

From Mahone Bay Heritage House Tour Guide

1993

Dunham House (1867 - 70)



From the outside, this house is impressive, simply because one has to look up, and then climb up to it. The house seems to grow in size as you climb. The triple dormer windows set the stage for low ceilings and considerable depth inside, but what surprise awaits!

On entering, one is overwhelmed by the staircase in this house, so that the other features might easily slip away unnoticed. The hall is grand, and might be used in far larger house. After noticing the stair, with its delightful 'one piece' newel post, there is still the remarkable landing. The fact that the stair is large and the landing is larger, is a surprise to find the rooms large enough to be very comfortable. This is obviously a trick of scale, as the interior is much larger than expected from outside the house. One aspect of scale is the height of the roof, seen by the level of the eaves. The height of the roof has been reduced by the introduction of the large dormer windows and kneewalls upstairs. This lowering of the roof level effectively creates the surprise inside the front door.

There are fine details, which change from room to room and even within the same room. Some of the details are modern. Look at the doors and the trim around them, and enjoy the rooms, settings and the overall decorative story that is being told here, where history is not slavishly held to, but the whole issue of the house as 'lived in' gives weight to the notion that the house is the servant of the user, not the reverse.

The small, Gothic Revival window on the landing is a choice example. Here the purpose of the window is not clear, apart from lighting the stairs, but the position has been compromised by the main extension at the back, which forces the window to be asymmetric within the room. The balustrade is reserved in its simplicity and reminiscent of naval architecture rather than the landward extravagances of contemporary houses.