

## **Blending History on Virginia's Eastern Shore**



*Caserta*

**June 2008  
Rosebud Co.  
Atlanta, GA.**

**Overview:** Caserta II sits on a 200 acre tract of land slightly north of Eastville, a small community on the East Shore of Virginia 25 miles north of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. As the name implies, Caserta II is the second iteration of the original structure. Originally known as Little House, the first structure was built in 1730 by John Haggmon. It received the name Caserta from Commander George Parker Upshur. He took possession of the house in 1836 and named it after a town in Italy that he was fond of. His memories of Caserta turned tragic with the loss of his wife and two children. He left the house and its painful memories and died in Spezia, Italy in 1852. In 1975, the original Caserta was struck by lightning and burned to the ground.

The current structure is a blending of two separate structures that were moved on the site of the original building. Dr. Howard Moses and his wife Mary J spent fifteen years searching the East Shore for appropriate farmhouses to cobble together to recreate a historic structure in keeping with the one they had lost. Caserta II involves



two older farmhouses located at different locations on the East Shore. The larger of the two was known as Runnymede and its original location was around Accomack, VA. The smaller section of the house pictured to the left had a brick dated to 1797 and the larger section dates to 1862. The two sections were pulled apart and now provide

Caserta II with the “bookends” of the current structure.

A second older farmhouse was moved to the current location from Pungoteague. Built in 1800 by Dr. Kellam, the house may have served as a hospital by Union troops in the Civil War. A section of the original two story structure was salvaged and sandwiched in between the two Runnymede “bookends” along with a new fourth section that was added.



The Moses's retained the services of Sam Morris, a general contractor from Onancock, VA. Collecting the portions of the various structures, Morris moved them to the Eastville location and started the long laborious process of merging the structures together as well as leaving space for the new addition that would house kitchen,



bathrooms, family room and an elevator. The merging or “lacing” together of the various components of the old structures and the blending of the new construction requires a set of work skills that rely more on experience than class work. Morris combined his background of construction along with his knowledge of old houses from

having grown up on the East Shore to produce a structure takes renovation to a new level. The resourceful use of deteriorating structures helps give a new lease on life for structures that had a very doubtful future. Both houses, Runnymede and Dr. Kellam's house, known as White House, had reached a terminal point in their respective lives and were faced with extinction. The value of this reuse and recycling of older properties in this manner cannot be ignored and provides a learning point for those interested in the stewardship of many old homes faced with a similar future.



## The Wood Floor Restoration

In May of 2008, Rosebud Co. became involved with the work at Caserta II to restore the wood floors to a condition that would be appropriate to this historic structure. Dr. & Mrs. Moses were interested in an approach that did not involve the traditional sanding of the original pine floors. The floors had never been sanded before and their intent was to have floors that more accurately reflected the age of the home. On the initial visit, testing was performed to determine if Passive Refinishing was an option. There was a considerable amount of paint in the various rooms. Several had paint around the perimeter of where a floor cloth or area rug would have laid. Several had paint over the entire area. The testing was successful and work was scheduled to begin in early July 2008.



In this photo of the living room floors you see the pattern of paint around some floor covering. Based on the popular trends of that time, it is safe to assume that a floor cloth or area rug sat in the middle of the room and that paints were applied around the perimeter

Same floor, different view. The clear area in the middle often appeared like it had never had any finish but we often encountered light accumulations of old drying oils.





Other rooms were painted entirely. To the left is a portion of the central “cross hall” and it had a mustard/brown paint. The second picture was shot from the front porch area looking towards the rear of the house. In both cases, note the level of accumulation of paint on the floors. It is impossible to see the wood due to the thickness of the paint.



The central stairs show the wear pattern from the foot traffic. The paint has been worn through to expose the grain pattern.



As the paint is removed and the old wood cleaned, the aged character of the yellow pine begins to emerge. The surface accumulations were numerous and thick so multiple applications of the cleaner were applied to get the desired results.



The rich colors of the aged pine are clearly visible in the central hall.

In a second floor bedroom, we see the cleaned wood as well as a shadow in the upper portion. The shadow, a darker line that goes from side to side just below the round hole, is where paint had been applied. The color variation indicates different aging rates of the wood due to the paint on the surface.



The application of the oils to the aged wood brought about significant color changes in the floor.



In the living room, not only is the paint gone but so is any trace of a shadow from where the paint had been applied.

The stairs have a uniform rich color. All wear patterns are gone.

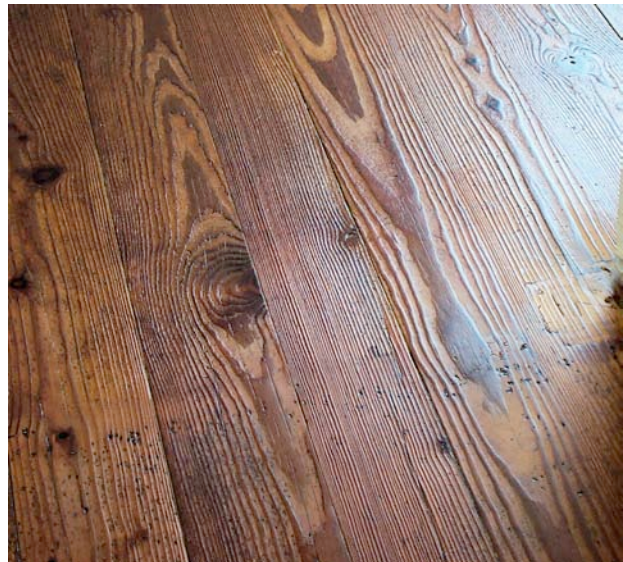


In the second floor bedroom, all traces of shadows are gone. The round hole in the floor was a gravity fed heat vent allowing warm air to flow upstairs from the first floor area.



The second floor sewing room now displays a level of color and warmth in aged pine that is rarely seen. There was no color added to the oil applied to the floor

Passive Refinishing also reveals another unique feature when the finish oils are applied. The raised grain of the wood is visible and highlighted in the photo to the right and below. Small holes from tacks no longer are an annoyance but a decorative feature of the wood. These unique qualities would have been lost with traditional sanding.



The history of Caserta by itself is interesting and hopefully its tragic years are in the past. The resourceful use of two other structures to create one historic property is innovative and allows for the successful reuse of what had been deteriorating property. Both structures used to create Caserta II were in the final stages of deterioration and would have been lost completely. The innovative leadership of Dr. Howard Moses and his wife Mary J combined with the craftsmanship and skills of Sam Morris have taken restoration and reuse of old properties to a new level.

The wood floors presented a unique challenge due to the amount of paint on the surface. The successful removal represents a real milestone and potentially allows for the restoration of many properties with wood floors that lie buried under layers of old paint and dirt. What separates these floors from others is the unique display of raised grain and its aesthetic and historic appeal. This is extremely rare and the fact that this option may be available could extend the life of these handsome old floors indefinitely if aggressive sanding can be avoided. For those looking to avoid the loss of original material this is an ideal option to consider.

Michael Purser  
Rosebud Co.  
Atlanta, GA.