

# A greystone dwelling with history

This is the second in a series of eight stories highlighting properties — commercial and residential — awarded prizes in the 2008 Montreal Architectural Heritage Campaign (Op ration Patrimoine Architectural de Montr al), organized by the city of Montreal to recognize property owners who preserve or restore the city s architectural heritage and to encourage others to do the same. This week: 3686-3688 Laval Ave. in the Plateau Mont Royal borough, the home of R al Bougie.

Sometimes, visitors to Rhéal Bougie's house say they get a strange feeling when they walk into the third-floor bedroom at the front of the house that overlooks tree-lined Laval Ave.

"A couple of people started shaking when they walked in here," Bougie said of the modest-sized, empty room that was once a bedroom. "I don't feel anything, but others swear they do."

Bougie doesn't know why this happens; what he does know is that this is the bedroom that was occupied by the famous Quebec poet, Émile Nelligan. Bougie's house, which dates to 1882, was Nelligan's childhood home before he moved at about age 12 to another house a little farther north on Laval Ave. If the energy felt by Bougie's visitors has anything to do with Nelligan, who was regarded as a rebel by his elders and institutionalized during his late adolescence, it's all in that little third-floor bedroom.

Nelligan isn't the only famous Quebecer who has lived in the house. In 1989, Bougie bought the greystone terraced structure from composer/pianist André Gagnon. "It was in very good condition," Bougie said. "André had bought it in 1973 and renovated it."

Laval Ave. feeds into one of Montreal's prettiest squares, Carré St. Louis, which is characterized by old shade trees and typical Montreal greystone houses from the late Victorian period, many of them with turrets. In the post-war period, many of those houses, including Bougie's, became rooming houses, occupied by transients.

"In the early 1970s, artists started to come back to the neighbourhood," Bougie said. They include a who's who of the Quebec culture scene, including singer/actress Pauline Julien, filmmaker Claude Jutra and playwright Michel Tremblay.

Bougie said the renovation Gagnon effected to return the house to its former bourgeois glory was so complete he had very little work to do on it.

"What I did do was create an extension at the back, off the kitchen in

1994," he said. "It seemed silly to have breakfast in the formal dining room so I created a breakfast nook in a sunroom. My brother is an architect, engineer and carpenter. He did the work."

The house still boasts its original architectural detailing, including ornate cornices in two of the second-storey bedrooms, a marble fireplace mantel in the living room, and solid newel posts on the staircase.

Bougie said one of the newel posts is so large, it would be impossible to reproduce now. "You couldn't find a single tree trunk this massive now," he added.

The second-storey windows are all the house's original casements, complete with Victorian hardware. Even the hinges on the small double doors that lead to a Juliet balcony overlooking Laval Ave. are original.

Bougie said he carried out a few renovation projects last year after hiring a designer. The hardwood floors, which were a bleached colour when he bought the house, were sanded and stained dark brown. And in a third-storey bathroom, a cast-iron clawfoot bathtub was

refinished and surrounded by subway tiles.

Bougie never makes changes to the house's facade without first consulting the city of Montreal heritage officials.

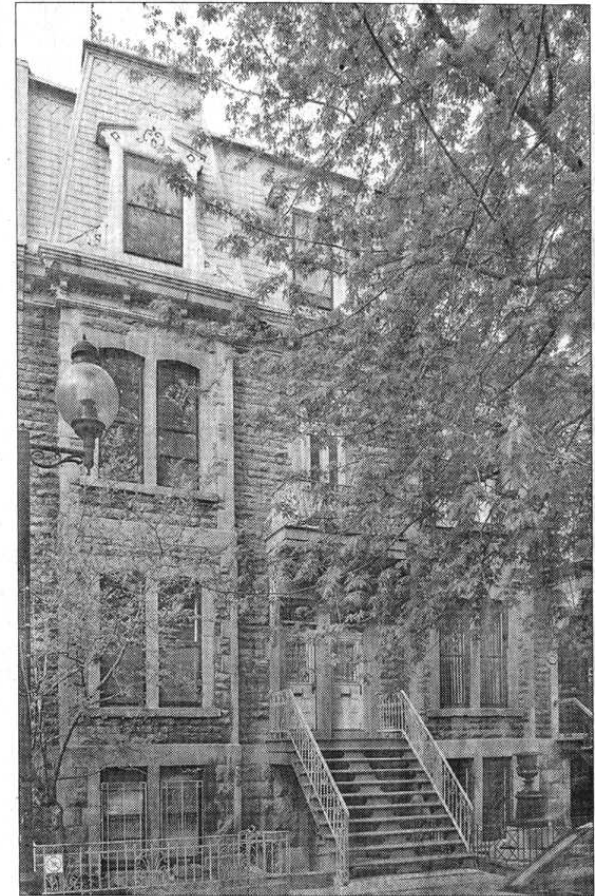
"I had to replace the doors to the front balcony because they were rotten and had to get them replaced exactly as they were by a special artisan. It had to be approved by the city," he said.

"I'm all for protecting historic housing that way. Otherwise, you get some dingaling putting up an aluminum door and painting it purple."

He said he loves the surrounding neighbourhood as much as the house. "You can walk everywhere. It's within walking distance of the restaurants of Prince Arthur St. and St. Laurent Blvd.

"And the neighbours here are fantastic. Everyone knows everyone else, but no one disturbs anyone."

In fact, he added, St. Louis Square is like a village within a large city.



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The greystone at 3686-3688 Laval Ave. has been home to at least two famous Quebecers: Émile Nelligan and André Gagnon.

Bougie said he has a "moral obligation to maintain his home for future generations."

"The artisans who built these old houses — you can't find people like that today," he said. "They built with their hearts. They were artists."

As were some of the occupants, including a long-dead beloved poet, whose spirit seems to talk to visitors.