowl lies in the center of the room, evidence of a bathroom renovation project, and a velvet portrait of Elvis hangs as a nod to the neighborhood.

After three grueling years renovating their two-story building on the corner of Fort Avenue and Henry Street, Phil and his wife, Teresa, a science and math special education teacher at Francis Scott Key Technology Magnet School, have achieved their decade-long dream of living above his shop—an urban live/work model with a long history in American cities. Slowly regaining popularity, this convenient and flexible mode of living helps shop owners like Phil balance home and work. Teresa often invites Phil's customers up to dinner, and Julianna chats with them as Phil works. "It's a true mom-and-pop shop," Teresa says.

"Having this place made it possible for us to do the things that are important to us," Phil says.

Although Phil says his success serves as an example for other small business owners, he and Teresa's new home is more than an experiment in mixed-use living. To Phil and Teresa, it represents a way of life for their family. Since their move in March this year, Phil finds he has more hours to devote to his wife and children. For Teresa, the highlight is the neighborhood's walkability. "The kids of

my suburban friends think that going somewhere means getting in the car," Teresa says. "My daughter will walk everywhere with me. Instead of having ice cream at home, we'll walk to the shop and say hi to the neighbors along the way."

This urban sensibility is a quality Julianna's parents had hoped their children would gain when they decided to move downtown. Julianna plans to be a marine biologist, perhaps because of their membership to the nearby aquarium. She receives Christmas presents such as dolls and accessories from local merchants, and her parents say she's learning important lessons about culture and diversity. "There are lots of different people here with different backgrounds," Phil says. "She sees people she probably wouldn't see if she were living in say, Columbia."

An epiphany came in 2002, when they were living in suburban-like Lauraville. Tired of spending long hours away from his family while in his repair shop on Light Street, Phil decided to make a change. The couple had long admired south Federal Hill, where Phil's father lives, for its small-town feel and local amenities. But it also had sentimental value: Phil and Teresa met on Fort Avenue in 1993 and had their first kiss in what is now Hogan's Alley.

In March 2002, they found what they were looking for—a corner rowhouse with a storefront and ample living space. Still, it was a long way from their dream home. Renovation challenges included structural damage and a long history of quick fixes to big problems, like drop ceilings and linoleum tacked to the walls.

Family and friends assisted in the process, but ultimately, it came down to Phil's perseverance and willingness to read how-to books and ask numerous questions, says Teresa. Phil, who knew little about home construction when he began, is modest. "I'm good with my hands," he says, and credits his wife: "She has the patience of a saint."

One project that might have tried that patience: Phil's insistence that all of the brick structure and interior walls be reinforced for stability. "There's so much wood in this home now that all of the bricks could fall down, and the house would still stand," Teresa says, laughing.

Today, the Jacobys' modern and airy living space provides the perfect balance of home and work. A comfortable blend of new and salvaged furnishings inherited or purchased in Baltimore-based shops gives the home a friendly, lived-in feel that

suits the tight-knit family. Some standouts: a Bakelite telephone that belonged to Phil's grandmother, a coffee table made from a steamer trunk Teresa's grandmother brought over from Ireland, and wooden Masonic Lodge lockers that now hold guitars waiting to be fixed.

Additionally, the home's impressive array of antique bathroom fixtures reflects a passion Phil picked up from Teresa's father, a plumber. Still, despite their preference for antiques, Phil admits to two major splurges: a commercial-grade stove and a custom railing by local craftsman and South Baltimore neighbor, Jonathan Maxwell.

As soon as architectural drawings are approved, Phil will embark on the next stage of renovation: adding a third floor, which will ultimately house the master suite. In the meantime, he says, the family is "very cozy." Then he smiles and says, "But we don't mind."

—Alice Ockleshaw is a regular contributor to *Urbanite*.



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1848 Reisterstown Road, Suite A
Baltimore, MD 21208
410-484-2600 202-464-4729
www.studiooneda.com