

61 ALBAN STREET DORCHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS



61 ALBAN STREET is widely recognized as one of the most magnificent homes in Dorchester, if not in all of Boston.

Designed by architect Harrison Henry Atwood in 1888 as his own residence, it is truly an “architect’s house.” The advanced—modern, even—plan, fine architectural and decorative embellishments, and the abundant use of beautifully-worked, first-quality materials are testaments to Atwood’s sophisticated design talents, refined taste, and to the care that he took in creating a building for his personal use.

H.H. Atwood was a remarkable, multi-talented man. Prior to completing his architectural training in his early twenties, he had already become a lawyer. Throughout his life, he balanced a successful architectural practice (including being named—at the age of 26—to the prestigious post of City Architect for Boston in 1889, just after completing this house) with a long career in politics (as a Republican State Representative for several terms and a US Congressman for Massachusetts for one term).

The skills that qualified Atwood to be named City Architect—a job that required him to design complex public buildings such as schools—are evident in his unusual plan for this house. Working with a deep but narrow lot, he planned a simple rectangular volume to maximize the size of the building. However, this is no plain box: the parade of variously-shaped bays along the south and north façades and its multitude of complexly-profiled roof dormers provide a hint of the elaborate and luxurious treatment of the interior.



Inside, the layout of the ground and second stories are similar, and are both efficient solutions to organizing space within the great length of the building. Passing first through the charming glass-enclosed front porch, one enters the spacious foyer, where all of the doors, wainscoting and other trim are cherry—including the striking, hand-carved newel post at the foot of the three-story stair case. Straight ahead is the long, slightly off-center hall that runs nearly 60 feet to the kitchen at the back of the house. To the right are the main public rooms, which increase in elaborateness from front to back—each impressing visitors in new and different ways. The wood changes from cherry to oak in these rooms, and rich paneling and carved elements abound.

The front parlor is large and features a tall ceiling border in high relief. Through broad pocket doors one enters the middle parlor, with its oak-paneled ceiling and wainscoting, enormous carved mantle with red tiles and oval over-mantel mirror, and the round bay with its lovely continuous stained glass transom window that leaves one wondering if the bay is somehow defying gravity. Behind this lies the even more sumptuous dining room. Its monumental mantle features wonderfully-carved classical details and striking green (perhaps Grueby) tiles. The built-in buffet is a wonder of hand-carved oak with elaborate pilasters and corbels, and doors with carved figures representing the pleasures of music and drink. The spacious kitchen at the rear combines wonderful original built-ins with new cabinets, granite counters and backsplash, and stainless steel appliances. The vast butler’s pantry that connects to the dining room is another testament to the cabinet-maker’s art. Back toward the front of the house, the large library on the north side of the central hall features two walls of built-in bookcases with foliage-patterned, leaded-glass doors.

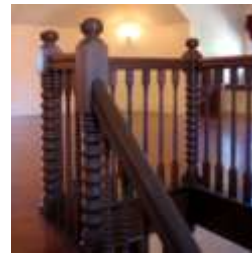
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61 ALBAN STREET, ASHMONT HILL



Heading upstairs, there are four large bedrooms, an office, and full bath at the front of the house. At the rear is a wonderful master suite consisting of a spacious master bedroom, large sitting room with a decorative mantelpiece and balcony, half-bath, and a glassed-in sleeping porch. There is ample built-in storage and closets in all of these rooms. In fact, there seem to be closets and cupboards everywhere one turns, resulting in very little wasted space—another example of Atwood's impressively efficient plan.

The third floor may contain the biggest surprise of all in this house full of surprises—a nearly 700 square foot ballroom. Its polished fir floor, deep window seats set into the roof dormers, and curvaceous ceiling worthy of a baroque church combine to form a truly magical space. Behind this is a three-room servants' suite that could be converted into a charming in-law apartment.



Finally, even the basement is no ordinary space. The sloped drive along the south side of the house provides access to a garage at basement level. A later improvement by Atwood, it contains such modern conveniences as a turntable in the floor that allows a car to be rotated and pointed back out to the driveway. One enters the basement of the house from here through glass doors leading to a large reception room with a stained glass window and a fireplace with a richly-molded cast stone mantle. The handsome granite and brick foundation walls of the garage support a vast terrace, accessed via an enclosed porch off the kitchen.

The house's new exterior paint-color scheme relates to materials used in its construction: dark mauve brick, oxidized brown granite, and deep, blue-green colored glass. Other recent improvements include a new roof and high-quality storm windows.

It is simply not enough to say that this house is one of a kind. In its progressive plan, its grand scale, the fine design of its architectural details, the consistent use of the highest quality materials, and its excellent state of preservation, 61 Alban Street rivals the best mansions of Boston's Back Bay and the elite suburbs surrounding the city.

