



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ROBERT HARTWELL

In the renovating process, Hartwell said he hopes to honor the 200-year-old home's architectural integrity while also staying true to his own past by bringing in Black designers and artisans.

Broadway veteran to film documentary-style series that combines history, home renovation and genealogy

BY EMILY THURLOW

GREAT BARRINGTON

Actor Robert Hartwell is no stranger to the spotlight or the stage.

But, this spring, instead of the lights from Broadway, the lights that might be shining on him likely will be more recessed, pendant-style, or even from a chandelier or two. And the stage, well, that will be the steps up to his own 1820 colonial Great Barrington home as he stars in and co-executive produces a home-renovation series.

Hartwell, whose credits include “Motown” and “Hello, Dolly!”, purchased his Castle Street home this past Juneteenth, and his story went viral on Instagram, garnering more than 505,000 likes after he posted a photo of himself in front of the

4,500-square-foot mansion. In his caption, he wrote that when he contacted the seller, he was told that it was a “cash-only offer” and that the seller stated he was sure that it took him off the table. He noted that the house was constructed for the Russell family, who were textile manufacturers working with cotton and wool. Slavery at the time, he wrote, was still legal.

“I know this house is bigger than me. I wish I could’ve told my ancestors when they were breaking their backs in 1820 to build this house that 200 years later a free gay black man was going to own it and fill it with love and find a way to say their name even when 200 years later they still thought I would be ‘off the table,’” he wrote. “We are building our own tables. I’ve never been prouder to be a black man.”

Months before the purchase, Hartwell lost his Aunt Paulette to COVID-19. Her passing was truly devastating, he said. ►

Left, “I immediately just knew: ‘This is going to be my house,’” Hartwell said when he saw the 1820 colonial home in Great Barrington.