

Foggy Bottom History Project – Recollections of #4 Snows Court NW, Washington DC

My husband and I purchased #4 Snows Court in the year 2000 and owned it for 16 years. Over that time, I was continually delighted and sometimes frustrated with our very special Alley Home in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood.

From my first visit to 4 Snows with our Realtor, the small width of the staircase to the second floor was always part of my fascination with the property. When you entered through the front door, the staircase was immediately in front of you, so you couldn't avoid seeing it. And to see it, you were reminded of the age of the place because the steps were well-worn and not quite perfectly square. But most importantly, the small width of the staircase was a unique and outstanding feature. I would refer to the stairs as Dollhouse sized.

While the staircase was charming, the size made it a challenge to get furniture to the second floor. In addition, we found that we did a lot of painting along the wall where every trip up or down seemed to add additional scuff marks from the baggage we carried.

On the second floor, there were more charming surprises. One of the most notable features of 4 Snows was the bathroom skylight. The chain-pull to open it seemed like it was a relic from a much earlier time. I treated it gently until I learned that it was tough as nails and needed a good tug to close it firmly on those cold winter nights when the wind was howling. Keeping the cold air out of the townhouse was essential and there were enough leaky entry points around the old windows and doors without adding the bathroom skylight to the list.

Another challenge at 4 Snows was the guest bedroom. The room was quite small, and I wanted to make the most of the space, so I decided to use a futon in the room. That way, I could have a sitting room, or I could unfurl the futon to use as a single bed for guests. The problem was that once you opened the futon to be a bed, there was no room to swing the door - you would either need to leave the door open or leave it closed. Thankfully, we rarely had guests!

While the townhouse at 4 Snows had a small footprint, the kitchen was designed to be about as functional as possible. It was no surprise that "princess" sized appliances were the best option. What I learned, in time, was that the smaller appliances are generally just as efficient as the standard larger sizes, but you get to pay twice as much for getting a smaller size. Another mystery...

At some point in our ownership of 4 Snows, we needed to replace the old refrigerator. With a slight modification of the overhead cabinet, we were able to get a larger replacement and were giddy with the thought of having more space in our new refrigerator. But on installation day, we found a small hurdle in the way. We had measured the space available for the replacement at counter level. But with the extra height of the new appliance, we realized that the measurement of the space 6 feet up was slightly different. In short, the wall was not square in the corner. To fit the new refrigerator in the existing space, we needed to 'dig' out some of the wall at the top, around the 6-foot level. It was quite an unexpected twist to what should have been a simple appliance delivery.

Now, 7 years after selling 4 Snows Court, I still have many warm memories of our experiences at this unique property in Foggy Bottom. It was a great lesson in "living small"!