



What Were They Thinking?

By David Page, Marketing Director



Sometimes you walk into a rehabbed house and you can't imagine why the rehabber did what he or she did to it. This happened to me recently in Pigtown, a.k.a. Washington Village.

A bank-owned rowhouse on Cross St. was listed for \$90k, which is way more than usual. However, I recently sold a house within a few blocks of there for \$170k, and from the photos it looked like Cross St. had been rehabbed already. Maybe I could get in there and do a quick \$20k worth of work (so my purchase plus rehab would fit my usual formula of 65% of ARV) and get out fast with a decent profit.

No such luck. There were several issues on the first floor, including the kitchen and powder room, that were tough to fix. Here's one that was easily fixable: opening up the stairs.



That wall on the right was between this house and a neighbor's house, but the wall on the left was in the living room and could have been opened up.

That's the thing with rowhouses, even more than detached houses: you want to open 'em up. This was not a supporting wall. You could have removed the whole thing and added an attractive banister. That way, you wouldn't feel like you're walking through a tunnel to get upstairs. Plus, what a pain moving furniture up there!



Now, here's what I did on Ostend St. These stairs were perpendicular to the main walls, not parallel. Also, we thought it wise to keep those posts for support and a place to run wiring.

But the principle is the same: open things up, in this

case so you can see all the way into the beautiful kitchen, which is where the lion's share of the money went, for a "Wow!" factor when someone opens the front door. That exposed brick wall helped, too.

It gets better (by which I mean worse).



The upstairs at Cross St. was totally weird. Tell me, what's wrong with this picture? You can't see the whole room, so I'll just tell you: no closet. This is the smaller bedroom, in back. The big bedroom in front had no closet

either. Instead, the rehabber took the middle walk-through bedroom (that useless room a lot of rowhouses have) and turned it into a giant closet with the washer and dryer in there, as shown here:



Is this crazy or what? You have to leave your bedroom and walk out into the hallway to get dressed!

It's not all bad. Putting the washer/dryer on the second floor is a good idea. That's something I did on Ostend. But there should be a *separate* laundry closet, and it can be a small closet, like this one:



In fact, this closet could have been smaller, just enough for the pan under the stackable appliances. If you've got about 3 by 3 feet to work with, you've got laundry space.



Regarding the closets in the bedrooms at Ostend, the bigger bedroom got the double closets shown at left. The smaller bedroom still got a decent closet of its own.

The rule? *Every* bedroom in a rehab should have its own closet, at least a small one, so your buyers don't have to wander naked into the hallway to get dressed (assuming they sleep in the raw).

Now let's look at the only full bath on Cross St., on the second floor:



You can't see the whole vanity here, but it's a small, single-bowl vanity. Tell me, why didn't they put the toilet in that nook by the window (judging by the floor tiles, it looks like there's 30", which is enough space), and have a double-bowl vanity instead?

You can get a double-bowl vanity in a fairly small space. Here's the vanity I used at Ostend and have used elsewhere when space is at a premium:



This is a Virtu USA Gloria vanity from Home Depot. It's 48" wide and only 18" deep. It comes with the matching mirror and faucets, which are chrome, so in this bath, you'll want all the trim to be

chrome. (Otherwise I typically go with brushed nickel. But I'm considering going to bronze for a bit more "Wow!" factor.)

**New rehabbers: you needn't listen to me.
But please do talk to somebody.**

I don't mean to sound preachy discussing the items above. The point is not that I always get it right. I have made countless mistakes with rehabbing, from huge mistakes like trying to flip a house in a rental

neighborhood, to small mistakes like forgetting to have a door stopper installed for every door.

The point is, get another set of eyes to look at your rehab before you lay it out and start paying out the big bucks to get the work done. You can consult a fellow rehabber... your real estate agent... an experienced contractor... or a design consultant.

If you get the big stuff right, the small stuff won't matter. I sold the house that was missing a door stopper, though I had to touch up the wall where it got smooshed by the doorknob.

I would bet the rehabber on Cross St. lost a boatload of money. Please don't let that happen to you!

About David Page

David has rehabbed dozens of properties in the Baltimore metro area, wholesaled several others, and owns rental properties in Pennsylvania.

He's the Marketing Director of Baltimore REIA, co-moderator of the monthly [Meal 'n' Deal Meeting](#), and an instructor of the ["Rehabbing for Big Rewards"](#) class along with veteran rehabber Chuck Edwards.

David welcomes your questions about real estate, as well as any suggestions you may have regarding Baltimore REIA. You can reach him at DP@BaltimoreREIA.com.