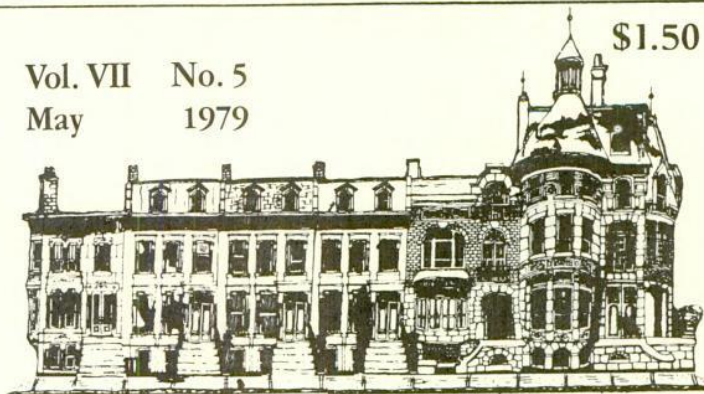


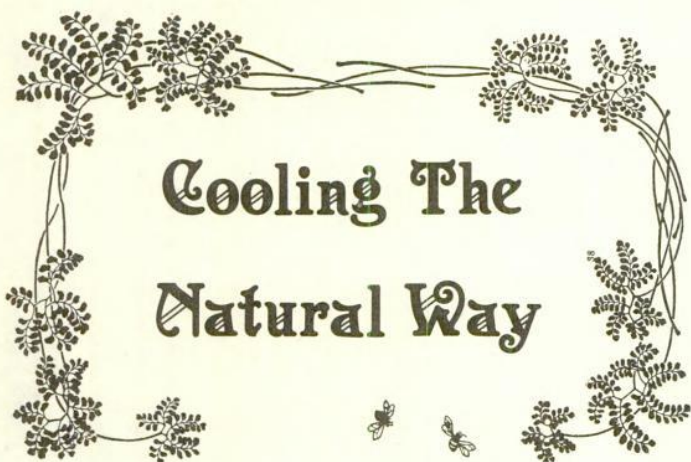
THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

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Restoration And Maintenance Techniques For The Antique House



Cooling The Natural Way

By Ron Pilling, Baltimore, MD

HERE ARE TWO WAYS to cool your old house during the most sweltering months of the year: 1) Expensively, and 2) Inexpensively. The former method is a battle against nature; is inefficient when combined with antique architecture, and normally requires costly and ghastly interior modifications to install in a mature house. The latter works in harmony with nature, is economical to install and operate, needs only limited interior change, and was developed when your ancient abode was new. Number one is air conditioning; Number two, natural or fan-forced ventilation.

PROPER VENTILATION TECHNIQUES do not introduce mechanical refrigeration equipment to lower air temperature. They rely on moving already-cool air through your home and exhausting it after it has absorbed the heat that makes you uncomfortable. That's great, you say, but where does one find already-cool air in the middle of August? It's almost always there somewhere.

AT NIGHT THE AIR is at least fifteen to twenty degrees cooler than during the day in most parts of the United States and Canada. In early morning



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Coming Next Month

NINETEENTH CENTURY WALLPAPERS

the coolest air is to the west of your house, and in the evening it is to the east. If you have a basement, you'll agree that the air is always cool there.

SINCE YOUR HOUSE was built decades ago when air conditioning was unheard of, you have other cool air sources. Frame houses of the Victorian era often feature deep eaves and gables that provide cooling shade. Air pulled in shaded windows will add to your comfort even when the sun is beating on your roof. Large old trees also help to cool the air around your house.

THERE'S A GREAT DEAL you can do to lower surrounding air temperature without compressing and refrigerating it. But first let's study some basic facts about air dynamics. Air currents are in motion even when there is no wind. This is, of course, because hot air rises. Therefore, if you have an opening low on the cool side of your house and another high on the warm side (see figure 1) you will create a natural current--cool in, warm out. These natural air currents are called "stack," or "convection" cooling.

[\(Continued on page 57\)](#)

A Case History ...

The Interpretive Restoration

Part II

By Clem Labine

LAST MONTH I set out some of the basic principles for an interpretive restoration...one that is faithful to the original period and style of the house, without necessarily being an exact duplication of what was originally in the structure. Now let me illustrate how I applied these principles in the restoration of the dining room in my 1883 brownstone.

THE HOUSE, located in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn, had been a rooming house when my wife and I purchased it. The house had been cut up into numerous apartments, with sheet-rock partitions dividing up the original grand spaces, and sinks and stoves seemingly in every corner. Very little evidence of the original appearance remained, except for the walnut woodwork—most of which was still intact under countless layers of paint.

THROUGH DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH, we learned that the house had been built in 1883 by a speculative builder, and had been rented out for two years before a purchaser finally came along. (See OHJ, Oct. 1976 for procedures in researching an old house.) Given the speculative nature of the house's start in life, it seemed unlikely to us that the house ever had a very elaborate interior decorating scheme.

WE ALSO LEARNED that the man who purchased the house in 1885 had worked in a brokerage firm on Wall Street. From the little fragments we found, Mr. Blackwell seemed to be a solid citizen—but not a man of unusual wealth. Therefore, it seemed unlikely to us that the new owners would have dramatically upgraded the decoration in their new home.

Evidence From The House

PAIN'T SCRAPINGS and other archeological evidence tended to support this hypothesis. The original finishes that we could find seemed rather mediocre...not at all indicative of the best taste of the 1880's.

WE UNCOVERED, for example, fragments of three wallpapers that, if not original, were from an early decorating scheme. One of them was a very attractive Art Nouveau pattern. But

the others were quite pedestrian. We wouldn't have wanted to reproduce them—even if the budget would have allowed it.

WHEN WE STEAMED the calcimine paint off the dining room ceiling (see OHJ May 1976 for the process), we found what seemed to be the original paint finish: A brownish purple that could best be described as the color of liver. It was definitely a color that could be called "interesting," but was not one that my wife and I felt we could live with.

DURING THE WORK on the ceiling, we also uncovered evidence of a turn-of-century remodelling that involved (among other things) removal of an ornate plaster medallion and its replacement by a much smaller, simpler circular medallion. This presented an immediate question: Should we attempt to recreate a medallion like the original, or work with what we had?

IT WAS AS WE PONDERED all these factors that we opted for an Interpretive Restoration.

'What If...'

FOR OUR INTERPRETIVE restoration, we started by going back to the original design idea of the house...to see what the structure itself would suggest. The dominant decorative feature...inside or outside the house...is the walnut woodwork with the large carved crowns. Research into the style books of the day showed that these linear, geometric ornaments were basically inspired by Charles Locke Eastlake and the English Aesthetic or Art Movement (see OHJ, April 1975). This discovery gave us the starting point we needed.

WE THEN POSED the "what if" question: What if one of the leading aesthetic designers of the time had been retained to decorate the house? What might the house have looked like? For

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DURING (right): A rooming-house bathroom had been built into the dining room alcove. Photo shows midway point in the restoration. Partitions and bathroom fixtures have been removed, the floor replaced, and the cut for the bathroom door is ready to be re-sealed. Behind bathroom partition was found a turn-of-century wall treatment in very damaged condition.

AFTER (below): Dining room restored in the Aesthetic fashion of the 1880's.

Photos by Jim Kalett



our "leading designer," we chose Christopher Dresser—an English design genius of the late 19th century. We selected Dresser because of the power and originality of his designs—and because he had published a great deal. So there was a large body of printed work available for review.

FORTUNATELY, several of Dresser's works are available in inexpensive reprint editions. And through a friend who is a book collector, I also had access to one of Dresser's original volumes. The color plates were immensely helpful in color selection.

NEXT, we made the decision to emphasize painted decoration. Part of the reason was that Dresser had a preference for flat, stylized decoration, such as stencilled ornament. Equally important, very little is available today in Aesthetic Movement papers and fabrics. But you can still buy paint and reproduce any painted decoration that you see in a book or in a museum.

THE DECISION to use painted decoration also solved the problem about what to do about the small replacement ceiling medallion. Dresser didn't like the large cast ceiling medallions; he preferred a flat painted ceiling ornament. So we decided to keep the existing small plaster circle and add a painted ornament around it.

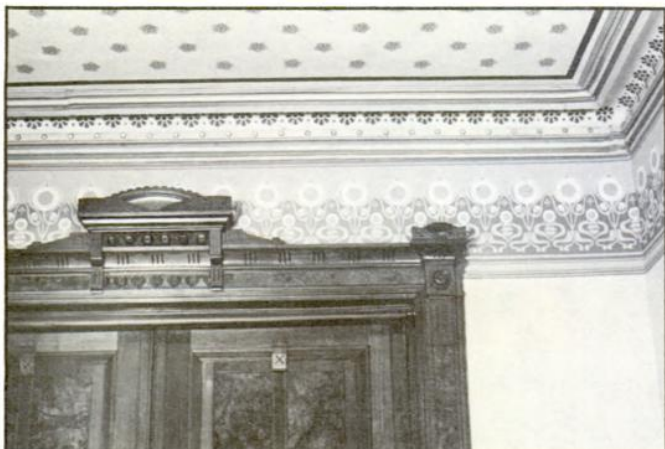
NEXT STEP WAS to select the patterns to reproduce. The pattern for the ceiling and center orna-



This One



ZU94-15Z-SQZ4



Large crowns on woodwork established the stylistic theme for the rest of the decoration: Sunflowers in the Aesthetic manner. Ceiling and cove are stencilled. The frieze paper was silk screened by a friend, Charles Enant.



Painted ornament—based on Christopher Dresser designs—was added around the small plaster medallion that had been installed in a 1900 remodelling. Dresser preferred flat painted ornament rather than three-dimensional plaster.

ments came from Dresser's "Modern Ornamentation." Similarly, dado and frieze paper were adapted from other Aesthetic Movement sources.

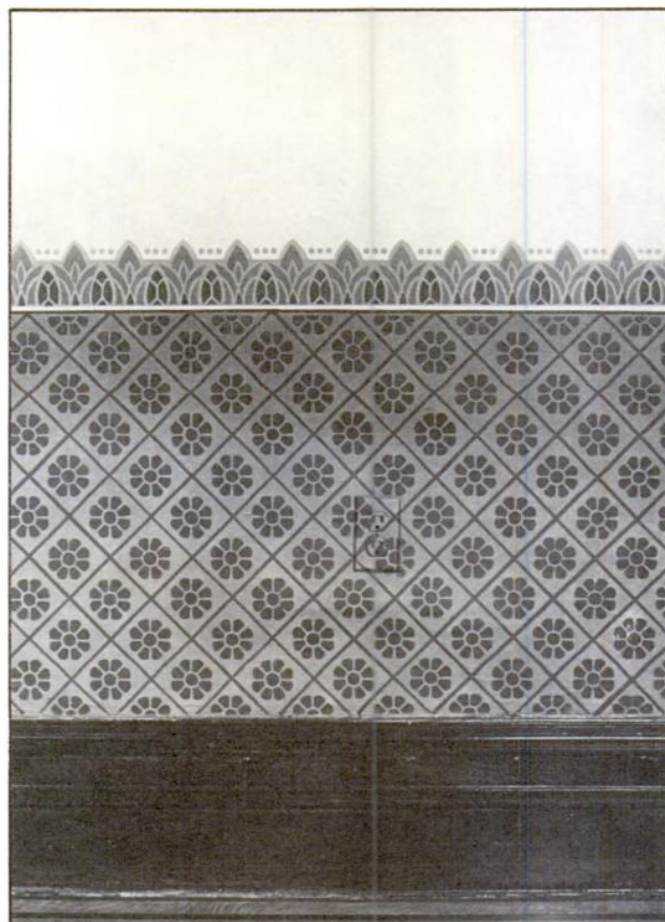
Canvas First

OF COURSE, before any of the decorative work could be done, there was an enormous amount of repair work to be executed—on woodwork, ceiling, walls and floor. But since this was relatively straightforward (albeit endless) work, I'm not going into details here. The "During" photo on the preceding page hints at the amount of work done.

ONE UNUSUAL FACET of the preparation work was the application of canvas to the ceiling and walls before any paint was laid down. Since so much time and effort was being put into the painted decoration, it seemed worth this extra step to ensure that the painted ornament wouldn't be damaged by minor plaster cracks. The "canvas" is actually a white vinylized fabric—applied just like wallpaper—and is available through large wallpaper and decorating outlets.

AFTER THE PREPARATION work was completed and the patterns selected, it was just a matter of layout and execution. Most of the decoration was stencilled—using the techniques described in *The Journal*, Nov. 1976 pp. 10-11. There were about 200 man-hours that went into the decoration. Howard Zucker and Helmuth Buecherl made invaluable contributions in the layout and application of the painted ornament.

THE RESULTING ROOM in the Aesthetic manner is not an attempt to duplicate what was originally in the house. But it is very much in keeping with the spirit of the times when the house was built. And, most important to me, the room is fun to be in. I understand all of the social history behind the decoration—and was part of the process that created it.



The dado was created by stencilling the stylized sunflowers over a glazed background; lines were produced with a stripping brush and straightedge after stencils dried. Dust band above dado is a three-color stencil.

A Glossary Of Old-House Parts

Exterior Features Of Pre-1920 Houses

Acanthus A common plant of the Mediterranean, whose leaves, stylized, form the characteristic decoration of capitals of Corinthian and Composite orders. In scroll form it appears on friezes, panels, etc.



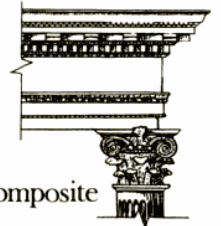
Bracket A projection from the face of the building to support a cornice or ornamental feature. Sawn wood brackets were an important decorative feature in many Victorian house styles.



Anthemion A common Greek ornament based upon the honeysuckle or palmette. Used singly or as a running ornament in friezes, cornices, iron work, etc. The anthemion is a very adaptable decoration; the one at right is a stencilled version.



Columns Part of the Classical Order in the architecture of ancient Greece and Rome. Comprised of the base, column, capital and entablature. The proportion for each and every element was spelled out based on the diameter of the column.



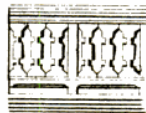
Composite

Baluster

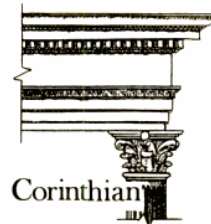
A spindle or post supporting the railing of a balustrade.



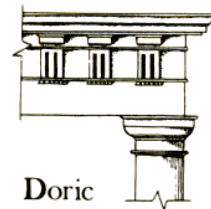
Balusters can be turned or sawn.



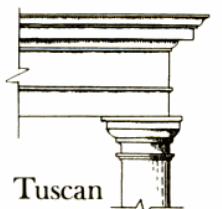
Balustrade An entire railing system with top rail and balusters.



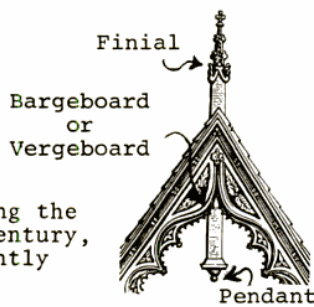
Corinthian



Doric



Tuscan



Bargeboard The decorative board attached to the projecting portion of a gable roof; the same as a vergeboard. During the late part of the 19th century, bargeboards were frequently extremely ornate.

Bargeboard or Vergeboard

Finial

Pendant

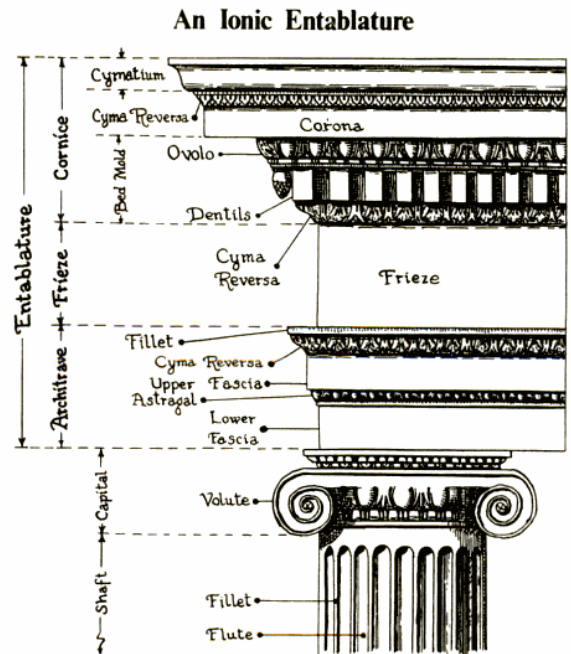
Bay An element that protrudes from the facade, usually defined by windows. A bay window rises from the ground one or more storeys.



Board and Batten

Vertical siding

composed of wide boards that do not overlap, and narrow strips, or battens, nailed over the spaces between the boards.



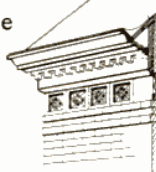
An Ionic Entablature



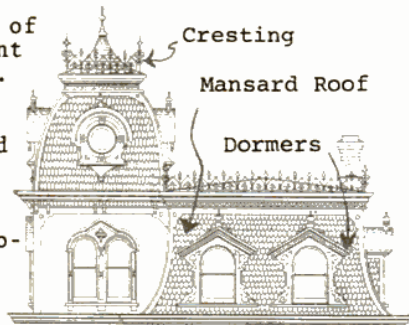
Corbel A bracket or block projection from the face of a wall that generally supports a cornice, beam or arch. "Corbelling out" refers to the building of one or more courses of masonry out from the face of a wall to support timbers or a chimney.



Cornice In classical architecture the upper, projecting section of an entablature; also the projecting ornamental moulding along the top of a building or wall.



Cresting A line of ornament finishing a roof. Victorian houses (especially the Second Empire and Eastlake styles) often feature a small cast iron railing with decorative points on roofs and balconies.

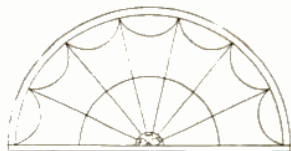
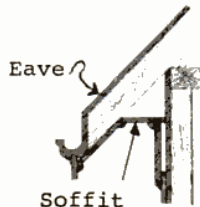


Cupola A small dome or similar structure on a roof. In the 19th century Italian villa style house, a square-shaped, windowed cupola was used from which to enjoy the view and was called a belvedere. Also called a lantern.



Dormer A vertically set window on a sloping roof; also, the roofed structure housing such a window. (See "Cresting" for illustration.)

Eaves The projecting overhang at the lower edge of a roof.



Fanlight Semi-circular window over a door or window with radiating bars or tracery in the form of an open fan.



Gable The triangular part of an exterior wall created by the angle of a pitched roof.

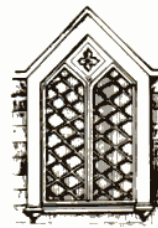
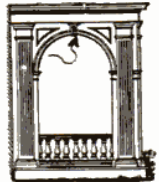
Gazebo An outdoor pavilion or summer house popular for lawns and gardens of rural houses in the Victorian era.



Half-timbered Descriptive of 16th and 17th century houses built with timber framing with the spaces filled in with plaster or masonry. This style of building was imitated in the 19th and early 20th centuries with the Tudor Revival. (See "Gable" for illustration.)

Keystone

The central stone of an arch.



Lancet Window A narrow window with a sharp, pointed arch; it was a feature of the Gothic Revival house.

Lattice Open work produced by interlacing of laths or other thin strips used as screening, especially in the base of the porch.



Leaded Glass Window A window composed of pieces of glass that are held in place with lead strips; the glass can be clear, colored or stained. Leaded glass windows are often called "stained glass windows."



Lintel The piece of timber or stone that covers an opening and supports the weight above it.

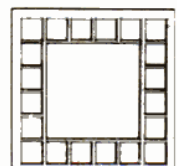


Mansard The classic mansard roof has steep sides broken by dormer windows. Named after the French architect, Francois Mansart, the mansard roof was a prominent feature of the Second Empire Style in the mid-19th century. (See "Cresting" for illustration.)

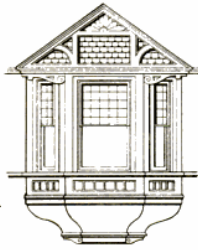
Modillion An ornamental horizontal block or bracket placed under the overhang of the cornice.



Mullions The strips inside the sash that divide a multi-paned window. Also called "muntins."



Oriel Window A bay window that projects from the wall of an upper storey and is carried on brackets, corbels, or a cantilever. The oriel window is often confused with the bay window. The difference is that a bay starts at the ground while the oriel begins above the first storey.



Palladian Window A window composed of a main window having an arched head and on each side a long, narrow window with a square head. Also called a Venetian window.

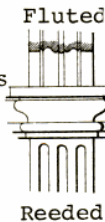
Pediment A wide, low-pitched gable surmounting the facade of a building in a classical style; also any similar triangular crowning element used over doors, windows and niches, usually triangular but may be curved.



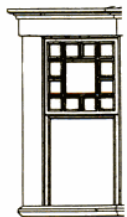
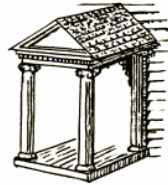
Pendant A hanging ornament, on roofs and ceilings, used extensively as a decorative feature in Gothic Revival architecture. (See "Bargeboard" for illustration.)



Pilaster A shallow pier attached to a wall; commonly used around doors and windows. Pilasters are often decorated to resemble classical columns and are generally fluted (with grooves and channels) or reeded (the opposite of fluted; a series of convexities like a bundle of reeds.)



Portico A porch, entrance way, or walk consisting of a roof supported by columns.



Queen Anne Window The Queen Anne style house, popular in the last quarter of the 19th century, revived many features from the 18th century. One was the small glass window pane, but arranged in a different form and usually only on the upper sash.

Quoin The stones or bricks which form the corner of a building, often distinguished decoratively from the adjacent masonry.



Revival Architecture During the 19th century many historic styles from preceding centuries came into fashion. The first significant revival came in the early part of the century with the Greek style. As happened with the later Revival styles, The Greek Revival began with public buildings. They were in almost exact imitation of the ancient Greek temples. Thousands of domestic versions followed, incorporating some of the prominent features of this historic style.



Greek Revival

This style had a very long period of revival--1820 to 1860. There was an emphasis on columns and pilasters, from a small portico to the elaborate Southern version, as well as use of the triangular pediment.

Popular from 1835 to 1860, Gothic was used for churches, civic buildings and houses--from small wooden cottages to stone houses. Sharply pointed gables, lancet windows, and wooden bargeboards with gothic motifs were all used to give a picturesque, medieval appearance.



Gothic Revival



Italian Villa Style

Originally inspired by the anonymous farmhouse architecture of the Italian countryside, the revival was popular here from 1845 to 1885. Features are: an asymmetrical arrangement of square shapes and lines, flat or low pitched roofs, heavy cornices with brackets and often a tower or belvedere.

The most popular style of all, the Tudor Revival continues today. Drawn from the 1500s Tudor period in England, its most prominent feature is half-timbering and often includes medieval windows and large chimneys. It was in great vogue in the late 1800s. Also called the Elizabethan style.



Tudor Revival



Romanesque Revival

Popular from 1870-1900, Romanesque recalled the massive effect of stone buildings in the period before medieval Gothic. Houses in this style were stone or shingle, large and low, with many rounded windows and round arches. Chimneys were squat to keep the low, solid shape.

The sparing use of classical decoration in architecture and furniture during the reign of Queen Anne (first decade of the 1700s) was the inspiration for this revival. Popular from 1875-1900, it actually was a conglomeration of Colonial features, medieval towers and windows, and large porches, arranged in an asymmetrical composition. Queen Anne houses have a great variety of shapes and textures as well as a wealth of ornament.



Queen Anne Style



Colonial Revival

Interest in America's 18th century heritage was revived by the Centennial Exhibition of 1876. From 1890 to 1920 a great many houses were built that echoed the styles of the early English, Dutch and Spanish settlers. Some

houses were built as exact replicas of the Georgian manor house or the Federal style, while most were, in size and shape, built in the earlier Victorian form with Colonial details (Palladian windows, columned porticoes, classical pediments, etc.)

Sawn Wood Ornament

Ornamental woodwork, popular in the Victorian era for trim on porches, eaves, fences. Often called gingerbread, scrollwork and fretwork.



Soffit The underside of any subordinate member of a building, such as the under surface of an arch, cornice, eave, beam or stairway. (See "Eaves" for illustration.)

Stained Glass Window A window with a painted scene or words on the glass that is then fired onto the glass. Windows with just colored glass are often called stained glass, but a true stained glass window is more the product of the art of the painter than the glazier.



Swag A festive decoration of semi-loops with loose ends, similar to a swag of fabric. They are also called festoons, and when composed of flowers, called garlands. Swags in stone, wood or stamped metal were popular ornaments for the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival houses.



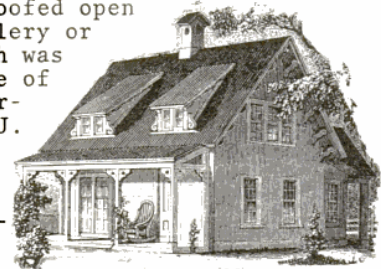
Tracery Delicate ornamental work consisting of interlacing lines, the intersecting of ribs and bars, as in rose windows and the upper part of Gothic windows.



Transom Window Any small window over a door or another window, often containing stained or leaded glass.



Verandah A roofed open gallery or porch. The verandah was an important feature of the romantic, picturesque styles of A. J. Downing in the mid-19th century--the Italianate, Gothic Revival and Bracketed cottage. It remained a popular feature of American architecture throughout the 19th and early 20th century.



Victorian Term used to cover all the various kinds of houses and public buildings built during the reign of Queen Victoria--1837 to 1901. Although "Edwardian" is used in England to describe buildings in the first decades of the 20th century, here in America they are generally known as "turn-of-the-century." The styles popular in the latter part of the 19th century--Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Stick and Shingle--continued to be built right up until the First World War.



Wheel Window Round windows with mullions radiating from the center, as in the spokes of a wheel. Also called Catherine-wheel. Those with tracery are generally known as Rose Windows, while the round window without tracery or mullions is known as an "oculus" or "oeil-de-boeuf"--Bull's Eye Window.



Widow's Walk A narrow platform on a roof, usually with a wooden balustrade. It was originally a feature of the early New England house with a view of the sea. Today it is often used to denote any small roof top with a balustrade or cresting.



THIS SELECTED GLOSSARY of exterior decorative terms has been designed to encourage a better understanding of old houses found around the country. It is not meant to be a comprehensive annotation of historic architecture but rather a helpful guide for the old-house owner.

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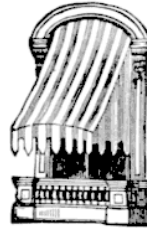
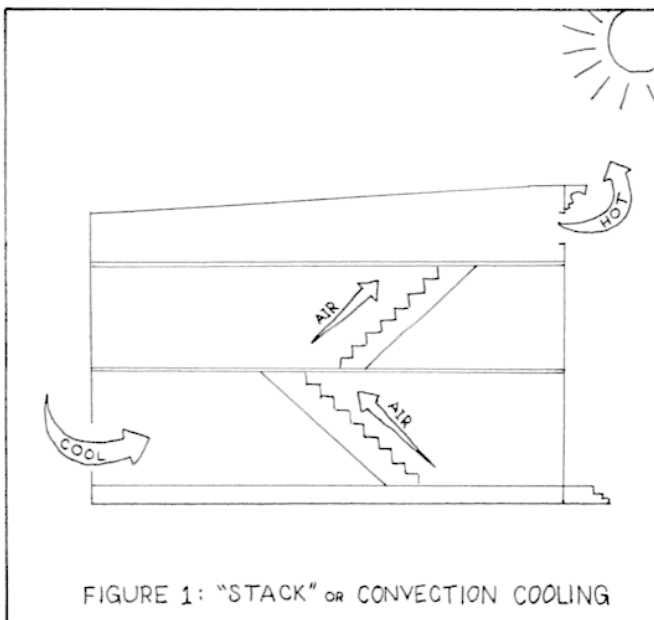
(Natural Cooling--Cont'd from page 49)

THE SPEED AT WHICH AIR FLOWS will enhance its cooling ability. The ideal for encouraging the largest volume of air flow is to have input and output vents equal in size. The faster air flows, however, the cooler and less humid it seems. So in damper climates the input vent should be smaller than the output vent. This constricts the air and speeds its flow at the input, making it seem drier and cooler. A fan will also increase air speed, but more on that later.

NOW YOU CAN SEE how, with a natural current passing up the "stack," you can control the direction of the draft. By opening and closing selected doors you can direct the air into certain rooms and keep it out of others. Old houses were designed with an eye to controlling air currents--summer and winter. That's one reason they had so many interior partitions and doors. If you remove any of the doors or partitions, you are reducing your ability to control air movement within the house.

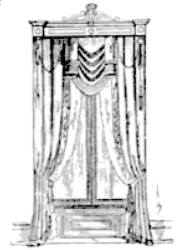
AS THE DIRECTION OF THE SUN CHANGES you can switch your input and output windows so that input is always low on the cool side and output high on the warm side. At night, when all the air around the house is cool, open the windows in rooms you occupy so that the largest volume of cooling air flows through your "stack."

BEFORE ELECTRICITY, the occupants of your home had to rely on these natural air currents for cooling. So they built features into homes which aided the system. Deep eaves and gables to shade the outside walls have already been mentioned. Canvas awnings, now nearly extinct, went up every summer to shade the windows. Awnings are most effective on the south wall of your home, where they can block all the sunlight. On the east and west walls, the awning will still admit the sun's heat those brief hours when the sun is shining directly into the windows.



INSIDE THE HOUSE, shutters and curtains were used to help the cooling process. This was done by tightly shutting windows on the sunny side to keep the heat out. High ceilings also help keep living areas cool and create open

spaces for better air circulation. The double set of doors on the vestibule entrance traps heat, keeping it out of the house. These double doors functioned much like the modern storm door.



YESTERDAY'S HOMEOWNER kept an eye on the location of the sun and opened and closed windows and vents accordingly. Maybe it's an old system, but it still works.

IT MAKES LITTLE SENSE to run an expensive air conditioner to keep your house at 70° when the basement air is cooler and the air outside in many places is cooler too. Yet the reliance on air conditioning does just this--and has caused us to ignore the features of old houses which were put there to make life more comfortable in the summer.

Attic Fans

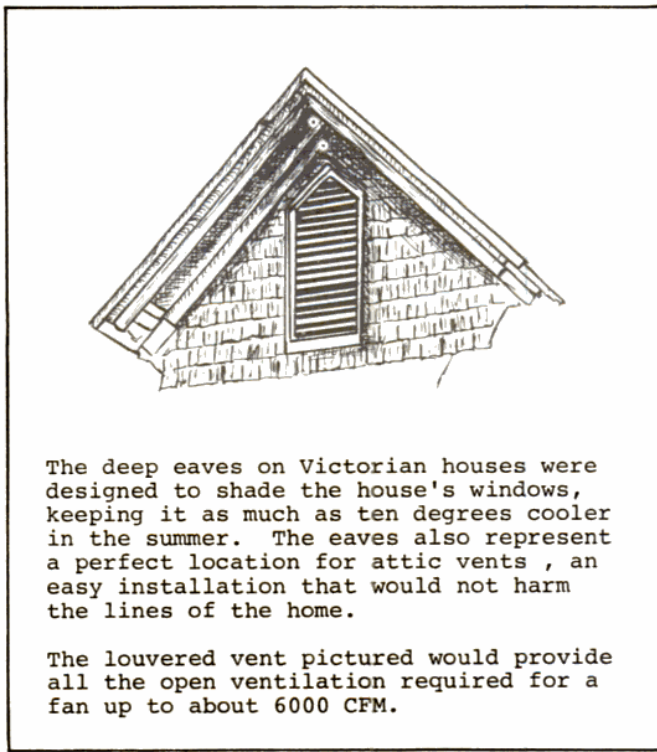
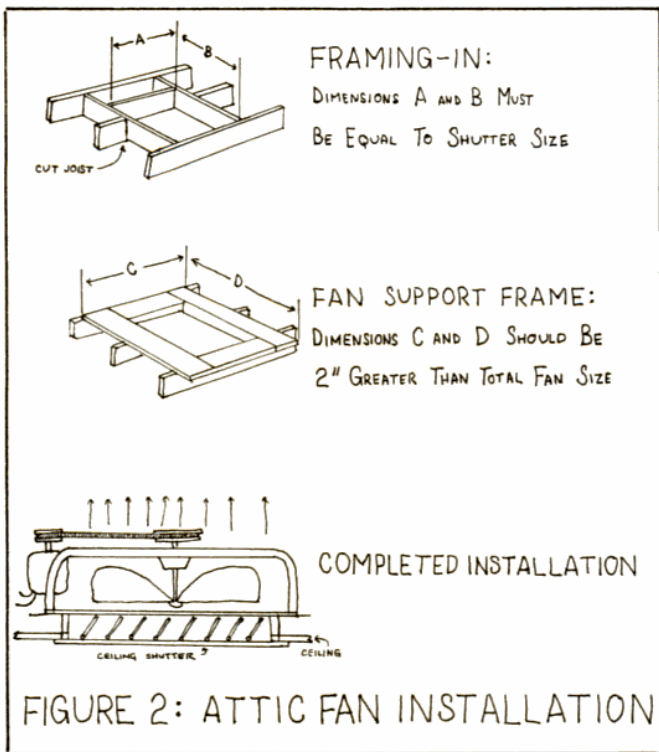
NATURAL VENTILATION is great as far as it goes, but that isn't far enough in the really hot months. The faster the air flows, the cooler and drier it feels, so it is logical that a fan-forced system will work better. We installed a 10,000 CFM (cubic feet per minute) fan in our attic in downtown Baltimore, and our home is now more comfortable than it would be were it centrally air conditioned.

THE FAN, located at the output end, pulls air in any window we choose to open. It required no ductwork, no unsightly compressor, and uses one-tenth as much electricity as a large window air conditioner. As such, it's merely an extension of the old-fashioned convection cooling principle and allows us to take advantage of the architectural features mentioned above.

ATIC FANS come in sizes from 6000 CFM to 12000 CFM. If you live in the North, the fan you buy should change the air in your house every two or three minutes. In the South, every minute is advised. Compute the volume of your home, subtracting closets and rooms you keep closed in the summer, and you can figure the size fan you'll need.

THE FAN SHOULD BE CENTRALLY LOCATED, or near a stairwell. It rests on a gasket mounted on the floor joists in the attic, and is controlled by a switch below. Louvers in the attic cover the fan, opening as cool air is pulled through. Adequate venting is required through the roof to exhaust the hot air.

THESE FANS ARE NORMALLY a minimum of two feet in diameter, so you will have to cut a joist to install them. Begin by marking on the ceiling below a square which, when cut



out, will accommodate the ceiling shutter. Cut the ceiling with a jig saw or keyhole saw, and cut the necessary joist from the attic above. Working in the attic, you must frame in the opening to tie the cut joist to solid joists on either side and provide the surface on which the fan rests. It's not a difficult piece of carpentry, especially if you have headroom in the attic.

OUR FAN IS CONTROLLED by a line thermostat which turns it on when cool air is needed. Now, with the fan on, it's necessary only to open windows low on the cool side, or windows in rooms we wish to cool. A strong breeze is maintained all day, and the house stays comfortable as long as you pay attention to the features mentioned earlier: Shutter sunny windows and open windows on cool sides only. On the very hottest days we pull air through the basement, where it will be cooled, and into the house. The fan goes on and off as it is needed.

Roof Vents

THE THIRD PART of the system is the roof vent. A thirty-inch fan that moves 10,000 CFM will need fifteen square feet of open vent, or 1.5 square feet per thousand CFM. This is a big hole in your roof, and can be unsightly if not planned properly. We were fortunate that our flat roof is not visible from the street or yard, so we simply cut a large hole in the roof and built a hood over it to keep rain out. Half-inch chicken wire bars the opening to birds and iron bars arranged over the hole discourage human predators.

IF YOU DON'T SHARE our flat roof, however, venting will have to be more cleverly devised. Some homes have vents in the gables already, and these can be used if large enough and unclogged. The most common type of attic vent is in the eaves--the soffit vent. With the broad eaves of older homes, a great deal of space is available for vents. By cutting a long vent, for instance, in an eave a foot wide and twenty feet long, you can provide all the vents you'll need for a 10,000 CFM fan. Like all other vents, this one will have to be covered with mesh or louvers. One caution: Don't put the vent near a window you plan to open to draw cool air, or else you'll find yourself recycling your hot air exhaust. I keep a couple of loose batts of fiberglass in the attic to cover my vents come winter.

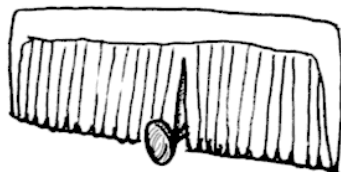
Astounding Results

THE RESULTS ARE ASTOUNDING. Our house was never designed for central heat or air conditioning and distribution of centrally air conditioned air would be poor. We tried window air conditioners. They were great as long as you were right next to them, but the large rooms kill their efficiency. Besides, they were ugly hanging out the perfectly proportioned windows of our brick rowhouse.

ENTER THE ATTIC FAN. We can stay comfortable in most rooms and the electric bills no longer soar in competition with the mercury.

ONE FINAL NOTE: Attic fans are often on sale in the fall, and the attic will be cooler for you to work. The whole installation shouldn't cost more than \$150.00.

Restorer's Notebook



Tack Holder

THE LAST OLD HOUSE I restored had several staircases—and the carpet on all of them needed replacement. Putting in that much stair carpet requires a lot of carpet tacks, which can also result in a lot of banged thumbs and fingers getting the tacks started.

I FOUND a sure-fire trick that saved both fingers and temper: Wedge the tacks between the teeth of a comb. The comb then holds the tacks upright until they are firmly started in the wood. This method can also be used for starting small brads in wood, hanging pictures, etc.

Frederick A. Mohler, III
Lancaster, Pa.

Damaged Plaster

IN THE INTERESTING recent article on restoring damaged plaster (OHJ, Feb. 1979), I did not note any reference to a product that we use as a standard step in such work performed by the National Trust's Restoration Workshop.

PRIOR TO APPLYING new plaster to patch old plaster, we apply a bonding agent. These bonding agents adhere strongly to the old plaster and lath and the new plaster in turn bonds strongly to the bonding agent.

BONDING AGENTS are available through masonry supply stores. There are different formulations. Some, for example, are for materials such as concrete. It is important to find one specifically blended for plaster.

TWO PRODUCTS we have used are: Link, manufactured by Sta-Dri Co., Odenton, MD; and Plaster Weld "Liquid Lath" by Larsens Product Corp., Rockville, MD. I am sure there are other products on the market of equal quality.

Alan D. Keiser, Chief
National Trust Restoration Workshop
Tarrytown, N.Y.

Removing Old Linoleum

BY TRIAL-AND-ERROR we found a method that works very well for removing old linoleum and paste from hardwood floors. It's a varia-

tion on the technique reported in The Journal in January 1977, p. 2.

WE HAD TWO ROOMS in which linoleum was hiding beautiful hardwood floors. We found that by ripping or slicing the top layer of linoleum off, you arrive at the glue and black backing paper. To loosen this material, we used a commercial wallpaper remover solution. This is a material you buy in bottles at a paint and wallpaper store and mix with water.

THE RESIDUE of linoleum paste is then soaked with this wallpaper remover solution, using sponges or mop to apply it. After each soak, the residue was scored with a knife—horizontally, vertically and diagonally—to achieve greater water penetration. We then used a putty knife to scrape up the softened material and paper towels to soak up the water.

IT IS A MESSY JOB, but it's the easiest way we've found to do it. The beautifully finished oak floors made the effort worthwhile.

Rita Angeli
Rhineland, Wi.

Antiquing Nails

IN THE APRIL ISSUE, a reader suggested using gun bluing on nail heads to give them a more desirable old look on projects where the heads show.

WHILE GUN BLUING works well on individual pieces (and especially large hardware) the necessary cleaning beforehand and polishing afterwards can be very tedious if you have a lot of nails or hardware to "antique."

HERE IS A METHOD I have used successfully to produce an antique look on large quantities of nails and/or hardware. Put the nails, etc., in an old pie plate or disposable aluminum plate and heat them dry until they turn a straw color (before it gets to red hot). I was able to get this degree of heating by just placing the pan on top of our gas stove.

IMMEDIATELY DUMP the heated metal into a can full of linseed oil. When they are cool, drain and dry. The oil absorbed into the surface during this process also tends to inhibit rust.

Jonathan Poore
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Got Any Tips?

Do you have any hints or short cuts that might help other old-house owners? We'll pay \$15 for any short how-to items that are used in this "Restorer's Notebook" column. Send your hints to: Notebook Editor, The Old-House Journal, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

Helpful Publications

Historic House Interiors

Reviewed by:
Douglas S. Fischer, Director
Regional Conference of
Historical Agencies
Manlius, New York

WILLIAM SEALE has produced one of the finest books on the historic house interior yet written. If you have been raised in the shadows of Winterthur's gorgeous period rooms and have visited any of the hundreds of historic houses with the finest high style furnishings on east coast, it will come as a shock that it was rarely, if ever, that way.

SEALE CALLS these attractive settings expensive suburban living rooms a la Grosse Point, Michigan and Larchmont, New York. The tendency of most historic recreations is to feature objects that kindle strong aesthetic responses. That shouldn't be and never was.

IF YOU ARE THE OWNER of an historic house or the director of a house museum and are seriously interested in documenting what was or might have been, William Seale takes you step-by-step through the process. He reviews the written records, documenting the objects, reading and researching the house and the developing of a collections list.

ALONG THE WAY you will probably find many of your conceptions of 18th and 19th century interiors destroyed.

ARCHITECTS AMONG OTHERS fall victim to Seale's pen. "Since the beginning the architectural point of view has dominated historical restoration, and this has created an unfortunate imbalance." Architects tend to ignore the particular building and lean toward recreating what he calls "academic typicals." The rule in recreating the historic interior is to let the human factor take precedent over everything else.



IN SECTIONS ON FURNISHINGS Seale admits to not being encyclopedic. You can get that elsewhere. He carefully helps us look at furniture, transient objects, lighting and textiles keeping in mind the human element. Half the book is illustrations with a balance between "historical" and documentary views and present day views taken in museum houses. He is critical of many of the current views and points out why some work and others fail. The book concludes with an excellent bibliography that includes the important primary and secondary sources.

RECREATING THE HISTORIC HOUSE Interior" is an important addition for the libraries of those who want to learn more about their old houses.

COPIES MAY BE PURCHASED through the American Association for State and Local History, Dept. OHJ, 1400 Eighth Ave. South, Nashville, TN 37203 for \$22.00.

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