

home || store makeover

Robi Sarkar overlooks a bedroom, which includes a painter's repurposed ladder, in the former Cabbagetown grocery turned home.

A CABBAGETOWN CREATION

Story by LORI JOHNSTON | Photos by JENNI GIRTMAN

For years, Robi Sarkar drove past the rundown grocery store in his Cabbagetown neighborhood. Originally built before World War II, the small market had for decades sold milk, eggs and other basics from the corner of Kirkwood Avenue and Tye Street. But by the late 1990s, the store was well past its prime, and closed more often than open.

"It was a store that lost its momentum and fell apart," says Sarkar, who saw potential in the property.

As Sarkar saw the building continue to fall into disrepair in 1999 and 2000, he frequently asked the shopkeeper, Sarah Knight, if he could buy the building that her family owned. They both were Cabbagetown residents and he figured it would be a way to show an appreciation for the neighborhood, which was experiencing a rebirth.

"I said, 'Would you be interested in selling that?'" says Sarkar, an architect and small intown real estate

developer. "She said she would, if I would rebuild the store exactly like it was."

Once Sarkar purchased it, he sat on the quarter-acre property for a couple of years, and then spent another three to four years seeking approvals from neighborhood residents and the Atlanta Urban Design Commission. The contentious process included hiring an attorney and structural engineers, a time during which the building continued to decay.

When he bought the building in the early 2000s, boards had rotted, graffiti covered the outside walls, and the interior walls were stained and dirty. The shelves were caving in, and the parts of the floor that remained were filled with trash, such as old baby dolls, bottles, yellowed newspapers and rags. "Every other couple of days something would fall off of it," he says.

The commission wanted him to renovate it, but the »

A tale of razing ...



The store at Kirkwood Avenue and Tye Street (left), after years of decrepitude, was finally demolished (right). Photos by ROBI SARKAR

... and resurrection



Above left, the home's exterior maintains the look of the original store. Above right, a wooden staircase showcases a tree design. Below left, the kitchen features an open floor plan and red accents. Below right, the upstairs master bathroom maximizes space. Photos by JENNI GIRTMAN



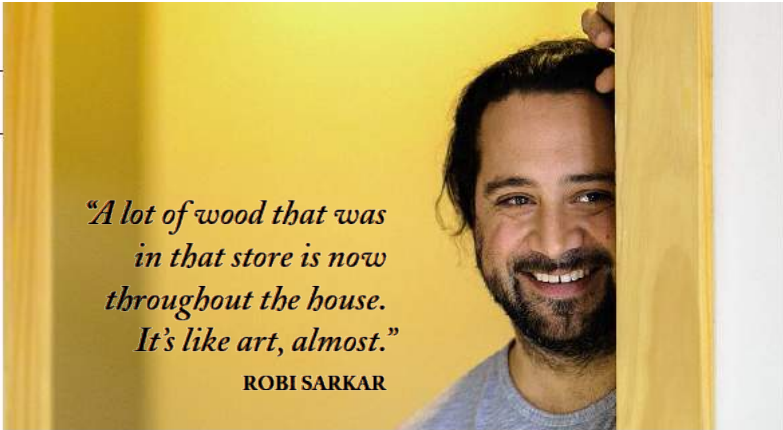
insider TIP » Sarkar says his "Coca-Cola red," glossy cabinets were bought from IKEA, assembled and cut to fit the kitchen's design.

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building was declared a public health hazard. They approved its demolition after Sarkar said he would rebuild it to replicate the architecture of the original store. Sarkar completed the construction on the new 2½-story building in 2011. "It was very slow and it was very thoughtful," he says.

Now, the new brick exterior, three-tiered roof and awning replicate the former store's design, to the surprise of visitors. "You don't really anticipate it," says Ariane McClure, a real estate agent with Atlanta Fine Homes Sotheby's International Realty, who remembers walking up to the home and thinking it was a store. "In real estate, we see cookie-cutter buildings all the time. It stood out."

Inside Sarkar's 3,100-square-foot home, McClure is struck by the contemporary touches and custom details, including a wall made of staggered blocks of walnut wood. Other unusual features include trees growing out of the concrete floors and built-in bookcases that wrap around two walls of the living room.



"A lot of wood that was in that store is now throughout the house. It's like art, almost."

ROBI SARKAR

"A lot of wood that was in that store is now throughout the house," Sarkar says. "It's like art, almost."

The part of the home where the store was located is now his living room and kitchen. For the kitchen's island and butler's pantry, which takes up about 800 square feet, Sarkar choose Calcutta marble countertops. The appliances are restaurant grade from Sarkar's days as owner of Village Pizza Co. in Cabbagetown. The building includes three bedrooms and three-and-a-half baths.

Outside, a picket fence and patio furniture in a small courtyard signal that it's a home. Sarkar used the

original footprint, which joins three new buildings he erected on the block to update the street and provide retail, office and residential spaces. One building houses Sweet Cheats (a bakery and coffee shop), and the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition is in another.

While Sarkar did not get approval from the Urban Design Commission for more skylights on the top floor of his home, he did get permission to add a master bedroom balcony that overlooks Cabbagetown Park, which neighbors also fought to create.

"It's fun and tough to turn a grocery store into your house," he says. ■



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