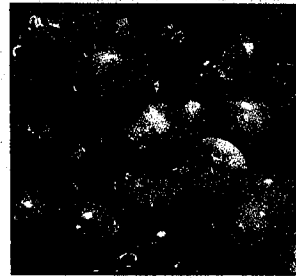


**PLANT TALK**  
Grow cranberries for future Thanksgiving dinners. (No, you don't need a bog.)  
Page 82



**GOURD LOVIN'**  
The versatile vegetable is long-lasting, easy to grow and a hot commodity.  
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## The Star-Ledger

diary



BERNER/SEATTLE TIMES

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## GRAND OLD HOUSE GETS A GREAT NEW LOOK



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER BROWN/THE STAR-LEDGER

This kitchen in the Luke Miller House, one of Madison's oldest homes, was redone along with the rest of the house by homeowner David Quirk. The renovated space includes the original stove. Quirk, below with his dog Punkin on the back porch, preserved historic details as he modernized.

# RENOVATING A GEM

BY CINDY POTTERS  
FOR THE STAR LEDGER

**D**avid Quirk knew exactly what he wanted when he went to see a real estate agent in 2005: a house with a secret passageway, a hidden tunnel and a ghost. Quirk is a big fan of "Lord of the Rings" and "Harry Potter." He wanted the kind of place in which a Middle Earth or Hogwarts being could kick back and relax.

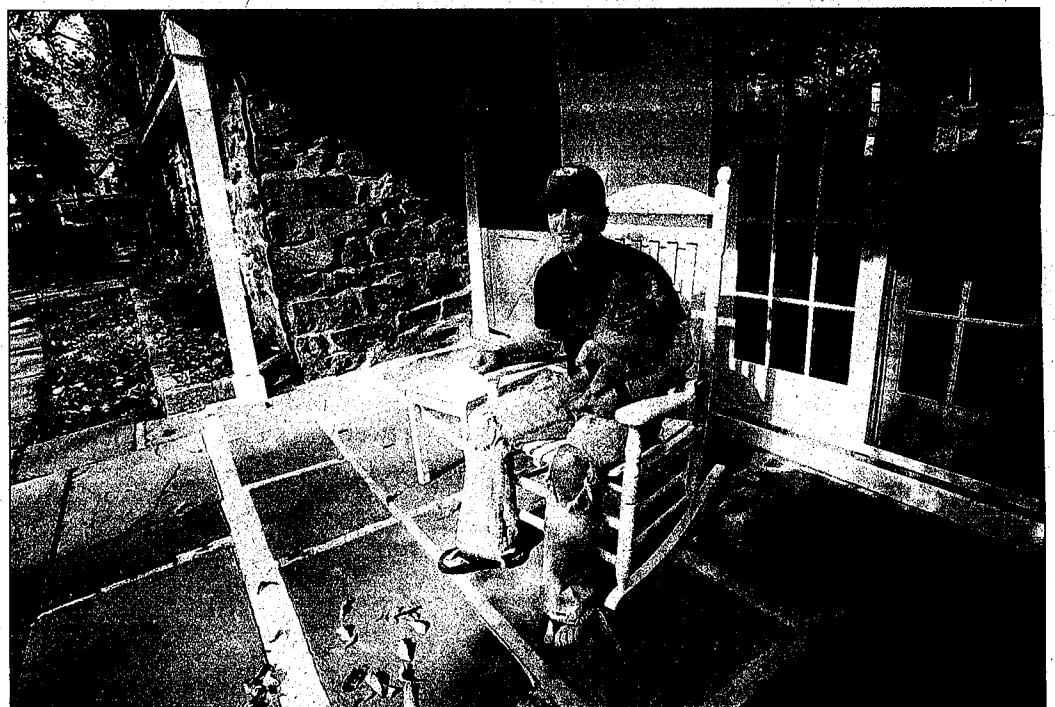
When the agent was done laughing, she told him it was doubtful.

A short time later, Quirk came across an article featuring the Luke Miller House, a historic home in Madison believed to be one of the oldest residences in town, if not the oldest. The article noted the borough had rescued the house and its 1.6 acres from being subdivided into four multimillion-dollar lots and was preparing to sell it at auction. Quirk, who didn't want to share his age, but prefers to say he's a member of Generation X, went to see the place and knew right away he had to have it.

Competing against dozens of bidders, he purchased the property for \$555,000 (10 percent of which went to auctioneer Max Spann of the town of Clinton). Quirk and his rescue dog, a Pomeranian named Punkin, moved in during the final days of 2005.

Friends were at a loss as to why he would take on an old homestead when he had just put the finishing touches on a new condominium in Morristown.

"I think they were confused," he says with a boyish grin. "It was a beautiful condominium, but I wanted a home that feels like it's from



another place in time. The kind of house a hobbit would find interesting."

He got just that.

The 3,500-square-foot space is filled with nooks and crannies, stairways, low ceilings, plenty of rooms, built-ins and character. And yes, a secret passageway, a tunnel and a ghost. More on that later.

The home's narrative is not too shabby either. Built in 1730 by Andrew Miller, the house

was originally called Miller's Station. Luke Miller, Andrew's grandson, was born there in 1759. At 17, Luke joined the Morris County militia and in time rose to the rank of major. During the Revolution, he opened his home to senior servicemen as they made their way across New Jersey. He died in the house at the age of 91.

Documents indicate that George Washington [ See **HISTORIC**, Page 84 ]

## Succulents are proving to be property-savers

# RENOVATION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 81

visited the house many times between 1779 and 1780, when he was stationed in the Morristown area, and was accompanied on one occasion by the Marquis de Lafayette. A special chair was reserved in the General's honor and, according to local lore, he wrote letters from the living room. A large rock he is said to have sat on still sits in the basement with a sign over it that says "Washington's Rock." A small "V" carved into the dining room mantle stands for "victory," according to Quirk.

The property also is considered historically important because of the blacksmith forge situated 60 feet from the main house. The forge, a small brick building, connects to the house by way of a secret underground Indian Raid Tunnel, which was sealed and filled years ago by the home's former owners. It is believed Luke Miller had the tunnel built after he fought local Iroquois during the Battle at Minisink Ford on the Delaware River in July 1779 and witnessed the deaths of 50 of his fellow servicemen.

If all goes well and the New Jersey Historic Commission provides grant money, an archeological dig and sonar scan to inspect the tunnel's condition will be completed in 2008. If intact, the entrance will be reopened by creating a movable wall — a secret passageway — in the former root cellar, now a beautiful, fully stocked wine cellar.

The property is protected by a unique historic preservation and conservation easement. Under the easement, Quirk owns and maintains the property but agrees to host two public events per year. This year, he agreed to a Nikon USA photography training session in October and the Madison Garden Club's holiday wreath sale Dec. 9.

"I'm happy to share the house for anything related to history or education," he says.

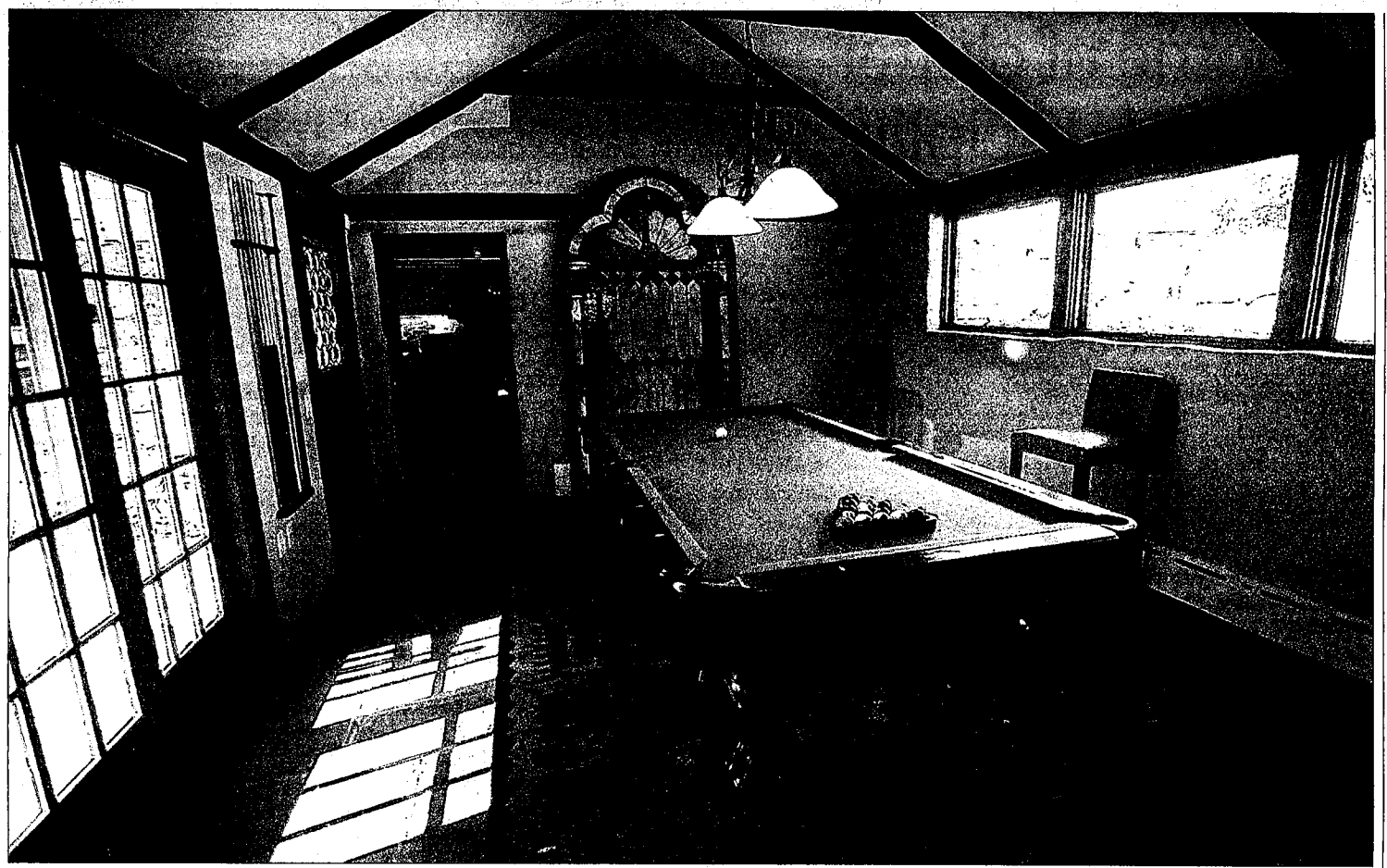
It is no wonder. In less than two years, he has refurbished every square inch, inside and out. The interior restoration, which cost approximately \$300,000, was done almost exclusively by

Italian, Lebanese, Polish and African-American stone masons, brick layers, wood workers, plasterers, painters, plumbers and electricians in their 60s, 70s and 80s — all masters in 18th-century craftsmanship. "They came in and knew exactly what to do. It was incredible to watch," Quirk says.

The house required cosmetic, not structural, work, but Quirk still needed approvals from the New Jersey Historic Trust, which oversees the historic preservation and conservation easement. (He says the trust granted all his requests.)

Quirk, a vice president at CommonHealth/WPP, a health care marketing and communications firm, served as the designer and general contractor. "It bothers me to see people buy historic homes and then strip away their history," he says. "This house was in great structural condition. I knew I could make it extraordinary."

He is the home's 13th owner, and like him, most did their best to keep features, like the original door latches, intact. "I think everyone who has ever lived here knows how special this place is," he says.



According to Quirk, one previous owner was so attached to the property he took two huge doors with him when he moved. One of the doors had an opening carved at its bottom to allow the family pet to come and go; it is said to be the oldest example of a "cat door" in the state.

The doors were in South Jersey for a number of years, then Florida. At some point, the guilt must have become too much for the former owner, because in 2006, Quirk found the doors sitting in his front yard. They have since been returned to their former posts and are working fine.

In a remarkably short period of time, Quirk has created 20th-century comfort in an

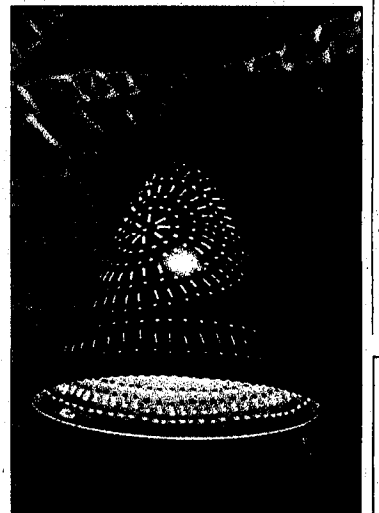
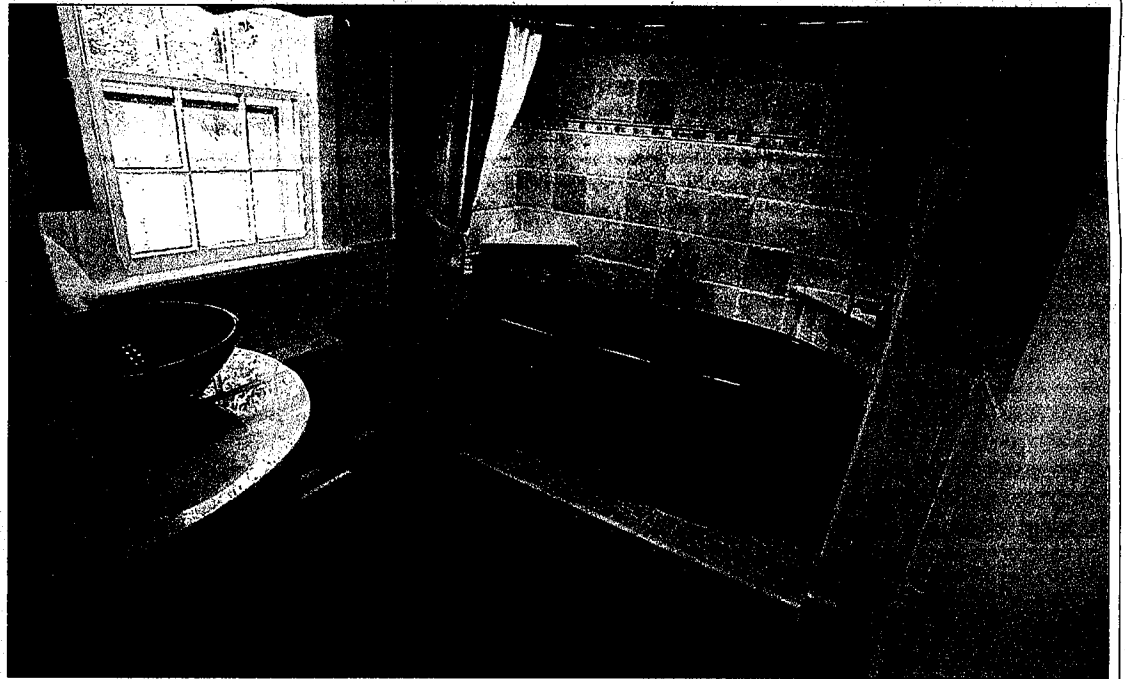
18th-century landmark. The house is equipped with wireless Internet and has many of the bells and whistles found in newer construction. Quirk chose materials one would find in colonial times and then tweaked and layered them to create an environment suitable

for a modern lifestyle.

Four new bathrooms have river stone floors, tumbled travertine marble tile, vessel sinks, iron sink stands and premium fixtures. A gorgeous teak wood bathtub is the focal point of the master bath.

The house has two kitchens, one in a space that was formerly used as an apartment. The main kitchen has the original stone floor. In the center is a heart-shaped rock. Quirk had the plaster walls refurbished and added decorative brick. The space is equipped with custom maple cabinetry, rough surface granite counters, stainless steel farmhouse and bar sinks, Jenn Air appliances and a wine refrigerator.

A travel buff, Quirk says he drew inspiration from the architecture and ruins he's seen in Italy, Greece, France, England and Costa Rica. While in Costa Rica, he toured an abandoned leper colony where an old cemetery was about to be destroyed. He was able to salvage "carry-on" size artifacts. Two that look like a mix between a cross and a fleur-de-lis are inlaid in



At top, the billiard room, which was added to the Luke Miller House around 1950 and updated by David Quirk, the home's owner. Middle photo, the master bathroom, which Quirk outfitted with a vessel sink and teak wood bathtub. Above left, the Luke Miller House in 1936. Above right, one of the light fixtures Quirk ordered from the Tin Bin, an Amish manufacturer in Pennsylvania.

the wall of the kitchen on either side of the microwave.

Much of his furniture, including leather sofas in the living room and the glass desk in his home office, are rather contemporary, offering a nice contrast with the age of the house. Yet lights are generally lit with 7-watt silicone bulbs. "It just doesn't seem right to have bright lights in a house this age," Quirk explains as he stands in the dim glow of the dining room chandelier.

Many of the light fixtures throughout the house were ordered from the Tin Bin, an Amish manufacturer in Lancaster County, Pa.

A large billiard room, situated directly off the kitchen, was added to the home's structure sometime around 1950. Quirk put in French

doors that overlook the scenic grounds. The property was restored to its early grandeur by Drew University students who used the site as a case study for a historic restoration course. Quirk spent \$200,000 on the project (and helped pick up 900 bags of leaves during the initial cleanup). The effort entailed, in part, pruning 100 trees, including white oaks, maples and magnolias, and repairing a flagstone patio with a large, fully-functional water fountain.

Walking the property, one starts to wonder about the different house numbers Quirk has posted. On the front door is number 105. The former apartment is 105½ and the blacksmith forge is bedecked with the number 105%. "It's my

tribute to Harry Potter," Quirk says, laughing. (Train number 8½ went to Hogwarts.)

Inside, with Punkin on his lap, Quirk says he feels fortunate to live in a house with such a long and fine lineage. "I'm very lucky," he says. "It's better than I ever thought it would be."

As for that ghost, a granddaughter of a former owner says she saw a ghost years ago when she was playing here as a little girl.

"She was in a gorgeous white dress with a soft-brimmed hat and was walking slowly," the granddaughter wrote in a recent e-mail. "The image was so clear and white, like a reflection, it looked beautiful. I think I remember it so clearly because of the emotions it stirred."

Quirk hopes the ghost will come back soon.

## IF YOU GO

### LUKE MILLER OPEN HOUSE AND WREATH SALE

**When:** 1 to 4 p.m. Dec. 9

**Where:** 105 Ridgedale Ave., Madison

**How much:** \$5 donation at the door. For information, call (973) 377-0722, ext. 8

Proceeds will benefit the Luke Miller Forge Archaeological Research and Restoration Project

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