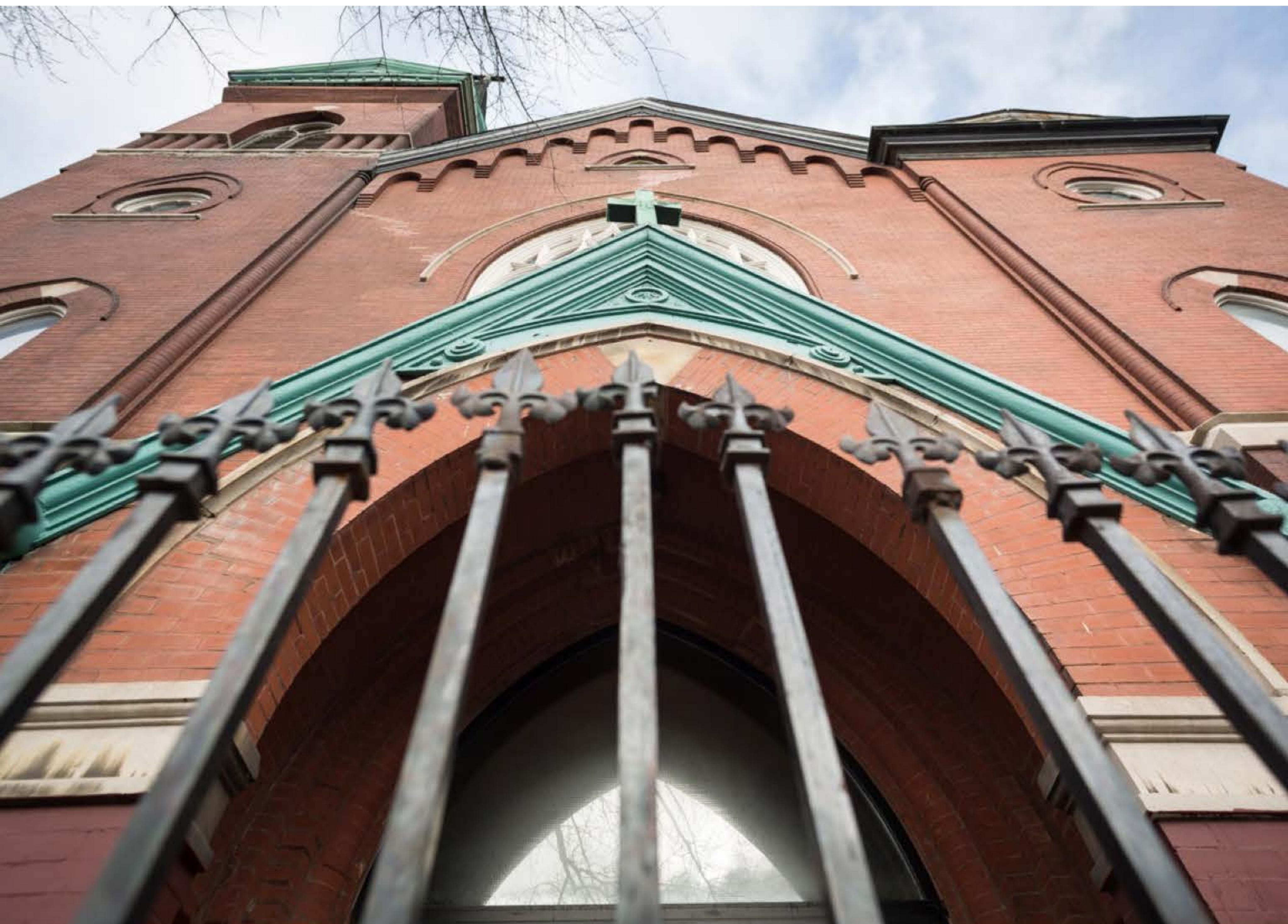




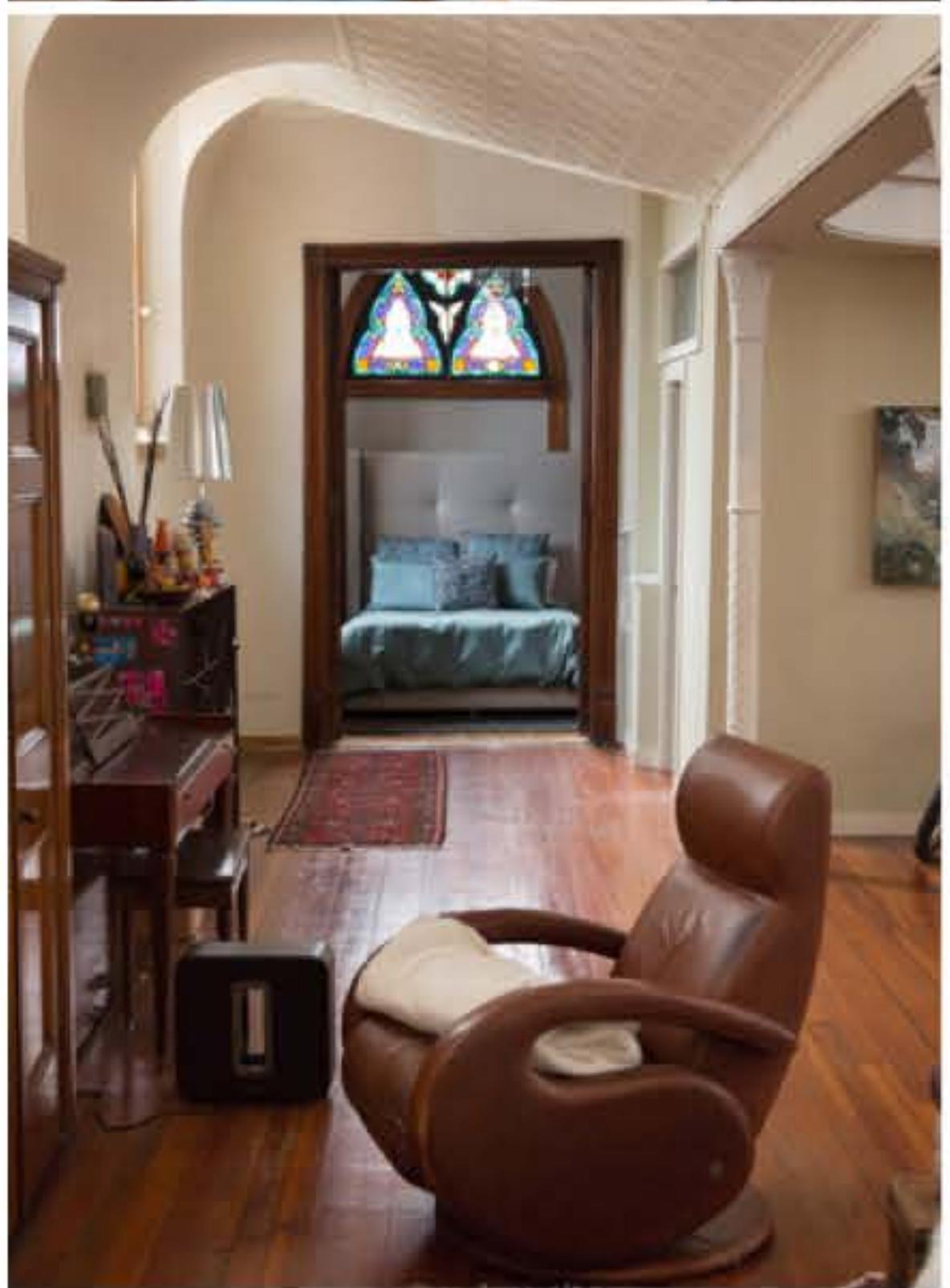
Holy home

Converted Church Connects to Past

by **AMANDA BELL**



INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST Andrew Sudds and his wife, Kristin Conley, have a flair for the unconventional, so it came as no surprise to family and friends when in 2011 they moved into their new home — a 19th-century Lutheran church in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood. “It’s really indicative of who we are,” Sudds says. Today, he says the 4,000-square-foot structure still has a welcoming, ethereal quality that makes it feel like home. He shares his unusual home story here.



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SEEING the POSSIBILITIES

Our original intention in our home search was to look for a single-family home. We had previously lived for 12 years in an open-concept industrial loft, which we now rent out, so the need for separate private areas wasn't that big of a deal to us.

We had looked for a home for over a year, and this church had spent a year on the market, too. We loved its unusual properties. We looked at it and all the possibilities — the 9-foot main doors, the wood staircases, the 1,000 square feet of balconies that go all the way around the structure — so we bought it for \$600,000. It's a creative person's playground. There's so much stuff you can do with it, where do you start?

“

It's a creative person's playground.

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— ANDREW SUDDS





ECCLESIASTICAL meets ECLECTIC

We don't know a lot about its history, but know it used to be the Bethenia Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod and was built in 1892. When we moved in, it had already been deconsecrated. The visible altarpieces had long been removed, and except for a fading trinity on the back wall, not much is left over from its original era.

The owner previous to us was an artist and had done some renovations of her own, so it was at that point already converted into a living space, but we knew we wanted to make some changes to suit our personal taste. She had decorated more in an Asian style, but we lean toward eclectic. Living in a 19th-century building, we like the juxtaposition of modern with the original details in the space.

RETROFITTING and RENOVATIONS

Over time we learned not to underestimate the cost of renovations and to be very realistic of how much they'll cost considering the scale of the building. We've spent close to \$60,000 on a new, modern garage on the property and another \$50,000 for retrofitting, renovation projects and excavating the dirt floor in the basement so we can use it as a storage space. The electrical hadn't been updated since the early 1920s, and with the way the building's designed, cold air lands on the first floor. We spent \$35,000 on electrical, a whole-house fan and insulation to keep heat in and circulating. We're set to renovate a bathroom but have been waffling on when we're going to do another project. With such big efforts we don't want to have to do them again.

'PUTTING OUR STAMP ON IT'

There's a subtle, but very good feeling to this place. When we first had to travel and leave one another and be alone in the space, we thought it would be creepy because it's so big, but we never had that feeling. Instead it felt very inviting, since we know the building's history as a church and all the things that have happened here, like weddings and baptisms.

Waking up in the morning and seeing the light go through the eastern windows of the church and how it illuminates the space, it's amazing how comforting and cozy it feels even though it's so large. You feel a connection to the past. All that positive energy — you feel that when you stay here.

I feel like since we own this place now, it's our turn to put our stamp on the space and keep it intact and moving forward. There was a strong argument when we bought it that a lot of other things could have been put here; our neighbors are relieved we're preserving its history.

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