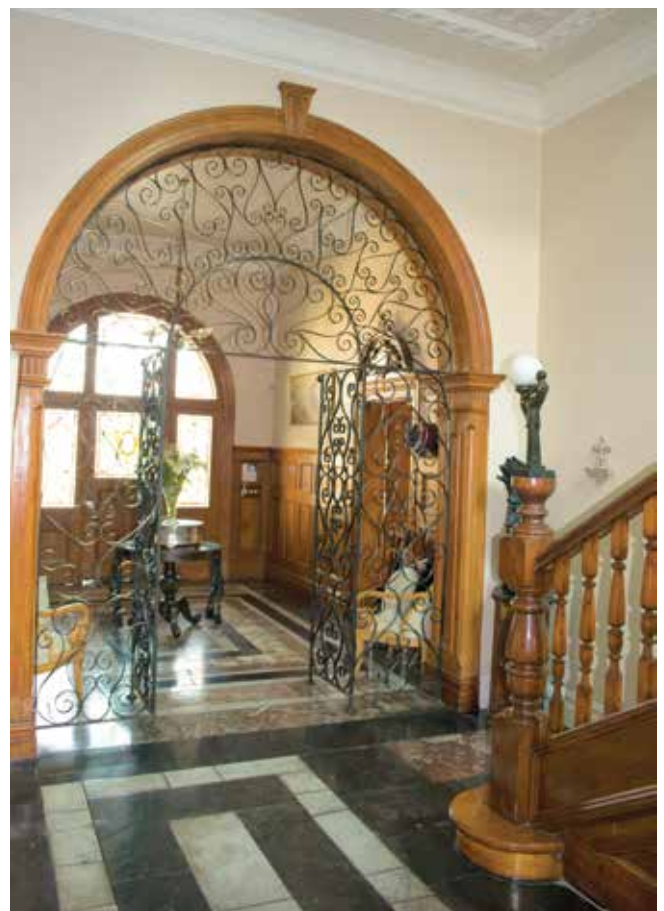


# YUKON



For people who love the style and atmosphere of heritage properties dating back decades or even centuries, the investment in such homes is forever treasured.

Like most of the houses built for Randlords and the folk of yesteryear the architects had one mission - "build to impress". And impress they did! Many of these homes were built in prime central locations, or close to attractive natural features such as rivers and mountain backdrops, and many of them still occupy significantly larger properties and offer far larger rooms than the average modern home. That and the rich history of a bygone era make these homes very sought after to investors and renovators.

Nestled below the Observatory Ridge, is such a Victorian gem built from stone quarried nearby in 1906, and successfully completed in 1911 for her owner, the flamboyant property developer, philanthropist and Mayor of Johannesburg Tommy Allen. Being the greatest house built in the area, it had to have a name befitting to such a fine dame.

It's all in a name they say - In the journal 'South African Homes' of October 1911, the house was described "as being replete with artistic and beautiful furniture, paintings and tapestries, antique oak Louis XIV cabinets and treasures from many lands. The decorations were superb; with hand-painted walls and ceilings'.

Most befittingly the property was christened "Yukon" by her then owner Tommy Allen. The name 'Yukon' was first used by the Hudson's Bay Company trader John Bell in 1846 and is derived from the Loucheux Indian word Yuchoo, meaning 'the greatest river.' Yukon has served as the mayoral mansion for two of Johannesburg's mayors for some years. ▶



With the demise of the gold and diamond rushes and the crash of the stock exchange, Allen was compelled to sell the property in 1929 to A.S. Holland who also became mayor of Johannesburg during the forties. After Holland, the house was successively occupied by several persons until 1971 when Angelo Avlonitis bought it with the intention of restoring it to its former glory. Alas, he ran out of money and returned to Italy, with it is rumoured, the various valuable and original fittings belonging to the home.

For approximately 20 years Yukon was owned by someone named, provocatively, after an angel, a "Bearer of Light," half Russian, half Greek, a photographer, hunter, arms manufacturer and purported mercenary. It is said that several of the upstairs rooms in the house were used for the manufacture of guns. In another room upstairs, the floor was apparently carpeted with complete lion skins (heads included). The furniture was "Chippendale", the walls adorned with gold embossed Russian icons.

When the 'angelic' owner bought the house it had been "a cathouse" - a brothel.

Apparently the 'Madame' who ran the house had painted out Italian artwork on the ceiling of what is known as the "ballroom", which leads on to a large veranda on the side of the house. The Italian paintings were lost forever, but the rest of the decor was restored by its new owner to its original condition by means of "gallons upon gallons of paint stripper."

The "bearer of light" sold the house roughly 15 years ago to a couple who ran it as a poster gallery. Described as "a secretive guy who could get out of any situation,"

he is said to be living in a castle today, the hunting and fishing advisor to the "Duke of Cumberland."

On selling Yukon, he stripped the large room on the opposite side of the house - the then "ballroom" of its marvelous leaded stained glass windows and uprooted several Italian marble fireplaces from the formal drawing room, and shipped them to London. He sold the windows at Sotheby's in London and "bought a flat with the proceeds." One of the fireplaces was apparently sold to a music producer who represented the British beat, rhythm and blues pop band that was popular in the 1960s, Manfred Mann.

During its lifetime, Yukon has been home to a number of institutions ranging from a girl's hostel, a convalescent home to a nursing home and was most recently used as the location of The Centre for Christian Spirituality headed up by the Revd. Dr Jeremy Jacobs. It's also very likely that the Masons used it for their meetings as Tommy Allen, who was later awarded the OBE for his charitable initiatives, was a foundation member of that organisation and was well known and popular with the fraternity.

Yukon was re-generated into a spirituality centre by an Anglican priest, Jeremy Jacobs. This was a time of light, inspiration, and solace in Yukon's history. The Jacobs family succeeded in converting Yukon into a haven of hospitality and prayer and many visitors to the centre benefitted from their efforts. The house was put on the market when the couple was expecting their second child and Jeremy was required to be closer to his Parish in Parktown.

After house hunting, searching high and low for a "Golden Oldie" in Jozi, current owners Loretta & Henry Chamberlain burst into tears when they had their first "Yukon" ▶

encounter. "It was love at first sight - we just knew we were home." an enthusiastic Loretta tells us. "Both of us visited countless manor homes in England & Europe and this property literally "spoke" to us. We just new we had to have her".

Upon our arrival at Yukon, one realises that although the exterior itself is imposing enough, the interior is of even greater importance.

Making our way up a sweeping marble veranda, which extends the front length of the house

To the left of the entrance hall is a 20-seater dining room, with original Art Deco fireplace, fronted with glassed Portuguese tiles. Gleaming Oregon floors and large stained glass windows create an intimate ambiance. The ballroom which once was the billiards room is currently being renovated with painstaking detail into a wedding chapel. The owner tells us with great enthusiasm that this room used to be the pride of the house as it had the four huge stain-glass windows titled 'Commerce, Justice, Industry and Agriculture' that were manufactured in England

house with its grandeur and splendour that I simply wish I never had to leave.

The kitchen has a French feel with beautifully displayed roosters, hens, vintage cheese boards, silver tea caddies, coffee & tea sets, rare wine coolers and quirky and unique items from Loretta & Henry's respective excursions locally and around the world.

In addition, there's a traditional coal-fired stove that adequately heats the entire house during

*"It was love at first sight - we just knew we were home."*

adorned with Portuguese style Art Deco tiles, a fountained courtyard garden and terraced gardens, we are greeted by the two resident peacocks Dali and Bertie.

Stepping inside the grand entrance the lobby has lavish marble flooring with Burmese teak wall panelling leading to a double volume lounge with large gabled windows, highly polished parquet floors, large mirrors and a 4.5m high pressed ceiling with original chandeliers and light fittings that create a majestic atmosphere.

in 1870 and regarded as the finest of their kind. They were initially housed in the first Stock Exchange before being moved to 'Yukon'. One can only reminisce at the formal gatherings, which must have taken place for the privileged and the elite in this magnificent mansion.

An original 1930's Art Deco lamp graces the sweeping staircase leading up to magnificently restored lead glass windows on the main stairway. No thought was spared when it came to the details and craftsmanship in creating this great dame. There is such a presence in this

winter. The floors are most exceptional - with tiling in the encaustic style typical of New York in the late 19th century.

An up-stairs library separates the two residential wings of the house. All upstairs flooring is solid Oregon. The library leads out through a high gabled glass door to a large wooden deck, which surrounds the Eastern, Southern, and Western sides of the house providing magnificent views of the valley below. It is also the gathering place on balmy summer evenings to enjoy Mediterranean feasts and sundowners. ▶



Yukon was built to overlook the valley by architects of the day who had little understanding and ambivalent feelings about the African sun.

Chinaware, porcelain, ceramic figurines, and plates are arranged side-by-side with an antique piano, modern furniture, rare antiques, a heirloom Gramophone and family portraits - the house has many features that are so unique, from the original light switches, light fittings, carved doorways, fireplaces, cloak cupboard, wrought iron gates, steel pressed ceiling and stained glass windows to the original mirrors.

The tour inside Yukon house verifies this commitment to heritage preservation by the owners.

To our utter delight, Loretta informs us that Yukon is now operating as a Wedding, Bed and Breakfast & High Tea Venue strictly by appointment.

If you ever fancied having afternoon tea in the epitome of Victorian class, surrounded by Rose & Lavender gardens with soft music playing during the summer months or a more intimate dinner by roaring fire and candle light in the winter months, put on your fancy clothes when the mood strikes and head on down to Yukon.

Experience everything that is unique, traditional and beautiful with your guests and loved one when tying the knot at this spectacular Victorian Manor. Loretta and her team offer a personalized service and attention to detail of bygone days. Whether you need a vintage Rolls Royce, antique props, fresh roses, pretty porcelain or the finest silver and crystal ware, rest assured of "More than just a service" at Yukon.

The venue also caters for up-market stork parties, hens parties, christenings, birthdays, anniversaries, conferences and corporate functions.

As we end our tour, we find ourselves on the outside veranda where our table is laden with a silver tea service, pretty porcelain cups, dainty home-made-pastries and whilst we bask in the sun we are in awe of the beauty and elegance that is Yukon and like the Victorian dames of yesteryear we can't help but feel like utter royalty.



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■ *Events* ■ *Weddings* ■ *B&B*

For any enquiries or for bookings, call Loretta at 072 025 9164 or email her at yukonhouse33@gmail.com