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Old House Journal

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Old-House Journal

Vol. XX No. 1

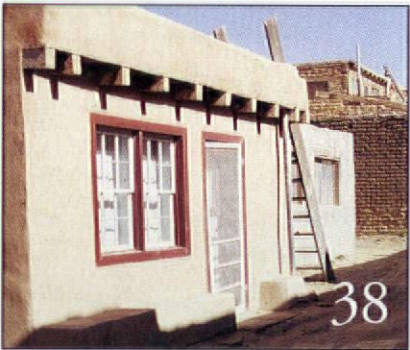
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Cover: Period staircase graining in a turn-of-the-century San Francisco mansion. Photo by Susan Goines.

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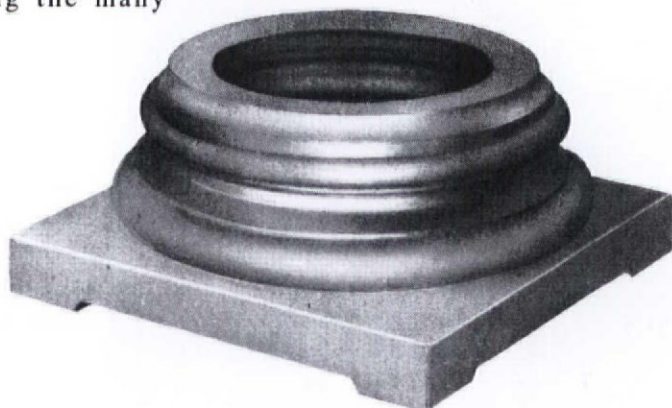
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BIG NEWS: AFTER SPENDING OUR FIRST 18 years in Brooklyn's Park Slope Historic District, *OHJ* has gone north. We've left New York for the historic seaport of Gloucester on Massachusetts' Cape Ann. Editorial and advertising offices have combined under one roof — in a wonderful old building that's famous hereabouts.

Our new home is a rambling four-story pile of bricks. The Blackburn Tav-

ern, its most recent appellation, dates to 1810 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It was built as a private home, and since an addition doubled its size in 1840, it's been variously used as an inn, a hotel and beer-hall, an ice-cream parlor, and, recently, a restaurant and dinner theatre. Luminaries such as painter Winslow Homer stayed in the little rooms that now serve as private of-

fices. Despite the building's checkered history, the solid brick exterior retains most of its Federal detail, and inside we've found cornice mouldings and working fireplaces along with the precariously settled floors.

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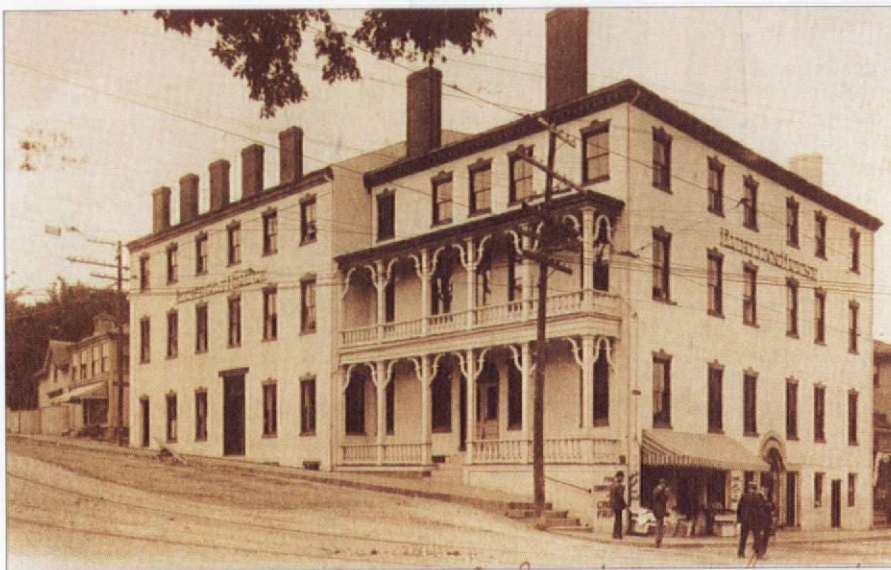
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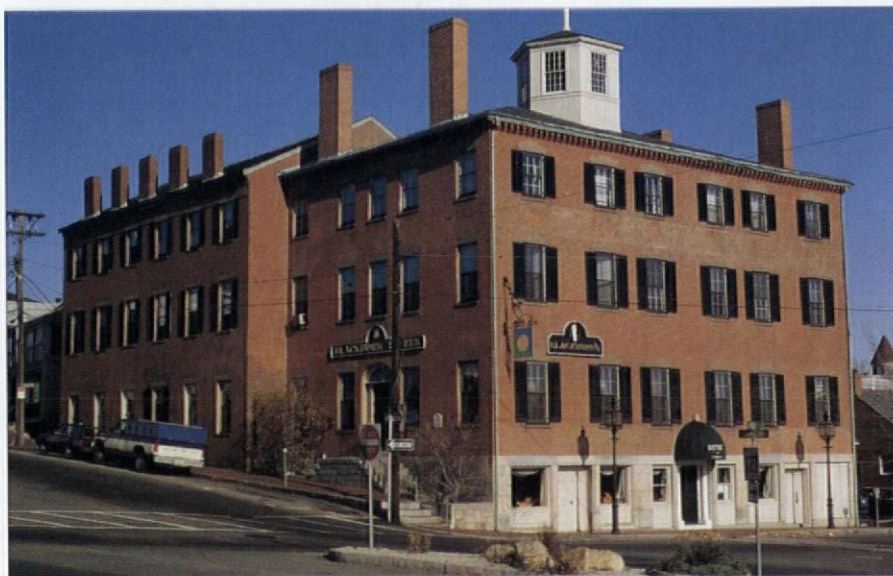
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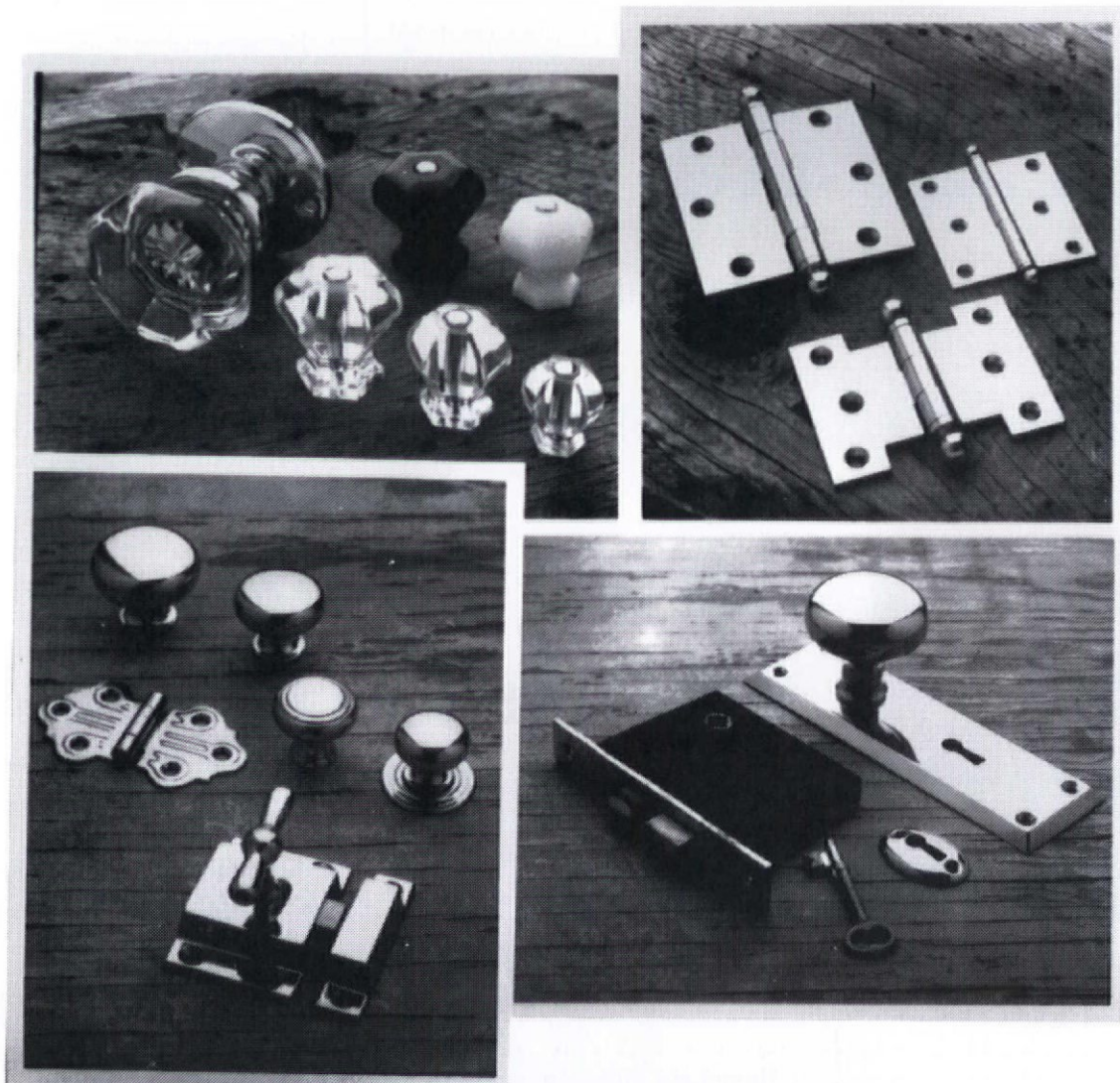


*Above: Back in 1906, the building was the Puritan House, a Gloucester hotel.
Below: Our headquarters as it appears today, complete with cupola.*

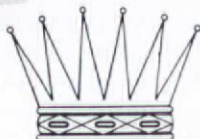


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Pink Stink

Dear OHJ,

I just pulled my November/December 1991 issue out of the mailbox and started my usual cover-to-cover read. On page 8, however, I skidded to a stop and gasped at the horrid pink, white, and blue (or is that lavender?) paint job attributed to a Shartlesville pair, Karen Kinnane and Barry Block. Reader Celia Aptacy of Saugerties, N.Y., loved it. I pray that Kinnane and Block NEVER find Nazareth with its wealth of beautiful old homes (many, like mine, in need of facelifts, restorations, and paint jobs). We — unlike, apparently, Shartlesville — have a historical society that wants things restored to SOME sense of historical accuracy. And I don't think shocking pink and lavender are anywhere CLOSE to that.

— Margaret Emery
Nazareth, Penn.

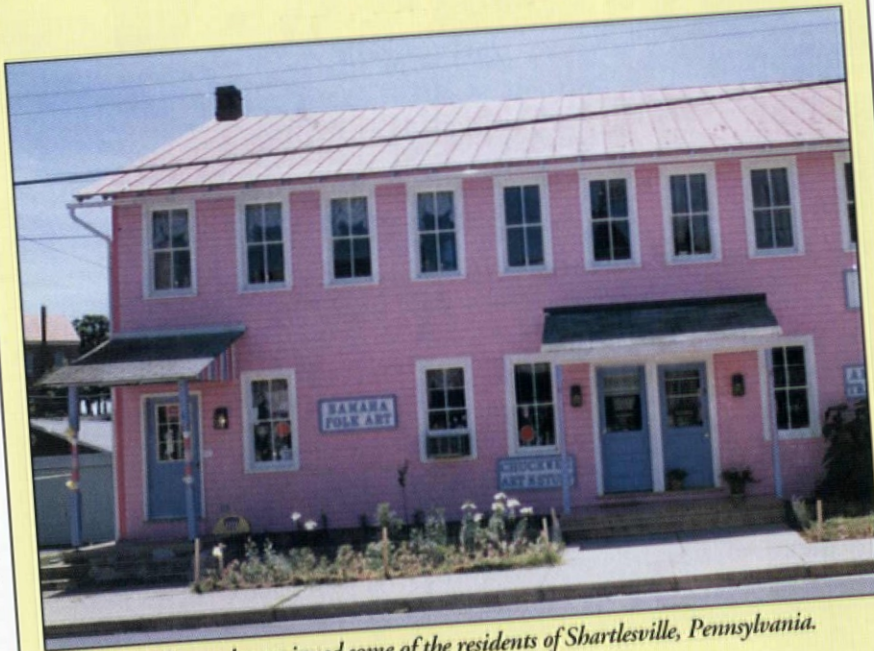


Photo: C. Aptacy

Pink houses have piqued some of the residents of Shartlesville, Pennsylvania.

Dear OHJ,

Had to write and comment on your letter from Celia Aptacy. She should have asked the town residents what they thought of the color schemes and of Karen Kinnane. There has been a lot of controversy going on about her "restoration." She recently gave a local newspaper an interview in which she called the town a slum. Locals don't take kindly to this and have been up in arms ever since. Two weeks after the interview, three of her buildings were damaged by a fire that is still under investigation.

Shartlesville was a picturesque little working-class town in Pennsylvania Dutch country. My husband and I took many Sunday drives that included its Main Street. Now the quaint feelings are gone, replaced by a circus effect in which Karen's buildings are the main clowns.

I've read *Old-House Journal* for many years and feel you would be just as displeased by Karen's blatant disregard for the local heritage as many are here.

— Helen Smith
Sinking Spring, Penn.

Not a Lot of Hot Air

Dear OHJ,

I've been really steamed at my heating system ever since I bought my 1922 Colonial Revival house in 1988. Now I'm no longer hot under the collar since reading Dan Holohan's wonderful, incisive, perfectly delightful article in the September/October '91 *OHJ*. In fact, that article alone justifies subscribing for 10 more years!

I wrote Mr. Holohan a rambling letter describing in detail the glitches in my system (no heat to sunroom, radiators which don't heat up completely) and sent a few snaps. He telephoned me, gave me a couple of hints, and then suggested I send him a videotape of the whole shebang. He's solved some things I've been struggling with for years. Not only does Mr. Holohan have a knack for writing, but he also really does know what he's doing.

Please publish more of Mr. Holohan's "steamy" articles.

— Thos. Terry
Genesea, Ill.

Antique-Apple Source

Dear OHJ,

As an *Old-House Journal* reader and an antique-apple lover, I really enjoyed the article in your November/December issue.

My experience as a gardener has shown me that trees and shrubs tend to be more successful if they are from a nursery in a similar area or nearby. For your readers in the Northeast, may I suggest Miller's Nursery, 5060 West Lake Road, Canandaigua, NY 14424. Their 1991 catalog lists all the varieties in your article and many more. I have purchased many fruit trees from them over a six-year period and have always been pleased with their products. (I have no financial ties to Miller's; I'm just a satisfied customer.)

Yours from deep in plaster dust,

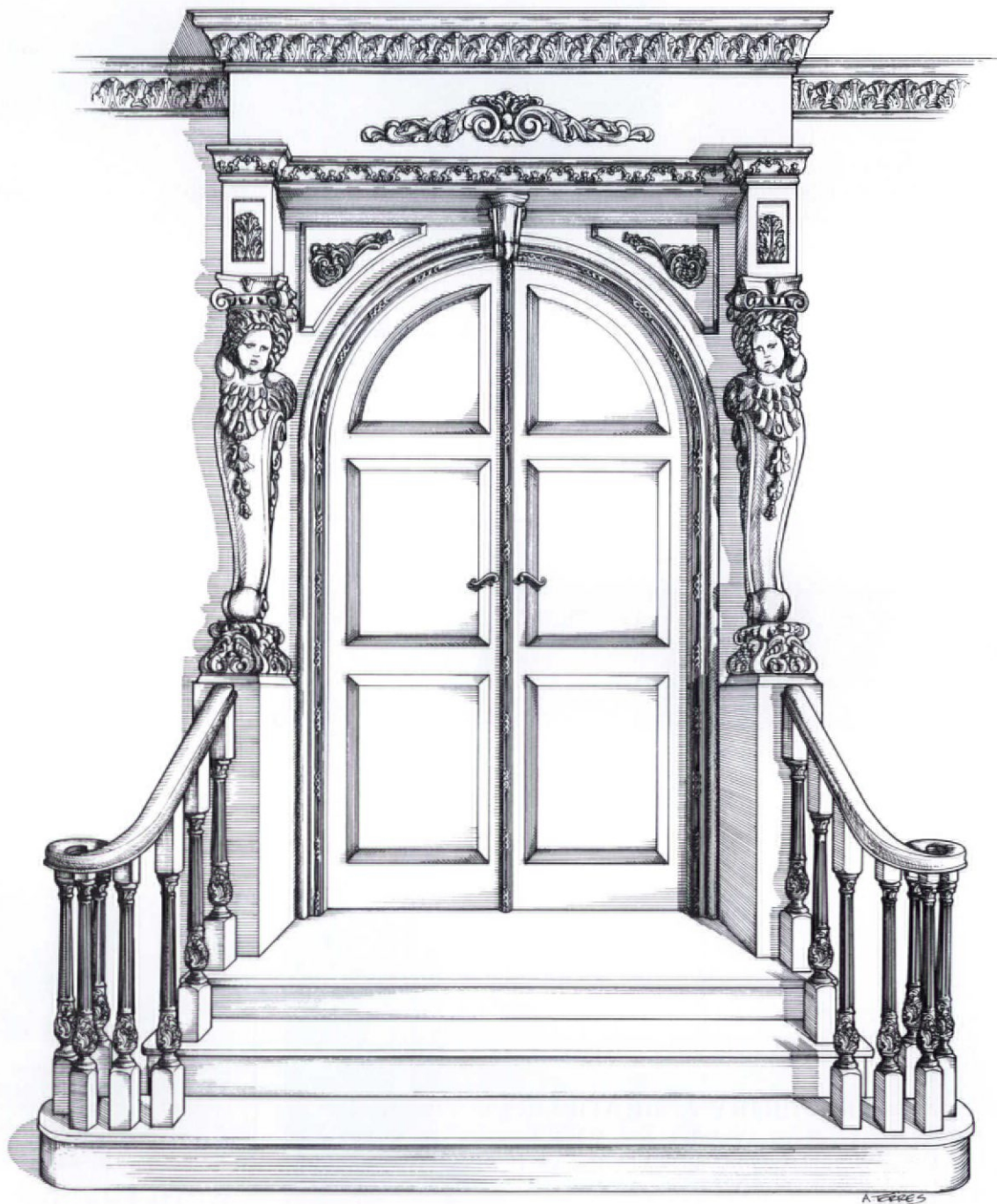
— Jill C. Forster
Columbus, Ind.

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A Woman with a Mission

Dear OHJ,

I was pleasantly surprised to see an article on Mission architecture in your July/August '91 issue. I live in a 1906 Mission house and have recently started a Bed & Breakfast. My guests are surprised to find a house of this style in the heart of the "Colonial" Hudson Valley in New York State. At the end of their stay, they often remark on the quality of craftsmanship and the soundness of the house. I have been fortunate and have acquired the blueprints done by architect Lynne Kinne of Utica, N.Y. I am now trying to construct a genealogy of the house. Thanks again for the article. I now show it to my guests and it answers a lot of questions.

— Linda Saulpaugh
Hudson, N.Y.



The Inn at Blue Shores in New York's Hudson Valley.

Who (& When) They Were

Dear OHJ,

I was interested to see in your article about Calvert Vaux ("Who They Were,"

Nov/Dec '90) that he had attended Merchant Taylors' School. My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather attended the school, and I have four

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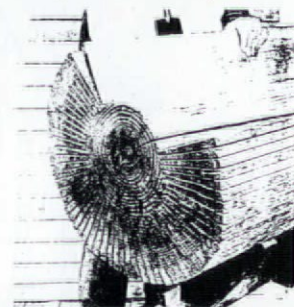
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volumes of the MTS School Register which list scholars who attended during the period from 1562 to the 1920s.

Calvert Vaux appears as an entry for December of 1833. He is listed as having been born on 20 December 1824, not 20 September 1824 as shown in your article. Calvert Vaux' brother Alfred Harris Vaux also attended the school, entering in March of 1835. (My great-grandfather entered in January 1836.)

Thanks for bearing with this bit of trivia. I enjoy your "Who They Were" articles.

— Philip C. Gunyon
Beaconsfield, Quebec

Homeowner Beware

Dear OHJ,

Two years ago, my husband and I bought an Italianate in New Berlin, New York, and ever since we've come to rely on *Old-House Journal*. We appreciate your

informative "how-to" articles and items on historic preservation, a subject that has become important to us recently.

Our neighborhood is listed on the National Register, a status that gives it some protection from certain government projects. Right now, the U.S. Soil Conservation (SCS) has planned just such a project for us. We found out about it last March when the Chenango County rights-of-way agent stopped by and asked for a permanent easement to part of our backyard. She said the SCS wanted to bury Paper Mill Brook, the stream that borders our land, in a storm sewer. The reason? "Flood control."

We didn't sign the easement form that day and began researching. We read the 1974 Environmental Impact Statement and on page 43 found the rationale for the project: In 1905, New Berlin had a "100-year flood" (5.5 inches of rain in 24

hours) and the stream had flooded the downtown area. Our State Historic Preservation Office had never been told about this project, and when we made this known, embarrassed SCS officials submitted it for review. We continued our research and learned that New Berlin had four recorded floods. In three of these, flooding occurred when manmade structures far upstream from the historic district clogged with debris — a condition the project will not address. In the fourth, 16 inches of rain (twice the amount of the 100-year storm) fell in 1913, yet Paper Mill Brook was able to handle this incredible amount of water because the channel was in good repair and kept clear.

These days, the brook needs attention: Retaining walls have fallen and neglectful property owners have desecrated it with trash. The Village, which has

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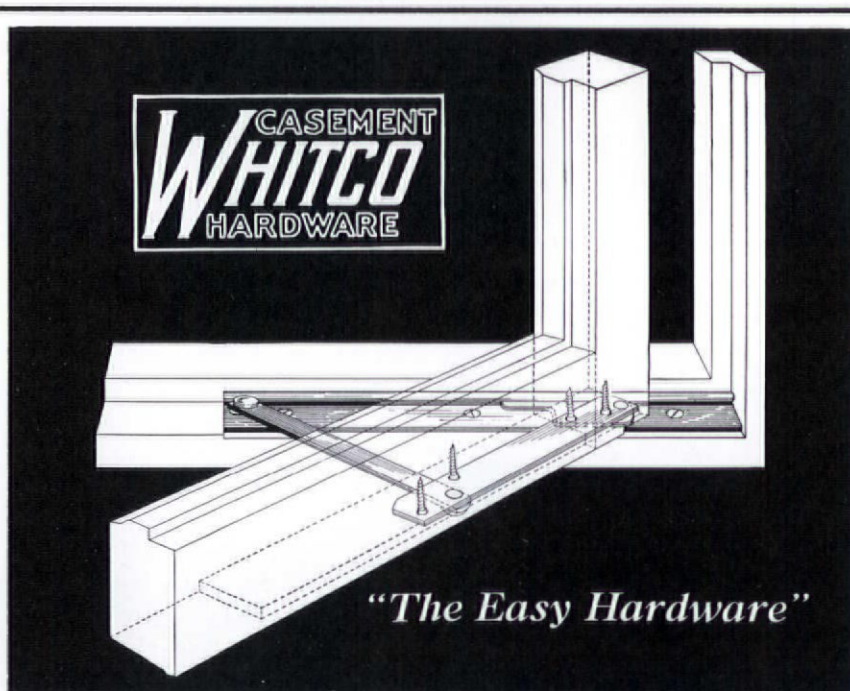
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ordinances to protect Paper Mill Brook from polluters, refuses to enforce its own laws and has adopted SCS's panacea of obliterating the lower half of the stream.

We have urged the Village and County to ask for options that would preserve the integrity of the historic district. SCS officials in Washington say they can redesign the project to keep the natural brook, and pay for it with federal flood-control (PL 566) funds. However, SCS officials in Syracuse, our home office, have refused to do so. Even though the SHPO and the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation are reviewing this project, their suggestions can ultimately be ignored. The County has yet to come back for our land, but has made it abundantly clear that it will use its power of Eminent Domain to take it away.

So we advise every old-house enthusiast



Our "Mystery Object" turns out to be a farrier's buttress for shoeing horses.

to be prepared: Your house may be in a historic district, but it is not protected from the designs of engineers.

— Lori Grace
New Berlin, N.Y.

Mysteries Explained

Dear OHJ,

In the May/June '91 issue on page 51

[*More Time Capsules*], you show a "mystery object": It is a farrier's buttress used to pare (shape) a horse's hoof before shoeing. The one shown is unusual in that it is all iron — normally, they have a wooden shoulder stock.

Also, the "ivory riding crop" appears from the photo to have the normal features of bone. (The handle shape is

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of an umbrella, not a riding crop, but the other end is not visible.) And the bayonet shown seems to exhibit features of American production of the Revolutionary War period — not a common find.

— Harry Kahn
Quakertown, Penn.

“The Oaks” of Maxfield Parrish

Dear OHJ,

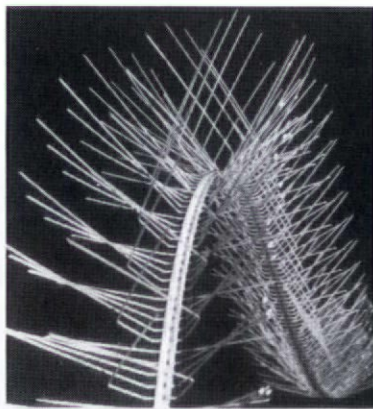
Maxfield Parrish created many fine works of visual art during his long career. When one thinks of Parrish, images of “Daybreak” and “The Garden of Allah” naturally come to mind. What many do not realize, however, is that among Parrish’s greatest joys was creation of another type, architecture. In its day, Parrish’s estate, “The Oaks” as he called it, was featured in many of the finest architectural journals of the day. Since

Parrish’s death in 1966, “The Oaks” has gone through many changes. It was converted into a restaurant and museum, and during the ‘70s the house burned down. However, the studio where Parrish spent thousands of creative hours still stands, essentially the same — with the exception of several destructive attempts to convert the studio into apartments! Parrish’s talents also included carpentry and machine work, and dozens of his inventions are still incorporated into the studio, such as ingenious mechanisms for opening the studio’s many windows. A small cart on rails and an elevator for the maneuvering of wood products are still operational.

The walled garden, reflecting pool, swimming pool, garage, and chauffeur’s cottage — all influential in his paintings — still exist but are in need of repair. An attempt was once made to create a mu-

seum out of “The Oaks,” but it ended in failure. The best avenue to ensure the historic and artistic preservation of the property seems to be the creation of a Parrish memorial park administered by the government, much like the one created nearby for Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Only an informed public can give the policy makers and those who hold the purse strings the needed incentive to take action in this matter. Send the following officials a post card stating your support for the creation of a Parrish memorial at “The Oaks”: Governor Judd Gregg, State Capitol, Concord, NH 03301; New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, P.O. Box 2043, Concord, NH 03302-2043; Gerald D. Patten, Regional Director, National Park Service, 15 State Street, Boston, MA 02109-3572.

— Kory Darnall
Davenport, Iowa



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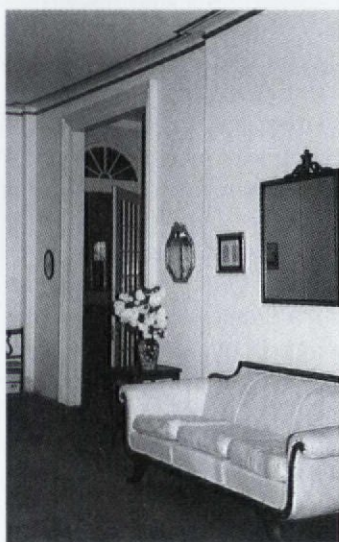
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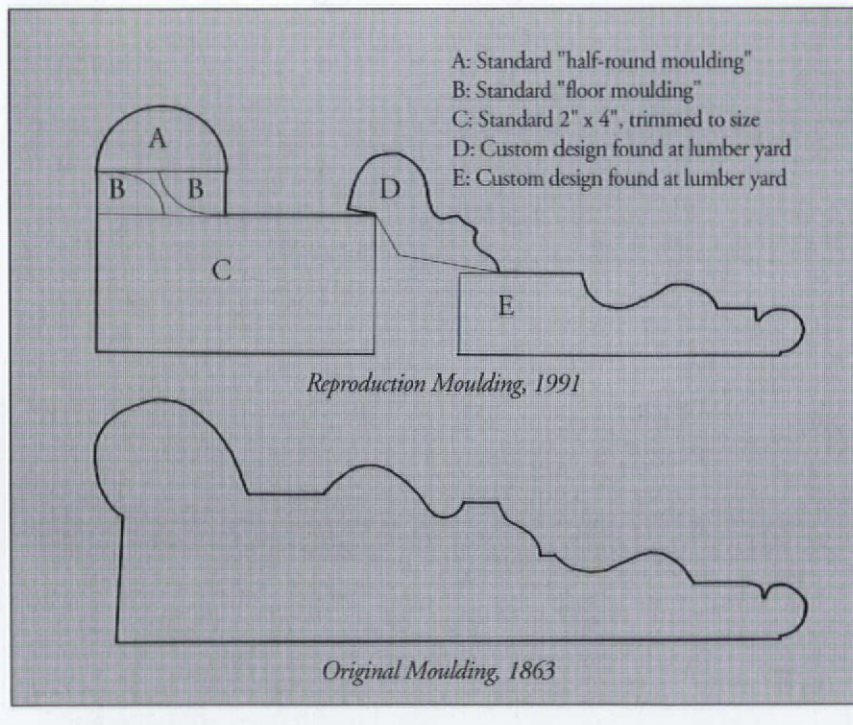
Matching Mouldings

In restoring the wall between our living room and front hall, we wanted to match the mouldings around the doorway with those in the rest of the house. But a thorough search through millwork catalogs and local lumberyards yielded nothing that was even close to the variegated 8-inch-wide originals. As for custom millwork, we were told that the cost of such authenticity would be forty to fifty dollars per running foot!

Our solution, although not inexpensive (eight dollars per running foot), afforded us a proper, faithful restoration: The doorway is almost identical to the one built here over a century ago.

It seems that when a lumberyard does custom millwork, it often keeps the new blade. Thus, although there is a start-up fee involved, someone else's custom design can cost you little more than standard mouldings. We discovered that, using six separate parts — two previously-cut custom designs, three standard mouldings, and one stud trimmed to size as backing — we were able to piece together a moulding that was virtually indistinguishable from the original. With the money we saved, we were even able to replicate the original baseboards using these same methods.

— David Fields



Brick Touch-Ups

After spending hours trying to sand and scrape white paint drips from the brick exterior of my 1925 Foursquare, I decided to try covering up the paint drips using solid-color, latex exterior stain and a small paint brush. The results were amazing. With this technique I have been able to restore the brick to its original color very easily. Solid-color stains come in a wide variety of colors, matching virtually any shade of brick. And because the stain soaks into the surface of the brick, it retains the rough, dull finish of natural brick.

The color I found which best matched my brick was Dark Redwood by Pittsburgh Paint. If your brick has more than one shade, it is easy to find corresponding colors to mix and match. If you should get stain on the mortar, simply scrape the mortar lightly or find a solid stain or flat paint that matches your mortar.

— Perry R. Downing
 Roanoke, Va.

Charmed Chalk

Chalk lines sometimes wash off when roofing jobs stretch over several days or longer. Before resuming shingle application, these lines must be resnapped. To avoid this time-consuming nuisance, pour water into your chalk box and snap the chalk lines wet. Even after several showers, these lines will not wash off.

— William N. Graham
 Homewood, Ala.

Removing Drips & Dabs

While stripping paint from baseboards, window sills, and trim, I've discovered that a dab of mechanic's waterless hand cleanser removed drips and dabs of old paint off the woodwork without harming the finish underneath. I applied the cleanser generously and allowed it to stay on for about 30 minutes before scraping or wiping it off.

— Denise R. Larson
 Bath, Maine

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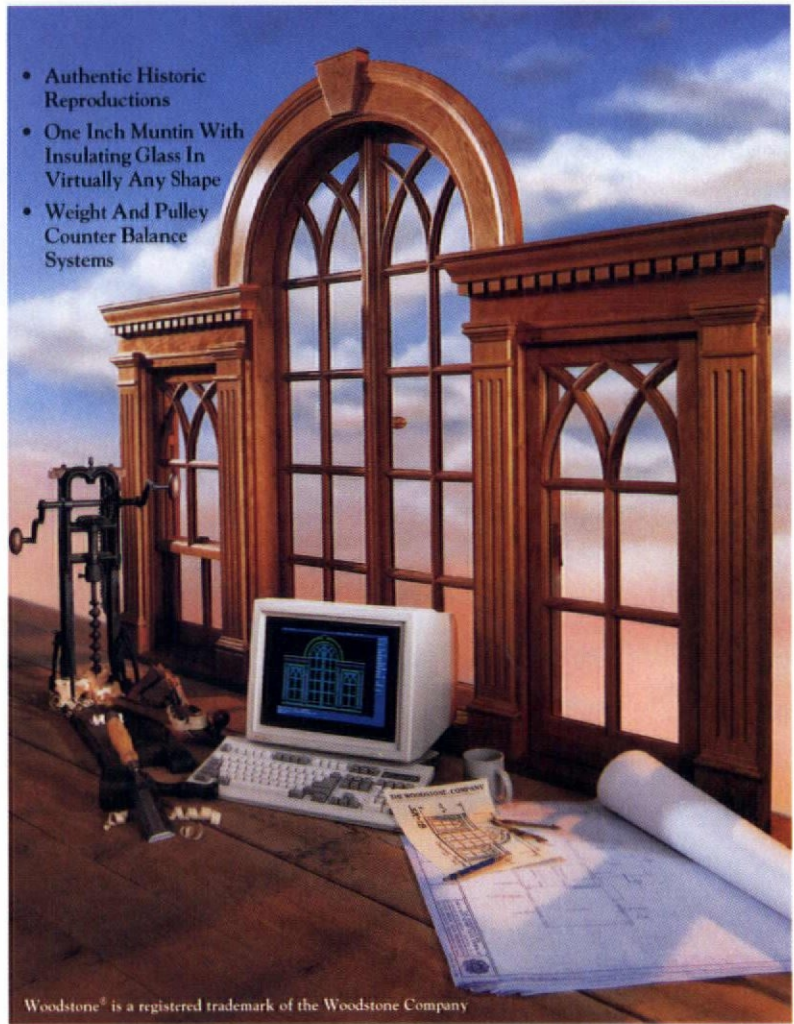
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Prairie/Craftsman?

Q Enclosed is a picture of our home in San Diego, California, in the Burlingame neighborhood. This subdivision was created in 1911 and we believe our house was built in 1912. It consists of three tiers in a "wedding cake" style. We have been told that the structure is a Prairie School design. Could you give us more information as to its architectural characteristics and design? Please also note all the river rock that extends around the porch; the chimney is also all river rock and appears to be original to the house.

— Robin and Martha Dean
San Diego, Cal.



Architectural features from both the Craftsman movement and the Prairie School are present in this house design.

porch and chimney. The Prairie School style was spreading across the country at the same time

A Your house and its striking combination of features draws on at least two early-20th-century architectural styles. Between 1905 and

1920, the Craftsman movement was extremely popular in southern California. Prominent Craftsman elements in your house include the triangular knee braces at the eaves and the use of river stone in the

and, as you suspect, it can also be detected in your house. Evidence of pure Prairie roots are found in the two-storey massing, the horizontal emphasis established by the balcony, and the contrasting trim band along

Mystery Metal

Q It took many years of living in my Homestead-style house before I realized that the dark-brown mystery metal of which the door plates, door knobs, hinges, and kitchen hardware are made was once coated in copper. Bits of the copper remain, most often on the raised parts of the hardware, indicating that the rest didn't wear off from polishing or use. (My husband did try polishing the metal, but it looked the same after as it did before.)

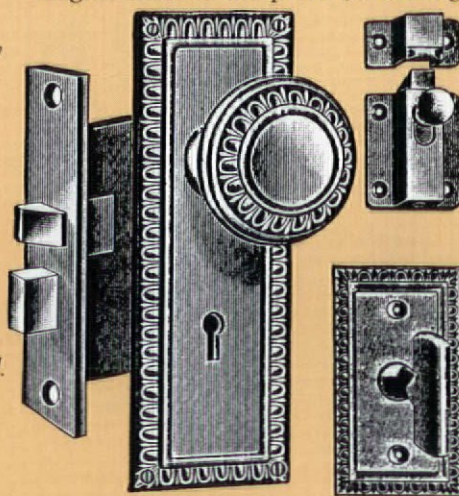
Was copper hardware common? What is the mystery metal underneath? Do any reproduction-hardware companies sell copper products? Which would be least expensive, recoating or buying new?

— Linda Moses Novak
Arlington Heights, Ill.

A Chances are the "dark-brown mystery metal" that shines through on your hardware is not copper but bronze. Brass (an alloy of

copper and zinc) is the most commonly used metal for decorative hardware, but bronze (an alloy of brass and tin) resists wear better and is popular for that reason.

Test to see if the hardware is solid bronze by giving it a deep nick or scratch in a hidden spot. If the nick exposes metal of another color or a magnet sticks to the piece (indicating



Bronze was popular for hardware.

a ferrous base metal), the hardware was originally plated or treated with one of the wide variety of metallic finishes employed at the turn of the century. Where this is the case, be gentle in cleaning the hardware or you will erode the remaining finish. Aggressive blast-cleaning methods such as glass-beading will also destroy the surface. Try using 3M Scotch-Brite pads (softer than steel wool, yet abrasive enough to dislodge dirt and oxidation) and a good brass polish such as Brasso, Barkeeper's Friend, or Simichrome.

Badly worn finishes can usually be replated by local electro-plating firms. For reproduction hardware, consult one of the many companies that specialize in solid-bronze and brass hardware in stock and custom designs. *The Old-House Journal Catalog* lists over 50 such suppliers. A good source for custom work is: Brian F. Leo, 7532 Columbus Avenue South, Dept. OHJ, Richfield, MN 55423; (612) 861-1473.

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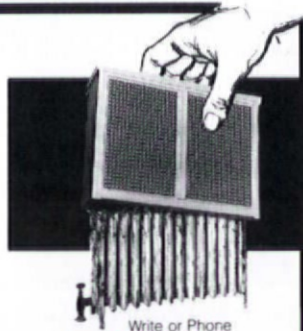
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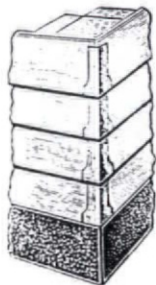
the roof line. The front entry door with sidelight panels, the massive square piers supporting the porch balcony, and the deep overhang of the eaves are traits shared by both Prairie and Craftsman camps.

What's left are the two most difficult features to classify: the flat roof and the tower. One plausible explanation is that they are inspired by the Mission Revival style, which had its origin in California's early adobe churches. Another idea is that the house as a whole shows the influence of Irving Gill, one of San Diego's most active architects during the first decades of the century (see "Who They Were," page 16). Gill was a renegade member of the Arts & Crafts movement, who promoted simple and sanitary building designs using flat roofs and "cubist" forms, often mixing them with elements from the Craftsman, Prairie, and Mission styles.

Metal Clapboard Corners

Q I'm having trouble finding replacement metal clapboard corners for my 1920s bungalow — all the lumberyards say no one makes them anymore.

— Lars Otuna
Spokane, Wash.



Metal corners, circa 1929.

A The galvanized building corners you're looking for are still manufactured by Coach House Garages (P.O. Box 720, Dept. OHJ, Arthur, IL 61711). They come in 6", 8", and 12" heights for under \$1 apiece. To order call (217) 543-2135.

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Irving Gill was a highly individual force in California architecture from the 1900s to the 1930s. He explored progressive modern forms long before they were generally accepted in the U.S., and combined the ideals of the Craftsman movement with a love of the Mission style and sweeping California landscapes. Like the buildings of H.H. Richardson and Louis Sullivan, many historians consider Gill's work one of the few examples of wholly American architecture.

Beauty, Gill believed, must come from simplicity. He considered applied ornament a product of custom and education, a device used to bolster a shallow design rather than to enrich a good one. The philosophy was not surprising given his background. Gill was born in 1870, the son of a Tully, New York, farmer. At age 21, armed with work experience from firms in Syracuse and Chicago but no formal education in architecture, he applied for a job in the office of Adler and Sullivan. Louis Sullivan, skeptical of the formal atelier system of training architects, was happy to hire Gill as a draughtsman not yet indoctrinated with the dictates of the day. Gill's final work in Chicago was on Sullivan's Transportation Building for the 1893 Columbian Exposition, one of the few structures that broke with the fair's Beaux Arts architecture. During the project he worked alongside Frank Lloyd Wright.

Gill moved to San Diego in 1893 and in 1897 formed a partnership with W.S. Hebbard that lasted until 1907. These early years coincided with the beginning of the Craftsman movement in Southern California, and Gill quickly found they shared common goals: use of everyday

materials, avoidance of historical ornament, scale that conveys modesty, and the democratic ideals of comfortable and affordable housing for all. In fact, Gill felt his most important work was the worker housing that he continued to perfect.

to recognize the value of architects, and for advancing new residential construction methods, particularly poured concrete.

Gill's fascination with concrete was fueled by his belief that it was the perfect material for making economical houses. He started with several wood-frame-and-stucco houses which simulated concrete. These were followed by houses constructed of hollow concrete tile and, later, reinforced concrete. In 1912 Gill designed his first tilt-up concrete house, the Banning House in Los Angeles. The zenith of his concrete-engineering was the 1916 Dodge House, constructed of two 3-inch, reinforced-concrete walls sandwiching a waterproof membrane. Occasionally his concrete adventures led to trouble. Around 1911 he purchased surplus equipment used to build tilt-up concrete barracks during the Spanish-American War. With it Gill formed the Concrete Building & Investment

Company but the venture lost money quickly as he was unable to keep the equipment busy. In his later years, he was even discovered in the back of his office trying to make concrete 2X4s.

Many of his ideas were born out of necessity. He had a steel fabricator make metal

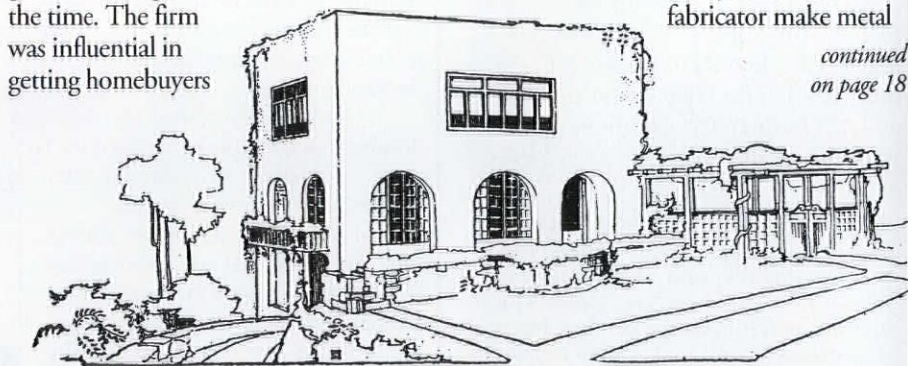
Irving Gill



Photo: San Diego Historical Society

Irving Gill c. 1913, about the time he was named Secretary of the San Diego Architectural Association.

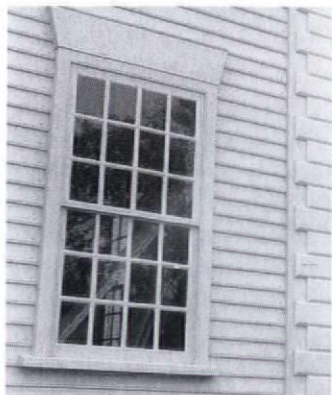
The years 1906 to 1916 were Gill's most productive. His nephew Louis Gill joined the firm in 1911 and the name was later changed to Gill and Gill. Frank Lloyd Wright's son Lloyd also came to work, making an office of eight — large given San Diego's size at the time. The firm was influential in getting homebuyers



A typical Gill design for a house in San Diego, rendered by Lloyd Wright.

*continued
on page 18*

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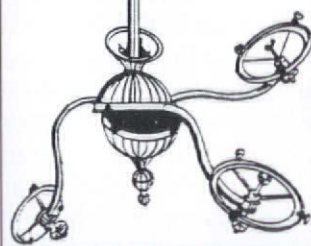
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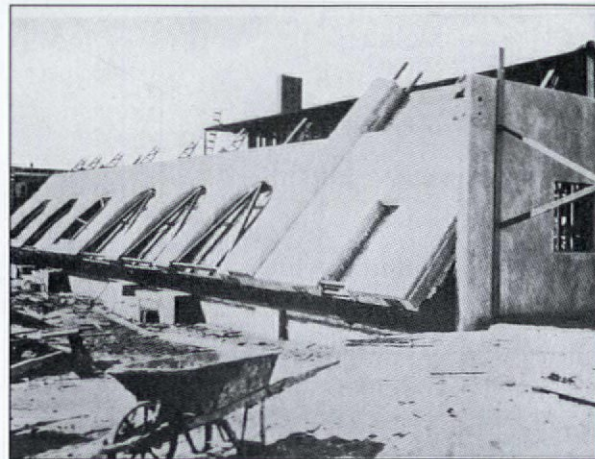


lath and corner trim years before it became a standard construction material. When he wanted thinner, tighter-looking interior walls, he designed a system of 1X4s set parallel to the wall plane, then lathed and plastered for a finished wall only 3" thick. Gill's walls tested as strong as the standard 2X4 system, but were 2-1/2" thinner and more fire resistant. Determined to perfect the concrete floor, he created a surface with the look of Spanish leather through a method of tinting, filling, oiling, and waxing.

The simplicity of Gill's designs did not result in plain or unattractive houses, though architects who felt threatened by his work often claimed they were "shoe boxes." His homes celebrated the California climate and landscape through the calculated placement of windows and arches and the extensive use of outdoor spaces such as pergolas and terraces. He was a master at bringing light into interiors, a concept ahead of its time. In addition, Gill believed house upkeep should not breed drudgery. In many of his houses, walls are finished flush with casings, and floors and walls meet in a slight curve to prevent dust from collecting. He eliminated picture mouldings, plate rails, wainscoting, baseboards, and other flourishes for the same reason. Gill's doors and cabinet fronts were often single slabs of mahogany or redwood, beautifully polished without stain, oil, or wax.

The year 1915 was a turning point in Gill's life and the beginning of a less-than-steady phase. He was slated to be the head architect of San Diego's Panama-California Exposition when Bertram Goodhue maneuvered into the position. Goodhue, a New York architect known for his work in the Gothic and Beaux Arts traditions, convinced the fair committee of the superiority of Spanish Colonial architecture and his well-established name. Gill eventually quit all work on the fair.

The fair was a heavy blow to Gill's popularity. Its highly ornamented facades met with instant approval and started the revival of Spanish Colonial architecture in the Southwestern states. Gill's concepts of beauty, simplicity, and practicality were brushed aside for the grand effects of elaborate terra-cotta decoration, wrought-iron balconies, and tile roofs. Gill closed his San Diego office in 1916 and moved to Los Angeles where he continued to find work.



The concrete walls of Gill's La Jolla Women's Club were poured horizontally, then tilted into position.

In 1928 at the age of 58 he married for the first time. (Though reputed to be charming and quite popular throughout his younger years, he had remained a bachelor.) A year later the stock-market crash brought a virtual end to new commissions, and he relocated to Carlsbad, California. There he lived on an orchard owned by his new wife, where he suffered a heart attack soon after the move. His personal notes from the period include a record of the pounds of avocados and tomatoes he picked to earn money.

Gill died in 1936, four months after being stiffed by a client who commissioned a beauty parlor in Redondo Beach. The client's lawyer, already in possession of the plans, argued that Gill didn't build the building, he only drew it. Fortunately, Gill's designs are better appreciated today as innovations in building design and technology, which piloted the way for American modernism.



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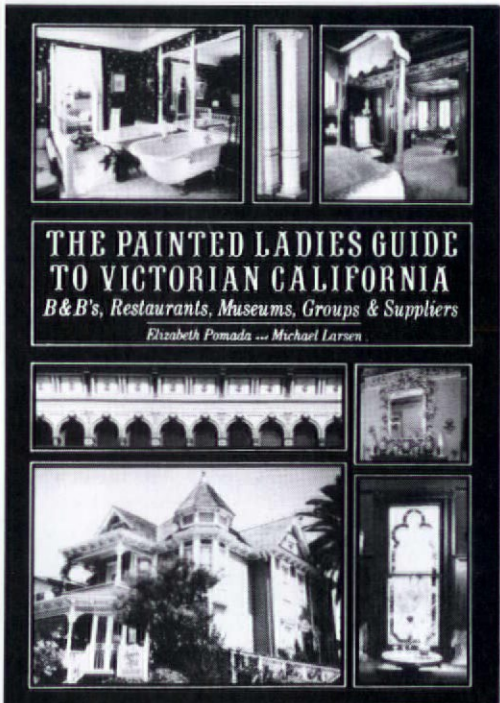
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T H E F I N E A R T O F Graining

How to master

the historical

imitation of wood,

using paint

by *Stephen Jordan*

WOODGRAINING — THE ARTFUL imitation of a hardwood's color and grain with paint — has been practiced in America since the early colonial settlement, and is still used today in restoration and in new construction. Graining

remained a popular decorative treatment, its use increasing throughout the 18th century until it reached its zenith in the late-Victorian period. Graining could be found in expensive, high-style architecture as well as modest worker housing.

Early techniques resulting in naive work gradually evolved into a strict discipline and the more literal examples of the late-19th century. The transition came about because of an improvement in technique, the increase in skilled immigrant labor, the availability of trade books, and, finally, the innovative use of patent tools. We can simultaneously be enthusiastic about naive examples of early

American work and awed by the facsimiles produced in the late-19th century.

Today graining can be used as a restoration technique, relying on old records, photographs, or physical evidence, or to improve architectural details

in a room. For example, common softwood doors might be grained to match oak trim.

Painted woodwork can be grained, adding a warm or "library" effect. Metal doors, widely used for practical reasons, can be grained as an excellent alternative to plain paint. Graining can even be used to blend concrete floors with surrounding decor. All of these schemes are practical — and have historical precedent.

Hiring a grainer is not as economical as it once was. However, many of the techniques are simple, yet result in a great finished product. The following instructions detail some of my favorite techniques for grained oak, the most imitated wood in the 19th century.

P H O T O G R A P H B Y S U S A N G O I N E S

PECULIAR TOOLS

Graining began with a few common tools, a brush, a feather, and a piece of old wash leather. However, by the mid-19th century, an array of peculiar and odd-named tools evolved along with the painter's ability to produce near-facsimile reproductions. Dotters, mottlers, floggers, and overgrainers are brushes designed for specific techniques. The demand for production graining was not unnoticed by inventors: The metal combs, stencil plates, and transfer papers that were patented could transform an ordinary door into Hungarian Ash or French Burl. Patent graining rollers enabled the painter to complete a door in minutes. These products supplemented the skills of the master craftsman and enabled the unskilled laborer to create a credible product.

Today most of these tools are still available (though some are prohibitively expensive). A wide siding brush can substitute as a flogger. Thin throwaway brushes work splendidly as grainers. Worn sash brushes make great stipplers, and combs can be cut from compounding rubbers available at any auto-parts store. Coarse burlap dragged across a wet glaze also creates a good combed effect. The possibilities are as endless as your imagination. Don't let the lack of expensive tools and hard-to-find gadgets discourage you. Get started now; you probably have materials out in the garage to begin with.

SURFACE PREPARATION

Graining is a fancy paint job — and the key to a successful paint job is meticulous surface preparation. Old surfaces must be cleaned and sanded. Clean to remove wax, oil, or silicone that ambitious house cleaners may have used, especially on previously varnished woods. In commercial spaces, beware of liquid waxes that were carelessly splashed onto the baseboards and lower door casings. Thoroughly sand to dull any gloss the current paint or varnish retains; it will also remove drips and brush marks. Use 120-grit sandpaper; lower grits will leave scars. Don't rely on deglossing products alone. Fill gouges or nicks with an appropriate filler such as wood dough. Shallow imperfections are best left alone.

Whether painting over old paint or new wood, I prime with a solvent-based, alkyd enamel undercoat — it ensures a good bond between coats and creates an excellent

sanding surface. Enamel undercoat is white but can be tinted to an approximation of the ground coat for better coverage. Apply it neatly with a quality bristle brush, taking care to follow the grain in each board. Allow one day for drying, then sand the primer with 220-grit sandpaper.

THE GROUND COAT

The next coat of paint is known as the ground. Usually one ground coat over the primer is sufficient, but two coats add durability. Oil-based enamels in a low-sheen finish are

preferable. These durable paints last much longer than latex enamels and display unrivaled leveling when applied correctly. Pratt & Lambert's Vitralite, Benjamin Moore's Dulnamel or Satin Impervo, and Devoe's Velour eggshell are several of my favorites.

Historically, the color chosen for the ground was the lightest discernable in the wood imitated. That rule remains safest for the beginner because minor adjustments in shading are possible at the end of the project. For oak graining, use a golden color similar to Pratt & Lambert's 1765 Burnished Gold (a custom tint).

After drying overnight, the ground coat is lightly sanded with 220-grit sandpaper. (For small projects, 400-grit wet-or-dry automotive sandpaper can be used with water to create a glasslike finish.) Finally, dust or vacuum the surface and clean off the remaining debris with a tack rag.

A SIMPLE GLAZE FORMULA

Few grainers would agree on the perfect graining-glaze formula. Many people prefer to use water-based products. With the concern for environmental conservation, this practice is the wave of the future. Nevertheless, I hold to tradition by using solvents and oils; they work best for me.

Your glaze mixture is neither a paint nor a stain. Unlike paint, the glaze should have a transparent quality. Rather than level out smoothly onto the surface, it should "stay put," meaning that the design you fashion onto the surface with your tool will remain exactly as you leave it. If your newly applied grain or pores amorphously disappear or run together, reformulate your glaze using less thinner or oil.

To mix your glaze, I recommend beginning with simple formulas and experimentation. My favorite basic ingredient is Pratt & Lambert Lyt-all Glazing Liquid, available in quarts

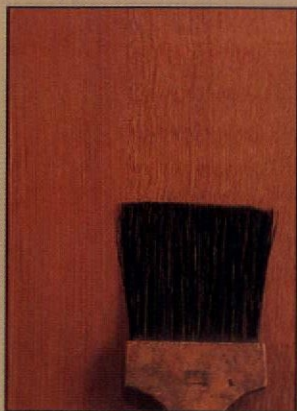


Tools and materials of the grainer's trade: Although arcane supplies are available for the purist, the novice can do good work even without expensive floggers and stipplers.



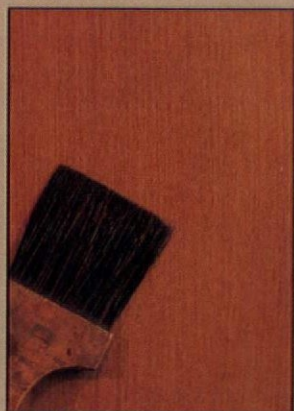
photos by Steve Jordan

THE BASICS OF OAK GRAINING



Start with application of the graining glaze: "rubbing in." The three elementary steps are glazing, flogging, and stippling.

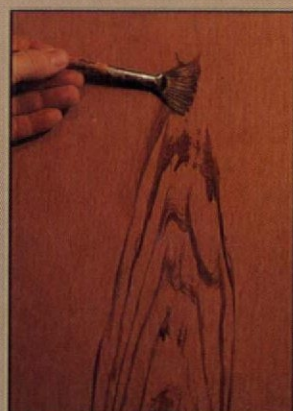
Glazing, or DRAGGING: Brush the glaze onto the ground with a 2-1/2- or 3-inch China bristle brush. Then use a clean brush to drag out the glaze uniformly, resulting in straight or wavy lines. Follow the grain of the wood so that the junctions of rails, stiles, and panels look natural.



FLOGGING, a variation of glazing, is critical to imitate open-pored woods like oak and walnut. I use a thin brush with long bristles, known as a flogger, but most large brushes give a similar effect. To create realistic pores by flogging, glaze the surface as recommended, and then pat the wet surface diagonally with the broad side of a clean, wide brush as you move down the board.



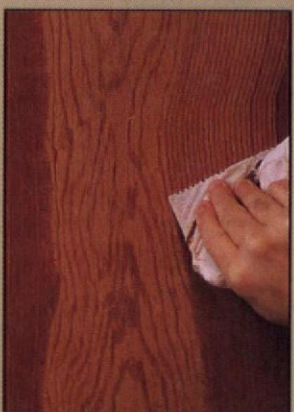
STIPPLING produces a fine-pore structure, as found in maple. Though not commonly used in oak imitations, it's an easy and common step in graining other woods. Again, the graining glaze is applied uniformly, perhaps less liberally. Stippling with an old shaving brush will suffice for small projects. Tap the bristle tips onto the surface until all brush marks have disappeared into tiny pore-like dots.



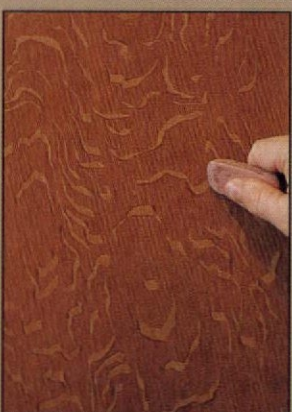
Heart Oak or PLAIN-SAWN GRAINING begins with a surface that has been flogged to create the heavy pores evident in oak. For heart grain, my favorite tool is a fan brush with the curve end cut off. (Fan brushes — a single row of bristles that radiate about 90 degrees from the handle — are available at art-supply stores. Any small, thin brush with tapered bristles will work. For large surfaces, a thin "throw-



away" brush is efficient.) Lightly brush in the grain with the tip end of the brush and your glaze. Take care to avoid repetition. Using another bristle brush, go lightly upward, **WIPING** across the wet glaze to create a realistic heart figure. Before the glaze dries completely, try a final swipe with a piece of coarse steel wool in the direction of the grain to create interesting striations. A typical piece of plain-sawn or heart oak con-

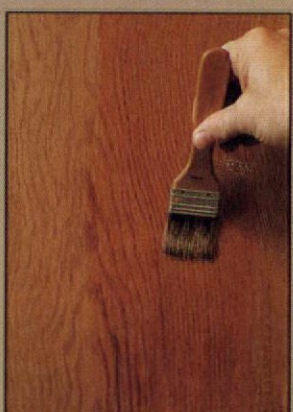


sists of a sequence of V-like patterns adjacent to lateral straight grains. Straight grains can be used alone or with the heart patterns described. For straight-grain effects, I prefer **COMBING** with commercial steel graining combs. Rubber combs also work. First, apply a dragged glaze to the surface. Then wrap a piece of cotton-knit (T-shirt) fabric tightly around the tip of the comb and drag it through the wet glaze in the direction



of the grain. While it's wet, flog the glaze diagonally or by combing it with a bare metal comb; either technique creates realistic grain. Go lightly when using an uncovered metal comb, and clean it with a rag after each pass.

QUARTER-SAWN FIGURING was a favorite for door or cabinet panels and wainscot. Imitating it is difficult but not impossible for the novice. On day one, glaze the surface and flog it to create a light pattern of



pores. On day two, apply another glaze coat, combed or flogged diagonally. While this application is wet, cover your fingernail with a rag or use a rubber eraser and wipe in the flecks. To soften, immediately pass a clean brush lightly over the wet glaze, with the grain.

DRYBRUSHING a new, color-corrected, non-opaque glaze over the dry graining is my technique for minor color adjustments.

WHAT WAS THERE?

SELECTIVE STRIPPING CAN UNCOVER ORIGINAL GRAINING, providing historical interest and even an actual "document" to copy in your re-created graining.

Selectively scrape areas to reveal original workmanship. Begin with a paint scraper and flexible-blade putty knife, or try an artist's X-acto knife. Wet-or-dry sandpaper and water help. If you're lucky, the old (original) varnish will serve as a protective buffer, making it easier for you to remove paint to the original graining. In an ordinary room, take samples from door panels, door stiles, casings, and baseboards. The grainer conserved his energy on baseboards hidden by furniture; a small sample will suffice in such areas. On the other hand, door panels were considered showpieces: Panels were often elaborately grained as crotch mahogany, satinwood, or quartersawn oak, whereas adjacent areas were plainly combed or simply brush-grained.

Wide casings and door trim were sometimes accented by the grainer picking out back banding and moulds as a darker wood. (Walnut or mahogany grain was commonly used for these details, while casings, stiles, and rails might be oak-grained.) Therefore, a methodical investigation of different areas is essential to discover the original scheme.

Once enough of the old surface is revealed for an adequate evaluation, take photographs. In a museum situation, archivally stable, black-and-white photos are requisite, but in the ordinary home, 35mm color slides and prints are adequate for reference. Consider "showcasing" a portion of your original graining: Refinish most but leave a small example of the old work for comparison and interest.

Determining an approximate date for your graining is often difficult. In special cases, hire a trained paint analyst or consultant. Scientific measures have been developed which achieve reliable results (or the experienced consultant may recognize factors about paint layers or colors which reveal clues). The age of your home, the wealth of its former owners, and the size and location of your community all factor into the expert's evaluation.

Generally, graining that exhibits a naive or whimsical effect is early, probably prior to 1850. Early grainers relied on brushes, feathers, sponges, leather combs, and simple tools for their work. This generalization is subject to location (remote and rural vs. urban) and the expertise of the craftsman. The rural grainer often had less formal training, less familiarity with reference texts, fewer tools, and less contact with urban professionals. Thus the rural example might be primitive whereas urban work of the same period can exhibit refined skill. Of course, crude examples could also have been performed by apprentices or the homeowner.

Near the mid-18th century, steel combs became a favorite in every grainer's kit. Combs were popularly used for combed oak applications, replacing the use of leather and gutta percha (rubber). Steel combs produce regular striations, leaving a marked distinction between the material remaining on the surface and that which is wiped away; leather combs had a softer effect. Evidence of steel-comb use generally dates an example after about 1860.

The regular recurrence of distinct patterns usually signals the use of patent tools such as rollers, stencils, and transfer papers. Their use was most popular between 1875 and 1925, especially on door panels and large flat surfaces.

and gallons. To 1 part glazing liquid, add 1/4 part mineral spirits, 1/4 part boiled linseed oil, and enough tint to produce the dark color of the grain. The oil increases drying time for larger projects, allowing the grainer to make changes. On small projects, the linseed oil may be omitted for reduced drying time. Glazing liquid tends to skim over quickly, so clean the can lid and seal it tightly when you have poured out enough to complete a job. (One quart of glazing liquid, thinned and tinted, might finish baseboards, window casings, and two or three doors in a room.)

My favorite tinting medium is oil color (colors in oil). A hard-to-find, expensive product, it consists of finely ground pigments mixed with linseed oil. Oil color can be used only in oil-based paints and varnishes, and is available in pints and quarts. It is the same product as the more expensive artist's oil paint found in art-supply stores.

Universal tints also work well. They can be used in both water-based and oil paints, and purchased in pints or quarts. A practical solution to tinting the graining glaze is to ask your paint dealer to tint the mixture for you. Simply take in a sample of the wood to be imitated. The charge should be nominal.

ALLOW TIME FOR SAMPLES

Before starting, find several good examples of the wood you want to imitate. Study these examples and keep them handy for reference, noticing that each board is unique. Always take time to make your own samples on a small board to ensure the proper color has been mixed. Do not rely on a wet sample for assurance; the dry sample may be markedly different. Varnish your sample; the amber color of varnish and polyurethane can alter a color significantly.

— THE TECHNIQUES —

The seasoned grainer has spent years learning to accomplish two or more graining steps in one day. Beginners are best advised to be patient with a little progress each day. My techniques are usually perfected well into a project, so I never begin in the most conspicuous area of a room. Baseboards are a good place to start; doors are for finishing up. (*see p. 23*)

COLOR CHANGES

Minor color adjustments are commonly needed before you varnish. The grain may need to be browner, greener, redder, or any combination of colors; it can usually be rectified by mixing a new, color-corrected glaze that is brushed sparingly over the graining after it has dried for at least 24 hours. Take care to mix a glaze that is not opaque — you don't want to hide your work. My favorite technique in tonal color changes is a drybrush coat of Minwax Wood Finish stain. (Drybrushing is a common painter's technique: The brush is very sparsely loaded with paint or stain, which is spread out or stretched as far over the surface as possible.) These stains are available in small containers and a broad range of colors. They offer a transparency that is rare in similar products.

ONCE YOU'VE MASTERED OAK....

Techniques for graining other hardwood imitations are similar;



Englishman Thomas Kershaw elevated the craft of graining to an artform, as these samples of his work from the mid-19th century attest.

but ground and glaze colors differ. Here are my formulas:

WALNUT—Begin with a coffee-and-cream color such as Pratt & Lambert's 2057 Brown Sugar. Once it is dry and sanded, apply pores and (after pores dry) heart figuring with an umber and black glaze. Notice from actual wood samples that the grain in walnut is similar to that of oak. But walnut grain is more subtle; don't allow the grain and basecoat to contrast too much.

MAHOGANY—Use a terra cotta-colored basecoat such as Pratt & Lambert's 1812 Spicy. An appropriate glaze might include a mix of burnt sienna, raw umber, and a touch of black. Some mahoganies exhibit a wild display of pores, whereas other species and cuts reveal faint pores. Small pores can be stippled in with the tip of a brush. Flogging is a good method for the distinct variety.

The characteristic of ribbon-cut mahogany is a random pattern of light and dark streaks running with the grain. Immediately after glazing your board, try wrapping a soft cloth around your fingers and adding light and dark streaks in a sweeping motion. Streaks can then be softened with the side of a brush.

Heart-grain mahogany has a much rounder pattern than the V-shaped oak grain has. After glazing your board, apply the grain with broad, fluid strokes of a thin brush which

has been loaded with the glaze. Add pores later. Crotch- or flame-mahogany graining can begin with the heart directions above, but add an additional coat of glaze after the previous coats are dry. The indicative flame figuring can be wiped in with a soft cloth, tissue, or small brush. This grain is difficult to imitate effectively.

ROSEWOOD—Begin with the same basecoat as mahogany. Your glaze mixture should be almost black with a little umber to soften it. Rosewood exhibits patterns of grain which are unusual and unlike other woods, so finding a good sample is important. The grain can be pointed and angular, or very curved. Apply this grain with a very small artist brush and by combing. My favorite trick for this imitation is a drybrushed coat of Minwax Jacobean stain or a thin, black-brown glaze after the grain has been applied and allowed to dry.

MAPLE—Literal imitations are difficult but possible. Begin with a straw-colored basecoat similar to Pratt & Lambert's 2080 Naples Cream. Your glaze should be only slightly darker, perhaps mixed from raw sienna and umber. Maple heart grain is very faint. I usually apply this grain with a small brush and then take another brush that's damp with thinner to take some of the heaviness back out. Pores should be faintly stippled in, if any at all. Birds-eye figuring can be added with fingertips over the wet glaze or with a dotter

fashioned from a small, round artist brush or a folded piece of chamois. You might want to darken your maple graining with a coat of dark oak stain or glaze to create an antique maple patina.

FINALLY, THE PROTECTIVE COAT

After the work has thoroughly dried for 24 hours (longer in humid weather), protect it with a coat of varnish or polyurethane. Urethane finishes are excellent in kitchens and bathrooms where moisture is present. Varnishes are good for any interior location subject to average use and exposure. On furniture, I prefer a high-quality, low-sheen varnish because it can be rubbed out with fine steel wool (0000) and polished with paste wax. Do not use lacquers — the caustic solvents in lacquer products can damage your work. For a flat protective coat, an additional coat of glazing liquid without colorant or oil will produce a durable, hard finish.



SOURCES FOR TOOLS

- **Johnson Paint Company, Inc.**
355 Newbury Street, Dept. OHJ
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 536-4838
- **Wolf Paints—Janovic/Plaza**
771 Ninth Ave., Dept. OHJ
New York, NY 10019
(212) 245-3241
- **Janovic/Plaza, Inc.**
30-35 Thomson Ave., Dept. OHJ
Long Island City, NY 11101
(718) 786-4444
- **Enbee**
P.O. Box 1268, Dept. OHJ
Springfield, OH 45501
(513) 323-3795
- **J.H. Ratcliff and Company, Ltd.**
135A Linaker Street
Southport, England PR8 5DF
011 44 704 5379 99

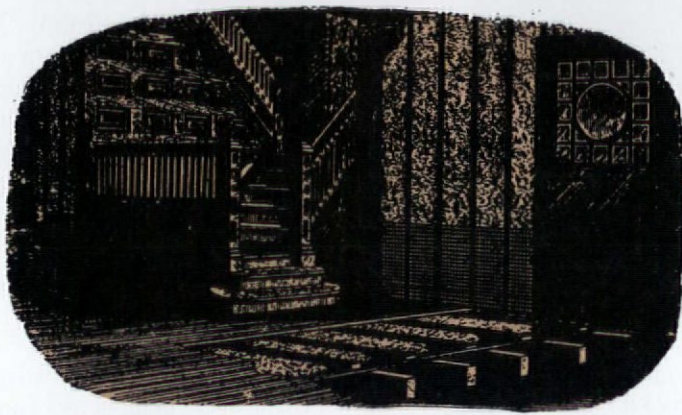
INSULATION FOR

What you might encounter

In this issue on old-house interiors, let's move even deeper inside — inside the walls, inside the attic, to the insulation. Or lack thereof: Insulation, a relative newcomer on the list of standard construction materials, is either a later addition or altogether missing in most houses built before 1940. When you do encounter early insulation, it seldom resembles modern materials and is not always easy to identify. Adding new insulation to an old house can be tricky, too. You'll find a multitude of products on today's market (a few looking much alike), and similar products may have different uses or installation requirements. To help sort them out, we've organized the basics on the common types of house insulation, old and new.

What is insulation? Thermal building insulation — as opposed to acoustic or electrical insulation — is a material that resists the flow of heat. It breaks up one or more of the modes of transmission (conduction, convection, or radiation) and thereby protects an area from heat or heat loss. Air is a poor conductor of heat, and so insulators tend to be airy, diffuse materials. However, because air can transfer heat through convection if spaces are large enough, the most effective insulators are often made up of minute dead-air spaces. Insulators also need to have their own integrity in order to perform as building materials: They must be durable and resist the effects of water, ultraviolet light, vermin, chemicals, fire, and aging. Finally, insulation should be easily handled and reasonably priced.

Beyond these characteristics, the choice of insulation is open and, not surprisingly, early types were made on site from an interesting variety of materials. Cork, wood shavings, and cinders poured into wall cavities were regularly used in the 1800s to insulate buildings erected for cold storage. Insulation in houses was rare, but examples of straw, sawdust, corncobs, or dried seaweed pop up from time to time, as do more elaborate constructions such as brick nogging or "bisquits" of wood



Mineral wool used as insulation and fireproofing, from an 1890s advertisement.

wrapped in straw and mud, then covered with plaster.

EARLY INSULATING MATERIALS

In the 1890s, an infant insulation-manufacturing industry started to take hold with products that served the rudimentary needs of the day.

Central heating was still far from universal and insulation was, at best, minimal in attics and scarce in walls.

~ BY GORDON BOCK ~

EEL GRASS

An early, natural insulation material was eel grass, first used by settlers in the North Atlantic regions. Eel grass (*Zostera marina*) is a unique, flowering marine plant with a very high silica content that makes it nonflammable; the grass can be burned, but does not itself support combustion. This property, along with a habit of forming tiny air spaces when compressed, made it an obliging insulation material.

Eel grass was the heart of Cabot's Quilt, a standardized product patented around 1893. Manufacturing began with collecting the grass on beaches in



Cabot's Quilt c. 1908.

Cape Cod, Nova Scotia, and, later, northern Europe. It was then dried and sandwiched between rolls of heavy kraft paper to be machine-stitched into 36"-wide "quilts," 1/3" to 2/3" thick. A special Inch Quilt was even made for use as a sound deadener in hotels, hospitals, and radio broadcasting stations. Quilts were laid up under exterior siding in new construction, or placed in between framing bays in existing buildings. Cabot's "Underwear for Houses", as it was called in ads, was manufactured up until the late 1930s, and predates the adoption of modern R-value ratings.

R OLD HOUSES

Retrofit Recommendations

MINERAL WOOL

Mineral wool is a generic heading for several products made by "spinning" fibrous materials from inorganic sources. At the turn of the century, there were just two types of mineral wool: slag wool and rock wool. Slag wool is made by blowing steam through blast furnace scoria (residue from the manufacture of pig iron) to produce a fine, flexible fuzz of intertwined fibers. Rock wool is made by applying the same steam process to molten naturally-occurring rocks.

Mineral wool was manufactured as early as 1875 as both a sound deadener and thermal insulation, and is still used today. It is sold as loose fill (either wool or pellets), or matted with a binder into batts and blankets (usually faced with a paper or foil vapor barrier). Loose fill is suitable for hand-pouring or machine blowing into exposed ceilings, wall cavities, and between floor joists. Batts can be applied in these same areas when feasible, as well as between attic rafters or on basement interior walls. Mineral wool is incombustible and does not deteriorate or absorb moisture. Its R-value (in the range of 2.9 to 3.7 per inch of thickness) is influenced by how densely the material is packed, and it should be installed according to manufacturer's directions for optimum effectiveness.



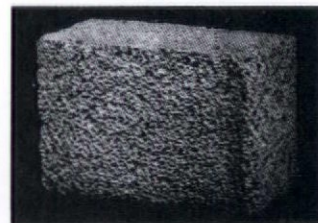
Semi-rigid sheet insulation made from flax.

CELLULOSE FIBER PRODUCTS

The fact that cellulose byproducts from wood and woody plants have moderate insulating qualities was not lost on manufacturing companies in the early decades of the century. Many such materials were on the market by the 1920s, most in the form of rigid "structural" boards. Insulite, which appeared around 1912, was wood fiber and binder pressed into sheets 1/2" thick which could be used as exterior sheathing, interior wallboard, or as a base for plaster. Cane Board was a similar product made from sugarcane. Inso Board was fabricated from wheat straw; Maftex started out as, of all things, licorice roots. Other products made use of semi- or non-rigid construction. Flax-li-num, based on flax fiber, was a matlike material meant

to be installed between wall studs; Balsam Wool, a fibrous cellulose substance, was flexible enough to tuck around window frames and door jambs or to form into batts.

Again, many of these products came and went before the R-value system became popular, but period literature often claimed insulating effectiveness in terms like "more than three times as resistant to the passage of heat and cold as lumber" (softwoods rate around R 1.25 per inch). While the cellulose fiber products that remain on the market are generally sold as building — rather than insulating — materials, they do have some value as insulators and a thermal resistance on the order of R 2.1 to 2.8 per inch.



Foamed gypsum, a novel product from the 1920s.

GYPSUM PRODUCTS

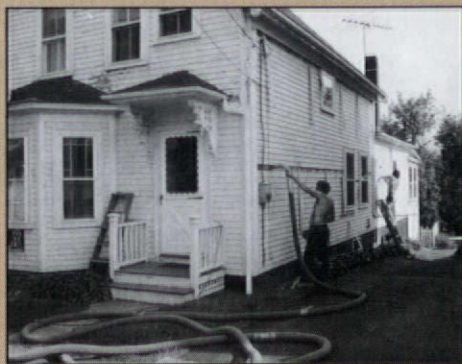
In the boom building years of the 'teens and 'twenties, more insulators based on inorganic substances appeared, including several made from gypsum. Loose-fill products such as Thermofill were suitable for pouring on attic floors, the primary focus of energy conservation in that era. Another approach was taken by Insulex, an "aerated or cellular gypsum." In use, the dry product was mixed with water and then poured in place, where it expanded several times in volume over 20 to 30 minutes. In addition to applications as heat and sound insulation, Insulex could be used as a lightweight fill for leveling floors and roofs. Neither of these products is manufactured today in its original form, but some modern materials make use of similar technology.

CONTEMPORARY INSULATING MATERIALS

Along with the change in many building materials and methods after 1940, new insulation and insulating techniques appeared as energy awareness improved. Attic insulation, for example, installed in 65 percent of new houses in the 1940s, jumped to 80 percent a decade later. Big increases in the cost of energy in the 1970s and the need for conservation which followed fueled another wave of development and a new breed of insulators, many based on plastics.

PERLITE AND VERMICULITE

Two other loose-fill insulations used on occasion are perlite



Photos courtesy of Dale A. Pope

Blowing loose-fill insulation into wall cavities requires at least two holes per framing bay for the best coverage.

COMMON INSULATION USES IN OLD HOUSES

	BATTS AND BLANKETS (mineral wool including glass wool)	LOOSE FILL (mineral wool, glass wool, cellulose, perlite and vermiculite)	RIGID PLASTIC BOARDS
ROOF/ATTIC/CEILING			
IN-FRAME CAVITIES	•	•	
ABOVE-DECK SHEATHING			•
WALLS			
IN-FRAME CAVITIES	•	•	
EXTERIOR SHEATHING, INTERIOR FINISHED WALLS			•
FLOORS			
WOOD-JOISTED	•	•	
MASONRY/BASEMENT WALLS			
INTERIOR	•		•
EXTERIOR			•

and vermiculite. Perlite is a glasslike volcanic rock that is heated until it pops into a granular form; vermiculite is mica exploded in much the same way. The most common use of perlite and vermiculite as insulation is in the cavities of hollow masonry walls in new construction, but it is sometimes hand-poured in the attics of existing houses and then screeded level.

Perlite and vermiculite are free-flowing materials that travel readily into hard-to-reach places. However, they also will flow out of their intended spaces if small cracks and holes are not plugged first. They are durable insulators, but their density makes them relatively expensive and heavy. When pouring either material in attics, it is important to make sure that the ceiling can carry the added weight. Perlite and vermiculite have a lower thermal resistance than other fills (roughly, R 2.7 per inch for perlite, 2.1 to 2.3 per inch for vermiculite) and so may require considerable depths of material if high insulation values are required.

EXPANDING FOAMS

Urea-formaldehyde is the most conspicuous expanding-foam insulation product. It is a combination of resin, hardener, and

compressed air mixed at the time of installation and foamed into closed wall spaces, where it hardens to a rigid material. Although prone to some shrinkage as it ages, UF's big assets are a respectable R-value (4.0 to 4.3 per inch) and the fact that it can be pumped into almost any building cavity. Though its use has been largely discontinued (due to concerns about the formaldehyde gas that may be released as the product cures), installations remain in many old houses.



Urea-formaldehyde foam in an attic installation.

Cementitious foam insulation, not unlike that marketed in the 1920s, has recently reappeared as a high-end, high R-value (3.9 to 4.2 per inch) insulation with benefits for those sensitive to the chemicals in modern building materials. Once in place, however, this product evaporates considerable amounts of water as it cures, making it difficult to use in finished buildings.

GLASS WOOL

Usually classed as a mineral wool along with slag wool and rock wool, glass wool is made by blowing air through molten glass or extruding it through dies to produce thin fibers. Often called fiberglass, these fibers are then held together with binders to create flexible batts (usually incorporating a kraft or foil facing) or blankets that are nearly 99% air. The fibers can also be formed into rigid panels or chopped to make loose fill suitable for blowing. (Fiberglas® is a trademarked name.)

In one or another of these forms, glass wool is the most widely-used domestic building insulation and has the broadest use in old houses. Batt and blankets are made to fit between horizontal and vertical framing, and are readily installed in existing, unimproved areas such as attic floors and ceilings or the living-space side of first-storey crawlspaces. Rigid or semi-rigid panels, originally developed in Canada as cold-climate basement insulation, are appropriate for below-ground walls in basements or crawl spaces. Loose fill is used for hand-pouring or machine-blowing into open or confined spaces. While it is easier to apply around obstructions such as joist bridging in attics, loose fill tends to settle over time (particularly in walls), compromising its effectiveness. Typical R-values for glass wool are 3.1 to 3.7 per inch for batts or blankets, 4.0 per inch for rigid boards, and 2.9 to 3.7 per inch for loose fill.

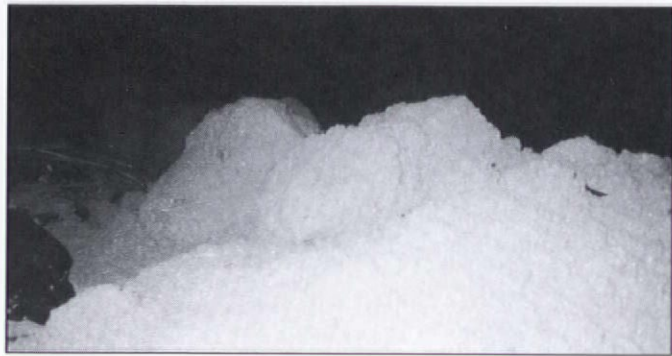


Glass wool batts install readily between framing members. As with all insulation, heat-producing fixtures should not be covered.

CELLULOSE FILL

Loose-fill cellulose insulation became popular as an alternative to glass wool, and is the most common cellulose-based insulation sold today. Cellulose fill is made from either mechanical pulp (recycled newspaper and paper products) or

chemical pulp (sulfate paper such as kraft). It is effective because the fill traps many small air spaces, it covers well (like many fills), and the cellulose itself is a good insulator. Cellulose fill can be hand-poured, but it is usually machine-blown dry into open and closed spaces by contractors. (A wet process is increasingly popular for new construction, but is normally not suitable for existing buildings due to the drying-out time



Cellulose fill is recycled paper processed for blowing into open or confined spaces.

needed.)

Cellulose fill has limitations, however. It is subject to the same settling and packing that affects the performance of loose mineral wools, up to 20%. Raw cellulose is flammable, and fill must be processed with an approved flame retardant (usually borate- or sulfate-based) in order to be suitable for insulation. It is also vulnerable to moisture. While not affected by water vapor, liquid water in the form of condensation or leaks can soak the fibers, reducing thermal resistance and causing it to pack and deteriorate. Moisture can also cause sulfate-based fire retardants to corrode nearby metals. Depending upon density, cellulose fill has an R-value ranging from 3.1 to 3.7 per inch.

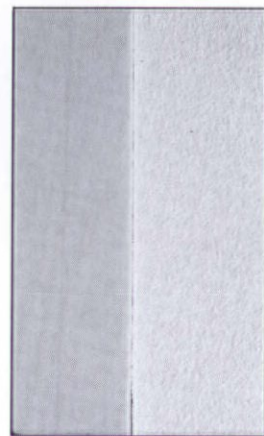
RIGID PLASTIC BOARDS

Modern plastics, foamed and formed into rigid boards, are the state of the insulation art by virtue of their efficient installation and tremendous thermal resistance. Often used as exterior wall and roof-deck sheathing in new construction, the applications for plastic-board insulation are more limited in old houses where roofing and siding are likely to be already in place. Their slim profile and high R-value, however, makes them well-adapted to covering interior finished walls and masonry surfaces where space allows. Plastic boards require a vapor barrier (asphalt-coated kraft paper, polyethylene film, or aluminum foil) on the living-space side. In addition, all plastic boards are vulnerable to fire and may produce toxic gases if ignited. For this reason, building codes require covering interior installations with a 15-minute fire barrier (typically, 1/2" gypsum wallboard).

POLYSTYRENE: Polystyrene is the raw material that makes up two of the most common board insulations. Expanded polystyrene (EPS) is manufactured by expanding pellets of plastic with steam and then molding them into blocks that are sliced into boards. Extruded polystyrene (PS or XEPS) is made with the same plastic, but instead is combined with a blowing agent (typically Freon) and extruded through a die to produce finished boards. The upshot is, the cutting step used in making

expanded polystyrene produces a material with a cut-cell structure (giving it a look similar to coffee cups, and the nickname "beadboard"), while die-forming extruded polystyrene leaves it with a smooth-surface structure. This difference not only influences the thermal resistance (R 3.8 to 4.0 per inch for cut-cell expanded polystyrene, R 4.4 to 5.0 per inch for smooth-surface extruded polystyrene), but also the application for each material.

Extruded polystyrene's smooth surface gives it the best resistance to moisture intrusion and transmission (it is an effective vapor retarder) and it is the board type recommended for insulating exterior basement walls and other sub-soil projects. Expanded polystyrene's cut-cell structure can hold plasters like stucco (a common use in new construction), but means only high-density versions are adapted to use below ground. Polystyrene deteriorates in ultraviolet light and has to be protected from the sun with an exterior or interior finish according to the manufacturer's directions. Solvents such as those found in adhesives or waterproofing products may also attack this plastic. Both types of board slip in R-value as they age.



The smooth surface of extruded polystyrene (left) compared to the cut cells of expanded polystyrene (right).

Another form of polystyrene worth noting is molded beads. This a loose-fill product (basically expanded pellets), suitable for hand-pouring, which has an R-value of 3.85 per inch.

PHENOLIC FOAM, POLYURETHANE, AND POLYISOCYANURATE: Rigid-board insulation made from other plastics share many characteristics with polystyrene and have their own strengths and weaknesses as well. Phenolic foam is a rigid, closed-cell product that holds its high R-value (4.7 to 7.1 per inch) as it ages and has a low flammability, but it is brittle and crumbly to work with. Polyurethane foam-board contains a gas that yields a high initial thermal resistance (R 6.28 per inch), but loses some effectiveness as it ages and the gas escapes. For this reason it may be manufactured with a foil facing that also acts as a vapor retarder. Spray-on polyurethane foam, sometimes used in new construction, has yet to be adapted to existing buildings.

Polyisocyanurate foam board, chemically related to polyurethane, is formulated for improved flame resistance and one of the highest R-values (5.8 to 6.2 per inch). These boards frequently incorporate glass fibers for increased strength. The thermal resistance of polyisocyanurate also drops off over time. While the naked board is not recommended for use where it will make ground contact (protective coatings increase its moisture resistance), it can be used as interior basement or masonry wall insulation.

The effectiveness of insulation is not determined by thermal values alone. All types depend upon proper installation, including thorough coverage and proper density (especially for loose fills and mineral wools).



French Interiors

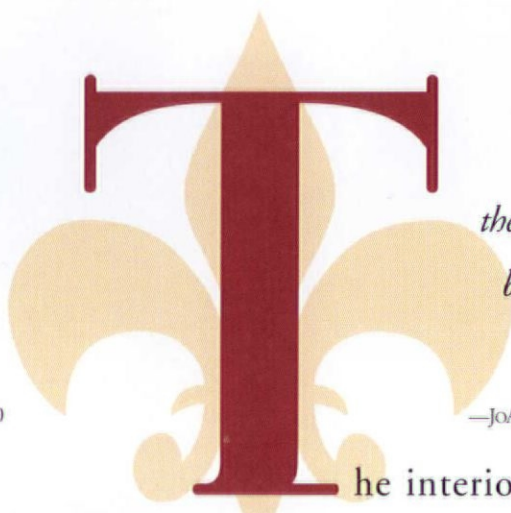


Salon, Newport, R.I., redecorated by Ogden Codman in 1897: Louis XV *boiserie* wall panels with green brocade infill, ornamental plaster and drapery cornice. Furniture is a mix of Louis XV and XVI.

American Style

*There is,
at the present moment,
almost a mania in the cities
for expensive French
furniture and decorations.*

—A.J. DOWNING, AUTHOR & TASTEMAKER, 1850



*Over the years, countless
decorating styles have made
their way to our shore, but few have
been as enduring in their appeal
as French country.*

—JOANNE BARWICK, EDITOR, HOUSE BEAUTIFUL, MARCH 1989

The interior decoration of American homes was inspired by a hodgepodge of sources during the 19th century: Oriental, Turkish, and Moorish; the Italian Renaissance; Elizabethan England; even something called “Gypsy.” Historical styles and motifs were revived and fell from favor, only to be resuscitated decades later and given a new twist. If there was any constant during this eclectic century, however, it was that French decorative taste, as much as or more than English, dictated what was fashionable.

Not until the closing decades of the last century did American tastemakers begin to follow different drummers, namely, this country’s Colonial Revival and the English Aesthetic and Arts-and-Crafts movements. Yet, even a generation later, as William Seale states in *The Tasteful Interlude*, “for most Americans, there were two desirable styles of interior decoration: colonial or one of the French Louis styles. Arts and Crafts, American Empire, Jacobean, and all the rest took second places....”

This dependence on French taste was nothing new. Even before the Revolution, when colonial tastes followed England’s lead, the mother country was itself taking cues from France. English trendsetters of the late Georgian period, such as furniture-maker Thomas Chippendale, were heavily influenced by the curving and naturalistic rococo designs of the era of Louis XV (Quinze). Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and other early Americans who spent time in France brought their enthusiasm for things French back to America.

But it was not until the 19th century that French tastes had a direct influence on American interiors. Three general periods can be defined: the Empire, the Second Empire (or Rococo Revival), and the French Revivals. These often went by different names (Empire was known as Regency in England, for example) and their periods of popularity in America didn’t always

correspond to their popularity in France. Let’s clear up the confusion and get on with decorating hints.

THE EMPIRE PERIOD: C. 1810-1840

BY 1800, INTERIOR FASHIONS HAD BEEN INFLUENCED by the ancient classical styles for several decades. King Louis XVI (1754-93, best known for losing his head to the French Revolution, along with that of his wife Marie Antoinette), was also the namesake of the Louis XVI (Seize) style. The style, which would be revived several times in America during the 19th century, was a reaction to the overly contorted curves and ornament of the preceding rococo; it began to reestablish the straight geometry of the classical styles. During the 1790s, the trend continued as the motifs of ancient Rome influenced the style which we know here as Federal, but which was called Directoire in France, and Adam in England.

The Empire Period, named for Napoleon’s reign, was the height of the classical craze. Being a man of no small ego (he had himself crowned emperor in 1804), Napoleon closely identified his reign with imperial Rome. His official architects and decorators, Charles Percier and Leonard Fontaine,

B Y J. R A N D A L L C O T T O N



*Parlor, Gallier House, New Orleans, 1857-60.
Belter-style Rococo Revival furniture in typical groupings.*

popularized Roman and Egyptian motifs (the latter after Napoleon's campaigns on the Nile). But it was the designs of ancient, classical Greece which became widely popular in France, England, and America. Decorating in the "Grecian" style was not only fashionable in this country, it was patriotic: Our young nation identified with the democratic ideals of ancient Greece.

How did French Empire tastes cross the Atlantic? As was common in those times, architectural and decorative styles were popularized through pattern books — and Percier and Fontaine were among the first to illustrate the archaeologically "correct" design vocabulary of Greece, Rome, and Egypt. Moreover, beginning soon after the French Revolution and continuing into the 1800s, many French artisans emigrated to America, where they found a ready market for their talents. More than two dozen French cabinetmakers had set up shop in New York City by the first decades of the 19th century; others settled in New Orleans and Philadelphia. (Two of the best were Charles Honore Lannuier and Michel Bouvier of New York City.)



1830s "Grecian" French Empire wallpaper dado

Another New Yorker, Duncan Phyfe, quickly adopted the French Empire style and established a highly successful furniture-making business.

Furniture makers were especially adept at incorporating French Empire themes: Chairs imitated the saber-legged Greek klismos chair or the cross-legged Roman curule chair. Buffet (sideboard) fronts were embellished with columns. "Grecian" couches (which the French called *recamiers*) had scrolled ends, and their legs were configured as classical winged figures. Tables were supported on columnlike pedestals.

Only relatively wealthy Americans (President James Monroe decorated the White House with imported French furniture) could afford high-style furnishings crafted of the finest exotic woods and embellished with gilded ornamental metal fittings called ormolu. More common were the cost-cutting American versions of French Empire style manufactured by such mass-producers as the Hitchcock Chair Company. For example, painted stencilling took the place of ormolu or gilding. Black paint imitated ebony. Moreover, patriotic American symbols were substituted for classical or imperial motifs: eagles instead of a sphinx or griffin.

Once a luxury, wallpaper was becoming more affordable during the Empire period. By the turn of the 19th century, the French had usurped the English in the production and design of

wallpaper, a position they retained until the 1870s.

Americans imported brightly colored striped or floral French papers. Designs imitating drapery were popular, as were those with classical and architectural themes such as architrave, garland or swag friezes, faux-marble masonry, or trompe l'oeil heroic statuary standing on pedestals and set in "niches." In 1820, the Zuber Company introduced an irisee or "rainbow" paper which was widely imitated. Rainbow papers featured alternating bands of graduated colors superimposed over a main pattern.

Perhaps most fashionable were French scenic wallpapers, or *decors panoramiques*. Scenics were printed on non-repeating rolls and would often take up an entire wall, or even wrap around the side walls.

Landscapes with New World themes were popular. Zuber produced scenes of Niagara Falls, West Point, and Boston Harbor, as well as a "War of Independence" design. Depictions of American flora, fauna, and Indians were also popular. Recognizing an eager market, French manufacturers even produced patterns incorporating images of Washington, Franklin, and Lafayette.

In the 1820s, the Oberkampf factory in Jouy, France, led the way in the production of printed cotton fabrics, and Toile de Jouy (see page 56) soon became a generic name for colorful, printed fabrics used as upholstery or window hangings. Textiles, too, were printed with French scenics, depicting classical ruins, for example. Medallions, stripes, and laurels were also popular themes for fabric designs.

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, the Bourbon monarchy was restored. The new *Restauration* style, too, was based on classical precedents, but the forms became less ornamental. Both England and America followed this trend. In the 1830s and '40s came the Louis Philippe style, which American contemporaries of the day sometimes called Modern Grecian or Modern Classical. Furniture lines became even more severe. Uncarved, unornamented mahogany veneers were the preferred finishes; the S curve and C scroll defined the geometric forms used for chair feet, table pedestals, and bureau fronts. This so-called "Pillar and Scroll" furniture was the last gasp of the Empire period; Americans were ready for something else.

THE SECOND EMPIRE: C. 1855-1875

THE MID CENTURY NOT ONLY WITNESSED NEW ARCHITECTURAL and interior styles, but it also brought great advances in the production of furniture, textiles, carpets, and wallpaper. After the Industrial Revolution, America could manufacture these goods domestically. *Harper's* magazine predicted that "the time is not far off, we feel sure ... when our most admired furniture will not, as now, date from Paris." Products were available in a range of prices, so that even modest-income households could afford fashionable furnishings not

Empire front hall at the Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's home near Nashville, 1836; detail of "Telemachus" French scenic wallpaper.



Curule chair by Duncan Phyfe

within their means during the Empire period.

By the 1840s, the popularity of the classically inspired Greek Revival and Empire styles was on the wane, replaced by an interest in "picturesqueness." Houses were built as romantic versions of Gothic cottages or Italian villas. Just after the Civil War, the Second Empire house style became all the rage. Except for its distinctive Mansard roof, the Second Empire house often differed little from the equally popular bracketed Italianate style. But if the "Italian tradition supplied the exterior," said one commentator, "French models inspired the interiors."

The Second Empire refers to the reign of Napoleon III, who, along with his fashion-conscious wife Eugenie, ruled France from 1852 to 1870. The official tastes of his French court had turned away from the classicism of the early 1800s, and had revived the styles of 18th-century France, particularly the rococo style of Louis XV (1723-74). The burgeoning middle class fueled a demand for the eclectic, derivative Second Empire fashions. To its critics, the Second Empire period was superficially glossy and unprogressive; its appeal was to the middle-ground tastes of the bourgeois.

A display of the Second Empire, or Rococo Revival as it is sometimes called, received wide acceptance at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London. It became the most popular of several concurrent decorative styles in America from approximately 1850 into the early '70s. The "Modern French," as Downing called it, "is now much admired and adopted in our town houses [and is] distinguished by curved and flowing lines and a profusion of delicate ornament in relief, producing a very ornate and elegant effect."



"Pillar and Scroll" table

The curving, florid lines of the rococo characterized nearly every interior element of the era. Ceilings wore ornamental plasterwork featuring sinuous moldings and center medallions cast as clusters of plaster flowers. Drapery cornices, lambrequins, and valances were silhouetted by scalloped edges, as were the frames of gilded mirrors and pictures. Wall-to-wall carpeting featured bright florals. The trademark of the nearly ubiquitous marble mantelpieces of the era was the arched or curvilinear fireplace opening topped by carved bouquets of flowers. The curved cabriole leg was standard for furniture. Globed



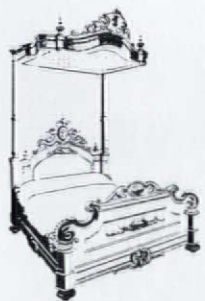
Courtesy Hermitage Museum

chandeliers, mantel clocks, silverwork, lamps, porcelains, and accessories of all types were distinguished by serpentine rococo designs. Cherubs and vines were popular again.

Furniture makers such as Joseph Meeks, Charles Baudouine, Gustav Herter, and Alexander Roux, all of New York City, heavily promoted their rococo and "Louis" lines, as did George Henkels of Philadelphia, and Prudent Mallard and Francois Seignouret of New Orleans. Perhaps most notable was John Henry Belter, who invented a manufacturing method that made curvaceous rococo furniture affordable: He laminated thin, cross-grained layers of mahogany or rosewood, which was then steamed and bent into shape. The florid, pierced carvings for which his furniture is famous was partially machine-formed, and the intricate detail work hand-carved.

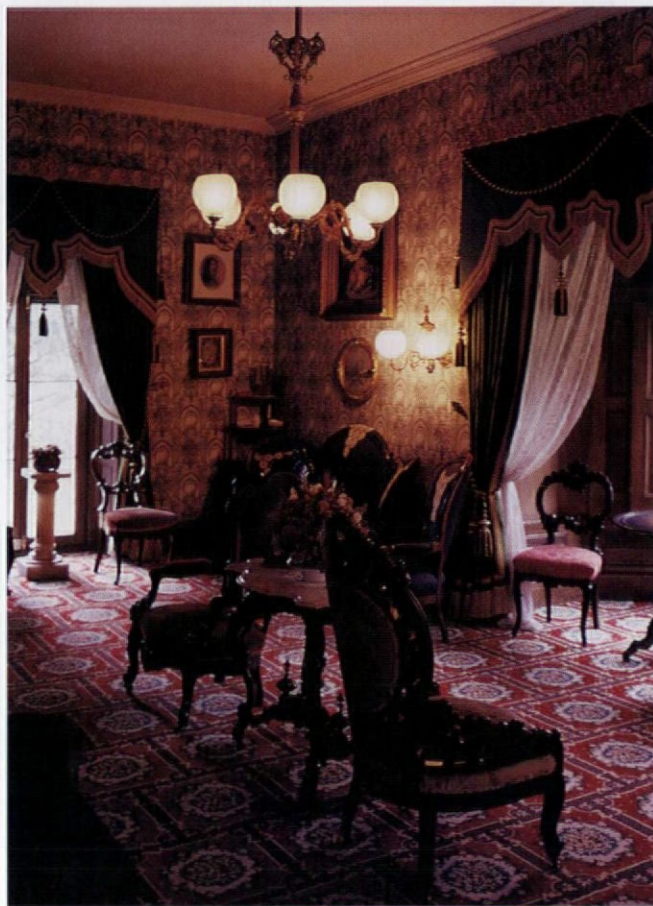
The mid 1800s marked the first time many Americans could afford to decorate an interior room as a unified fashion statement — a *tout ensemble*. Belter and others produced matched sets, or suites: sofas with matching side chairs, dining-room tables with matching chairs, Rococo Revival beds with companion, marble-top wash stands. Furnishings were arranged into "conversational groups" as opposed to the more formal and symmetrically balanced arrangements of the earlier Empire period.

A new generation of women's magazine's, notably *Godey's Lady's Book*, campaigned for the new French rococo fashions and introduced Americans to *etageres* (what-nots), *chaise longues*, *buffets*, *tête-a-têtes* (love seats), *torchieres* (standing lamps), and *armoires* (wardrobes). Bedroom sitting rooms were now *boudoirs*. Desks were now *bureaus*.



Opulent, mid-century Rococo Revival Bed

Other new pieces found their way into interiors, such as the French *meridienne* — a sofa in which one end was asymmetrically higher than the other — and the balloon-backed chair, a simplified version of the Louis XV style. Pioneered by the French, "comfortable" furnishings also enjoyed wide acceptance: Chairs and sofas were covered with stuffed and tufted upholstery in velvets and satins. American manufacturers commonly substituted black horsehair upholstery for more costly



Parlor decorated during the Victorian Rococo Revival, Maxwell Mansion, Germantown, Penn., 1859.

materials.

While walls were most commonly simply painted in earthy colors, some were embellished in the Louis XV manner: Wall surfaces were visually broken by wall-papered or fabric-covered panels framed by wood or plaster moldings. Architect Calvert Vaux illustrated several examples of this effect, called *boiserie*, in his classic 1864 *Villas and Cottages*. A faux *boiserie* arrangement could also be achieved by using "fresco" wallpaper sets that imitated molded wall panels.

Although the English would soon overtake the French as trendsetters for wallpaper design, and although America was increasingly using domestic wallpaper by the 1850s, the French Rococo was a dominating influence on mid-century wallpaper patterns. Bright, intertwining floral patterns against light backgrounds were popular, as were scrollwork designs and floral stripes.

Window treatments in the French manner were promoted in *Godey's* and other magazines that illustrated drapery patterns. Drapery was hung from ornate curtain rods (a French invention) and edged with silk fringe or braid, held back by hand-tied tassels.



Tête-a-tête

Rococo window cornices of stamped metal or wood, and scallop-edged fabric valances topped full-length drapes of costly silk or, more often, cotton damask or chintz. Lace was sometimes used as an "undercurtain." Although fashionable, a full-blown window treatment was expensive and usually reserved for formal rooms. Windows in secondary rooms were decorated in a similar but simpler fashion.

Ever since Frenchman Joseph Jacquard perfected a loom attachment in the early 1800s, which automated production of even the most intricate woven patterns, textiles had become more affordable. Middle-class American families had the means to buy wall-to-wall carpeting by the 1850s and '60s. Not surprisingly, carpets of the Second Empire period were characterized by rococo floral, medallion, laurel, and scrollwork designs.

During the Second Empire period, the Rococo Revival was often freely mixed with other decorative styles, including the Elizabethan, Gothic, and Renaissance Revivals. The latter became popular in America in the 1860s, '70s, and '80s and was very

Authentically French

CONTEMPORARY SOURCES FOR THE PERIOD DECORATOR

OWNERS OF OLD houses who want to bring a sense of authenticity to their interiors should take into account the pervasive influences of French decorative styles throughout 19th-century America. Here are some things to remember:

- The French Empire, and its derivative, the American Empire, were the decorative styles for Greek Revival houses. Owners of Italianate and Second Empire houses have several appropriate interior styles to choose from, but the Rococo Revival (Second Empire) was historically the most popular interior style during the mid 1800s.

- American interiors of the 19th century were rarely unified stylistically. Furniture styles were mixed freely, although mass-produced rococo and Louis XVI furniture was commonly bought as suites. A *tout ensemble* look was usually confined to the best rooms — parlors and dining rooms. In post-Victorian houses, a room (bedroom, sitting room, etc.) with a French Revival theme might coexist alongside rooms of an English or Colonial Revival style.

- Furnishings and accessories of the French styles (and all others) were produced in a wide range of prices and quality. High-styled American townhouses and villas were more likely to have interiors in the most expensive and fashionable tastes, while more common, modest houses contained simplified, mass-produced furnishings which had the spirit, if not the cachet, of the high styles.

- Until fairly recently, American antiques dating from the Empire and Second Empire period were less expensive than those from the colonial, Federal, and even late-Victorian periods. Recently, though, the best Empire and Rococo pieces have appreciated. More modest antiques of these styles can still

be found with price tags that compare favorably to their modern reproduction counterparts.

- For a long time, the markets for reproduction furniture, wallpapers, textiles, and other interior items has been dominated by the American colonial and 18th-century English look. Fortunately, recent decades have seen the rise of more authentic, more varied reproduction products. This Source List provides some of the products available in the Empire, Louis XV, Louis XVI, Nouveau, and French Provincial styles.

• FURNITURE

Antiquaria
60 Dartmouth Street,
Dept. OHJ
Springfield, MA 01109
(413) 781-6927 for catalog.
Mail-order Victorian antique furniture, many in Rococo & Renaissance Revival styles

Brunschwig and Fils
(see Textiles)
Classics in the French Tradition line of chairs in Louis XV, rococo, and provincial styles

Century Furniture
Box 608, Dept. OHJ
Hickory, NC 28603
(800) 852-5552 for brochures
Chardeau, Chantain, Century, and Chambery Chair lines in Louis XIV, XV, Regency, Empire, provincial

Kimball Furniture, Inc.
1600 Royal St., PO Box 460,
Dept. OHJ
Jasper, IN 47549
(800) 482-1616 for brochure
Hand-carved French repros. in Rococo, Louis XIV, with imported French upholstery

Magnolia Hall
726 Andover, Dept. OHJ
Atlanta, GA 30327
(404) 237-9725

Carved, reproduction Victorian furniture in Rococo Revival, Louis XIV, XV, XVI. Also rococo mantel clocks, mirrors, lamps. 80-page catalog

Pierre Deux
18 showrooms and boutiques throughout North America. Call (800) 8PIERRE for locations.
Authentic French country furnishings including provincial furniture, Toile de Jouy fabrics.

Traditional France
P.O. Box 1989, Dept. OHJ
Morganton, NC 28655
(704) 437-1480
Line of furniture imported from France

• WALLCOVERINGS

Bassett and Vollum
4350 N. Council Rd., Dept. OHJ
Galena, IL 61036
(815) 777-2460
French-style wallcoverings

Brunschwig and Fils (see Textiles)
French chinoiserie patterns, trompe l'oeils, florals, etc.

J.R. Burrows & Co.
PO Box 522, Dept. OHJ
Rockland, MA 02370
(617) 982-1812
Documentary wallpapers

Cowtan & Tout, Inc.
979 Third Avenue, Dept. OHJ
New York, NY 10022
(212) 753-4488
Handblocked wallpaper in authentic patterns

Pierre Deux (see Textiles)
French wallcoverings.

Charles Rupert Designs
2004 Oak Bay Avenue,
Dept. OHJ
Victoria, BC V8R 1E4 Canada
(604) 592-4916
French wallpaper

Scalamandre
37-24 24th Street, Dept. OHJ
Long Island City, NY 11101

(718) 361-8500
Period wallpapers including Empire, Toile de Jouy designs

Schumacher (see Textiles)
Period wallpapers including Empire

Thibaut, Richard E., Inc.
706 South 21st Street,
Dept. OHJ
Irvington, NJ 07111
(201) 399-7888
Royal Limoges line has French-inspired designs

Victorian Collectibles Ltd.
845 East Glenbrook Road,
Dept. OHJ
Milwaukee, WI 53217
(414) 352-6971
Brillion Collection reproduction wallpapers includes Victorian Rococo and Nouveau styles

Zuber
979 Third Avenue, Dept. OHJ
New York, NY 10022
(212) 486-9226
French scenics, documentaries, trompe l'oeil, and neoclassic designs. This French company has been producing wallpapers since the 1790s

• TEXTILES, FABRICS

Boussac of France
979 Third Avenue, Dept. OHJ
New York, NY 10022
(212) 421-0534
Numerous French fabrics

Brunschwig and Fils
75 Virginia Road, Dept. OHJ
North White Plains, NY 10603
(914) 684-5800 for brochures
French chinoiserie chintze, chinelle, brocade, moire, lace, etc.

J.R. Burrows (see Wallcoverings)
Neo-Grec lace curtain panels

Classic Revivals
1 Design Center Place,
Suite 545, Dept. OHJ
Boston, MA 02210
(617) 574-9030
French silk fabric



Louis XV ballroom at Chateau-sur-Mer, Newport, R.I., 1854. Ebonized furniture by Léon Marcotte; walls are grey with gilt; typical rococo mirror and mantel.

loosely based on the heavy architectural themes of Renaissance Europe. The French called the style “Francois Premiere.” Here again, the French were the masters. Although they were not singularly associated with the style, still “the French, in their Renaissance style,” said Downing, “offer the best examples.... Their works, especially in interiors and furniture, retain all the ... antique beauty of the works of the fifteenth century.”

There were, increasingly, critics of Second Empire taste. The fashions of Napoleon III were dubbed “le Style sans Style.” Belter’s furniture was derided as “Louisiana bordello.” Mass-produced, trivialized versions of rococo furnishings were called “Louis the Hotel” due to their seemingly universal presence in hotel lobbies. French fashions would remain an alternative for interiors throughout the remaining decades of the 19th century. But by the late 1870s, Americans were increasingly attracted to the designs of the English Aesthetic Movement and the principles of tastemakers Charles Eastlake and William Morris.

THE FRENCH REVIVALS: C. 1890-1925

MOVE AHEAD A GENERATION, AND by the 1890s, America had renewed interest in the historical styles of Italy, England — and especially France. American architects were being trained at what many thought was the world’s premiere architectural school, l’Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The principles of l’Ecole were apparent in the design of American mansions and public buildings of the period. French chateaux of the nouveau riche were erected on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, and these served as models for estate houses in our elite suburbs as well.

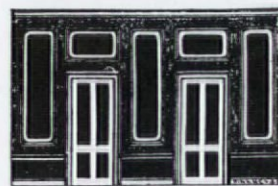
This was the heyday of the interior designer, a relatively new profession in America. Among the most prominent were Elsie de Wolfe and the team of Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. A raft of new decorating magazines appeared, including the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *House and Garden*, and *House Beautiful*. Publications such as these, along with professional decorators and self-proclaimed tastemakers, were in the vanguard of promoting the revival of French decorative styles. Most of it was pitched to the well-to-do, but the trickle-down effect influenced the homes of middle-class America.

How were French Revival interiors of this era different from the earlier Rococo Revival? When done well, they were more authentic to their historical precedents (and more costly to recreate). Interior ornamentation and furnishings were more serious and “correct.” Even Codman and Wharton recognized in their 1897 tome, *Decoration of Houses*, that “the perception of the French [decorative style] is uncomfortable, ostentatious, and fussy.” They countered, however, that the actual private living quarters, as opposed to the public rooms, of the French

prototypes were actually very comfortable and graceful.

As before, American manufacturers were quick to adopt and promote the latest fashions. The Herter Bros., Kimbel & Sons, the Gorham Manufacturers, and Leon Marcotte were some of the leading firms to produce furniture in the various Louis styles. Both the Bartholomae and National Wallpaper companies issued patterns with Louis XV, XVI, and Empire themes.

The Louis XVI was among the most popular of the revival styles. “Marie Antoinette rooms are breaking out all over” said Codman and Wharton. The style’s broad curves and straight lines were simpler and less fussy than the convoluted curves and almost frenzied rococo carvings of the Louis XV. Classical motifs crept into Louis XVI designs; round, fluted legs were a hallmark of its furniture.



“Boiserie”

French Revival rooms were bright: The woodwork was

Cowtan and Tout
(see Wallcoverings)
Chintzes, silks

Christopher Hyland, Inc.
979 Third Avenue, Suite
1714, Dept. OHJ
New York, NY 10022
(212) 688-6121
*Curtain accessories: coronas,
tiebacks, curtain finials, poles.*

Kimball International, Inc.
(see Furniture)
French fabrics

Pierre Deux
stores in New York, Atlanta,
Boston, Chicago, Houston,
San Francisco, Philadelphia,
Toronto, and others. Call
(800) 8PIERRE for addresses
French-import fabrics, linens

Rue de France
78 Thames Street, Dept. OHJ
Newport, RI 02840
(401) 846-2084
*Imported French-styled lace,
curtains*

Scalamandre
(see Wallcoverings)
*Many historically accurate
fabrics including brocatelle,
damask, lace, silk with French-
inspired designs; trimmings*

Schumacher
979 Third Avenue,
Dept. OHJ
New York, NY 10022
(212) 213-7900
Jacquard weaves, tapestries

Thibaut, Richard E., Inc.
(see Wallcoverings)
French-inspired fabrics

Vintage Valances
Box 43326, Dept. OHJ
Cincinnati, OH 45243
(513) 561-8665
*Custom design and
manufacture of historically
accurate window drapery
including Rococo &
Renaissance Revival periods*

■ CARPETING

J.R. Burrows
(see Wallcoverings)
*Documentary reproduction
carpets*

Scalamandre
(see Wallcoverings)

*19th-Century Carpet Collection
includes authentic French
Empire styles*

■ ARCHITECTURAL
ELEMENTS, TILES,
OBJETS D'ART

Danny Alessandro, Ltd.
307 E. 60th Street,
Dept. OHJ
New York, NY 10022
(212) 421-1928
*Reproduction & antique
mantels including 18th-century
French styles in wood & marble*

Country Floors
stores in many major
American and Canadian cities;
call (212) 627-8300 for
locations
*Authentic French wall, floor,
and fireplace tiles (glazed,
faïence, terra cotta, embossed)*

Dalton-Gorman
P.O. Box 5835, Dept. OHJ
High Point, NC 27262
(800) 356-3792
*La Cheminee reproduction
marble mantels including
Victorian Louis XV styles*

Decorator's Supply Corp.
3610 S. Morgan Street,
Dept. OHJ
Chicago, IL 60609
(312) 847-6300
*Mantels & applied-
composition ornament for
walls, ceilings, and fireplaces,
many in Rococo Revival &
Louis styles*

La France Imports, Inc.
2008 S. Sepulveda Blvd.,
Dept. OHJ
Los Angeles, CA 90025
(213) 478-6009
French ceramic tiles

Renaissance Marketing, Inc.
PO Box 360, Dept. OHJ
Lake Orion, MI 48361
(313) 693-1109
*Full line of French Art Nouveau
& Art Deco table & floor lamps*

Roman Marble Co.
120 W. Kinzie Street,
Dept. OHJ
Chicago, IL 60610
(312) 337-2217
*Carved marble & wood
reproduction & antique mantels
including Louis XV and XVI
styles*


painted white, as was much of the furniture. In fact, older furniture pieces were brought up to date with white enamel. Boiserie wall panels were covered with damask or toile and framed by plaster or gesso moldings accented with gilding (or gold-colored metallic paint). In fact, the gold accent-against-white palette was common for furniture finishes as well.

Wide openings between parlors were outfitted with portierres — drapes hung on rods, sometimes suspended below wooden grillework. (Portierres were actually enjoying a renewed popularity from their introduction in earlier Victorian times.) Window treatments continued the French tradition of swagged valances and cascading drapery hung over rods.

Glassed-panelled "French doors" opened onto porches or terraces, and parquet floors could be had by even the middle class. A gilt-framed mirror over a marble mantel was almost required in a French Revival parlor. Multi-globed gasoliers or electrified crystal chandeliers provided lighting in formal rooms.

Knowing the popularity of post-Victorian houses among *OHJ* readers, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention two additional decorative styles with decidedly French associations: the turn-of-the-century Art Nouveau style and its stylized cousin, the Art Deco of the 1920s and '30s.

With a few rich exceptions, the influence in America of the sinuous lines and naturalistic themes of the Art Nouveau was limited to decorative accessories and graphic arts. Perhaps best known was the work of Louis Comfort Tiffany, whose shop produced Nouveau-inspired lamps. Rudimentary Art Nouveau lines and ornament were occasionally seen in the turn-of-the-century "Golden Oak" furniture produced in Grand Rapids, or the pieces of the Gorham Company of Rhode Island, or Karpen and Bros. of Chicago.

Even though the French Revival styles remained popular into the 1920s, most early-20th-century homeowners were enamored of "colonial" interiors, or drawn to the Mission style that was virtually synonymous with bungalow houses. Still, pseudo-French, half-timbered houses or stone, Norman "farmhouses" were sometimes built side-by-side with bungalows and English cottages in many American suburbs. The interiors of these informal 20th-century homes could be decorated with French Provincial, a style that remains popular today. As the name suggests, the style is characterized by vernacular furnishings and accessories of the French provinces, which were simplified adaptations of the Parisian high styles. 

There are numerous books describing and illustrating American period interiors in the French styles. Among the most useful:

Victorian Interior Decoration by Gail Caskey Winkler and Roger W. Moss (Henry Holt, 1986; \$29.95)

The Tasteful Interlude by William Seale (Amer. Assoc. for State and Local History, 1981)

A Documentary History of American Interiors from the Colonial Era to 1915 by Edgar de N. Mayhew and Minor Myers, Jr. (Scribner's, 1980, \$45)

Three Centuries of American Antiques by the Editors of American Heritage (Bonanza Books, 1979)

Contributing editor Randy Cotton would like to thank Pierre Hivert (of Pierre Deux) and Gail Winkler for providing information for this article.

Pueblo of the Southwest Houses

By James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell

No American architectural style is more closely tied to a single region than the simple, blocky, adobe pueblo. In the Southwest and particularly in New Mexico and Arizona, the pueblo looks as natural as the strong yellow sunlight and red clay soil that give the land and the buildings their color. Once the pueblo magic had been discovered and translated into waterproof 20th-century materials, of course, there was nothing to stop its being built in eastern, midwestern or Pacific coastal areas — but why try to move a miracle?

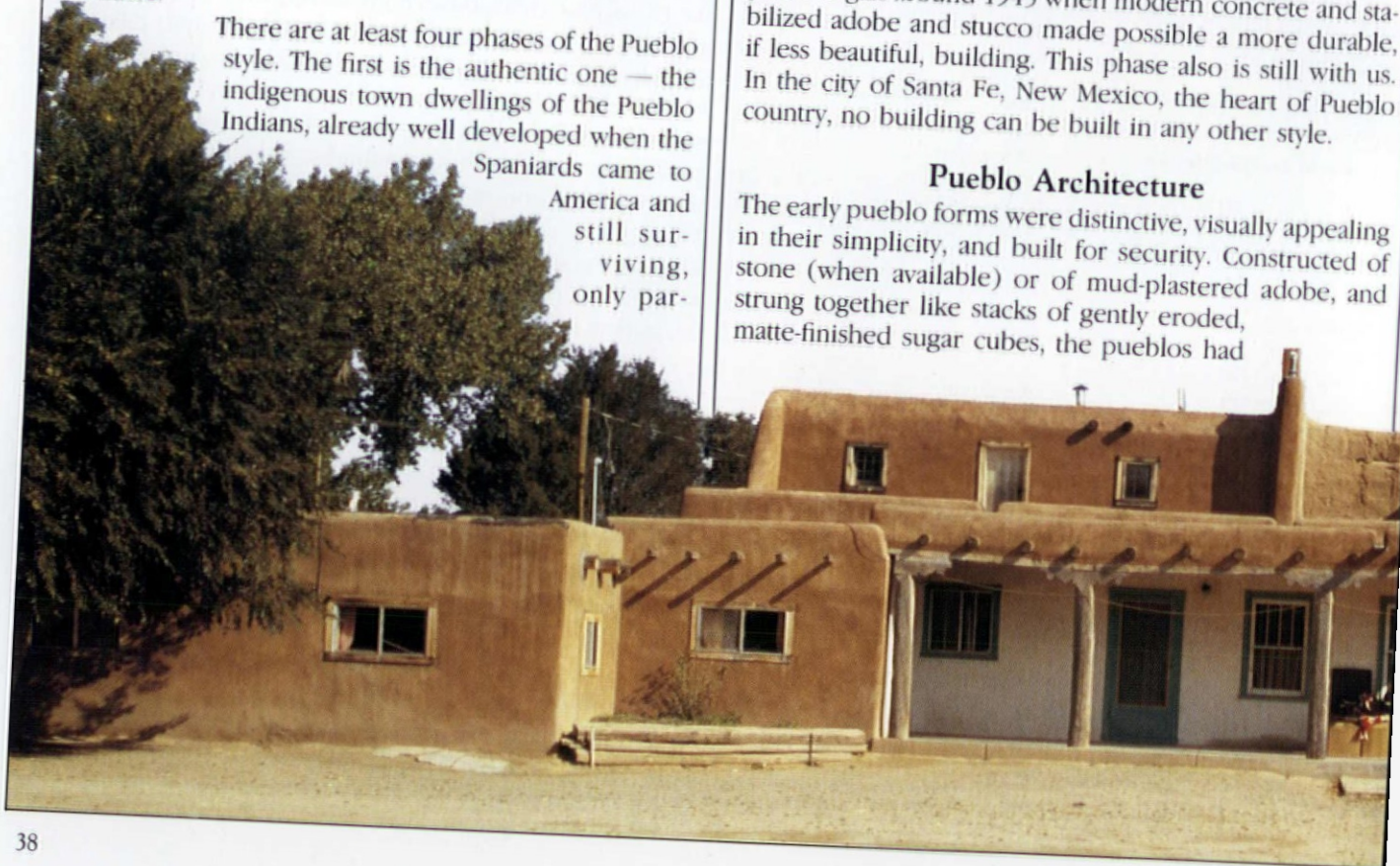
There are at least four phases of the Pueblo style. The first is the authentic one — the indigenous town dwellings of the Pueblo Indians, already well developed when the Spaniards came to America and still surviving, only par-

tially changed, today. The second came about when

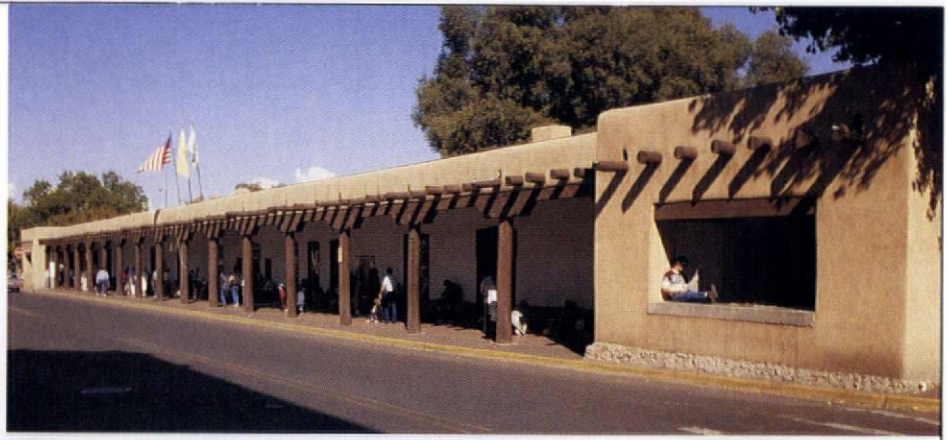
Spanish settlers added their own knowledge of adobe building techniques, adopted from years of Moorish influence from North Africa, to what the Indians were doing. The third was a revival that began in the wake of the early-20th-century railroad tourist expansion into the Southwest and the Arts & Crafts movement's emphasis on natural materials and forms at about the same time. The fourth phase began around 1945 when modern concrete and stabilized adobe and stucco made possible a more durable, if less beautiful, building. This phase also is still with us. In the city of Santa Fe, New Mexico, the heart of Pueblo country, no building can be built in any other style.

Pueblo Architecture

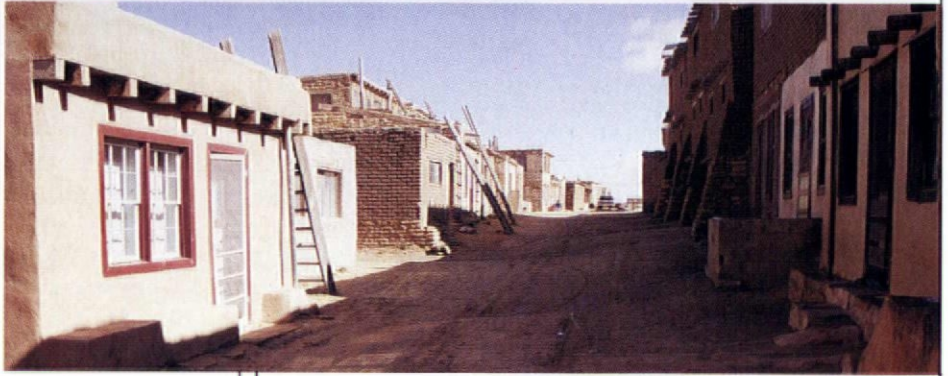
The early pueblo forms were distinctive, visually appealing in their simplicity, and built for security. Constructed of stone (when available) or of mud-plastered adobe, and strung together like stacks of gently eroded, matte-finished sugar cubes, the pueblos had



At right, the renowned Palace of the Governors (1610-14, remodeled and rebuilt 1909-13), the centerpiece of the plaza in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Below, the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico. Located high on a virtually inaccessible mesa, this view shows the most famous street in the most famous of the Indian pueblos.



slightly rounded corners and battered walls sloping slightly inward as they rose in uneven piles. Stepped-back second and third storeys provided uncovered decks on the tops of wood and clay covered first-floor roofs. These early apartment buildings were actually walled towns, constructed for shelter from the elements and from enemies, not for indoor living. The pueblos were ordinarily built atop tall, sheer-sided mesas so difficult to climb that they acted as natural defense towers in open country. They were also exposed to winds and violent weather, but there was always



refuge within. There were no openings in the continuous first-floor pueblo walls, and the pueblo apartment could be entered only by scaling ladders (easily pulled up out of reach of evil wishers) to the first-floor roof, and then descending through a hole in the roof into the rooms within. The roofs were supported by *vigas*, peeled round logs with jagged ends hewn by stone adzes or fire to uneven lengths. These were covered with *latillas*, or saplings, and twigs or straw, then packed with earth for a more or less waterproof covering that was sufficient in the dry seasons but presented difficulties when the rains came.

Adobe, which is both the sun-dried building block and the clay soil from which it is made, did have some structural problems. If water entered from the top, the walls eroded downward. If water and soil salts leached upward, the walls tended to soften at the bottom, causing a "coving" effect near the base that could lead to eventual collapse. The adobe walls, which the Indians laid by "puddling" (placing

continuous courses of damp clay one upon the other), or with "turtleback" handshaped blocks, were then protected by layers of mud plaster. This surface also washed away with the infrequent rains, wore off with the wind, or sloughed off as the building settled on its earthen foundations. Maintenance was constant and time-consuming, but not very complicated (and it was dirt cheap).

When the Spaniards came, starting in the late-16th century, they brought with them a new technology for forming adobe blocks in wooden molds, and a European approach to the building form itself. The Indians were happy to adopt the molded blocks, which were easier to use and could be dried rather quickly — in 30 to 60 days, given good weather conditions. Furthermore, in some ways at least, the Spanish building itself was not totally different from what the Indians had been doing. Although almost invariably a single storey and constructed around a courtyard rather than on top of an inaccessible mesa, it too was a

defensive building type, with continuous exterior walls and as few openings as possible. Spanish walls were more substantial, up to four feet thick as opposed to the Indians' usual 10 to 20 inches. Entrance to the grounds was guarded by a *zaguan*, a long, covered corridor and gateway that allowed horses and wagons to pass. Inside the small houses, the rooms opened to each other with-



The San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico, a traditional Indian house group dating from various periods. (Note the prominent *vigas* and set-back second storey.)

READING
THE
OLD
HOUSE

THE PUEBLO STYLE

Irregular parapet suggests old, picturesque roofline

Projecting chimney, stuccoed

Square projecting beams recall pueblo round *vigas*

Arched entry porch

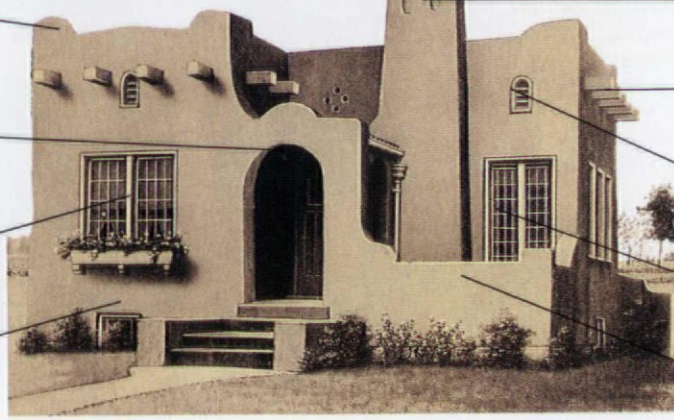
Decorative arched ventilation grille

Casement windows, wood or steel were frequently used as in this double window

Large pair of casement windows

Walls in modern stucco give appearance of old mud plastered adobe that was traditionally used.

Verandah with low walls



Primarily a New Mexico Revival based on traditional Native American pueblo architecture, it was occasionally used in plan books, as this example, in somewhat generalized form, and built examples can be found especially in the Southwest.

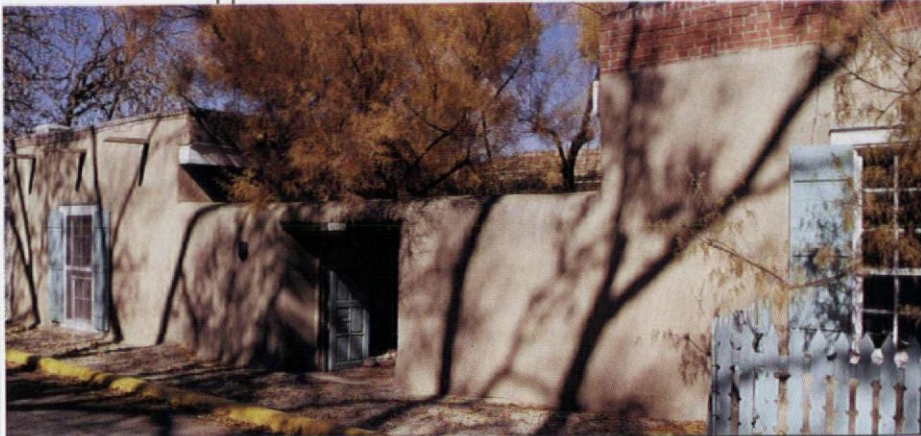
out a hall, and as the extended family grew so did the line of rooms, which eventually might take on an L, U, or box shape that enclosed a center courtyard, or *placita*. A *portal* (covered porch) often ran along the east or south side of the building. Window openings were small and infrequent



The 1890 Felipe Delgado House, an example of the Territorial style and its effects of fancy millwork and doublehung-sash windows made available by railroad commerce.

and often fitted with vertical wooden bars; when they were "glazed," they might be covered with a thin slice of selenite, a crystalline gypsum, which the Indians also sometimes used. Other Spanish innovations happily accepted by the Indians were the *fogón*, the corner fireplace with chimney (more efficient than the simple hole in the roof the Indians were accustomed to), the pintle-hinged door, and metal tools. And, of course, there was the *borno* (beehive oven) which became and still is a standby for baking

El Zaguán (1849 and later), a notable historic example showing the mid-19th-century interpretation of the pueblo during the Spanish period.



bread in Indian dooryards.

The Spanish influence on the evolution of Pueblo architecture extended to details within the buildings as well. Spanish Pueblo roofs also were supported by *vigas*, topped with *latillas*, and packed with earth as a top coat. However, the Spanish *vigas* were tidier than those of the Indians, since they had more efficient tools with which to cut the ends, and they were sometimes hewn more or less square. The Spaniards also added *pretiles* (parapet walls or firewalls) of two or three layers of adobe brick above the roofline and installed *canales* (hollowed-out logs) that projected 18 inches or so beyond the roof line to drain water away from the vulnerable plaster and adobe. Like the Indians, the Spaniards eschewed most ornament, but they did sometimes carve and paint decorative ends on *zapatas* (corbel brackets) that rested between the main beam and the supporting posts. Ceilings in Spanish Pueblo houses were constructed of peeled logs supported by vertical posts and *zapatas*, with saplings laid diagonally or horizontally between the logs. Earthen floors might be oiled or treated with blood to harden them, or stone might be laid directly on the earth. Interior walls were finished with adobe plaster, lime, or *jaspe* (powdery gypsum).

The arrival of the Anglos in the mid-19th century was accompanied by an influx of eastern building materials, such as fancy wooden millwork, large glass windowpanes

At right, a pueblo variant with whitewashed walls (rather than red-brown stucco) topped by a protective brick ridge, a 19th-century innovation. Below: As with many buildings, modern sash have replaced the '20s steel casement windows probably original to this Albuquerque house.



and doublehung wood sash, hard-fired brick, cement, real plaster, and paint. Embellishments such as these increased dramatically after the railroad arrived in New Mexico in 1880, introducing change and, sometimes, practical improvements. Brick capping along the parapets was sometimes added to give more protection from rain, particularly in buildings that inclined toward the Greek Revival-influenced Territorial Style. Only a well sealed, pitched, metal roof could solve the problem of a leaky topside, however, and pitched roofs are not Pueblo. For the first time, Spanish Pueblo buildings acquired such amenities as wooden floors. Wood trim and lintels, either imported by rail or copied locally from those that were, began to be used around doors and windows, which became ever larger and more elaborate. Eventually, even cast-iron and pressed-metal architectural elements made their way onto adobe buildings.

Modern Pueblo



Although it varied over time, the Spanish Pueblo style survived through the 19th and into the 20th centuries, when it was joined, but not entirely displaced, by the Pueblo Revival style. Drawn by the

healthful climate and the natural beauty of the area, and urged on by a vigorous Santa Fe Railway promotion effort, tourists and new residents flocked to the Southwest between the 1890s and the 1930s. Among the permanent immigrants were enough artists, poets, writers, and even architects to form vital aesthetic communities in Taos, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe — and to touch off a new Pueblo

building boom.

In 1908 the University of New Mexico remodeled its 1890 Richardsonian Romanesque Hodgkin Hall into a Spanish Pueblo-style building. In Santa Fe, the Palace of the Governors, a one-storey adobe structure begun in 1610 and variously burned, renovated, and modernized over the years, was enthusiastically if somewhat inaccurately “restored” in 1913 with a long *portal* in the Spanish Pueblo style, although it retained many Territorial details, such as large windows and doors. Hotels, railroad stations, and other public buildings designed as pueblos began to appear. And then, of course, all those artists had to live somewhere. Some, like Olive Rush, an internationally known Quaker artist, chose to live and work in original Spanish Pueblo houses. Rush’s studio, which she carefully maintained, is one of the few Spanish Pueblo houses in Santa Fe that has not been covered with concrete stucco.

More often, however, these free souls designed and sometimes even built their own pueblos. Their houses were creative adaptations of pueblo buildings rather than

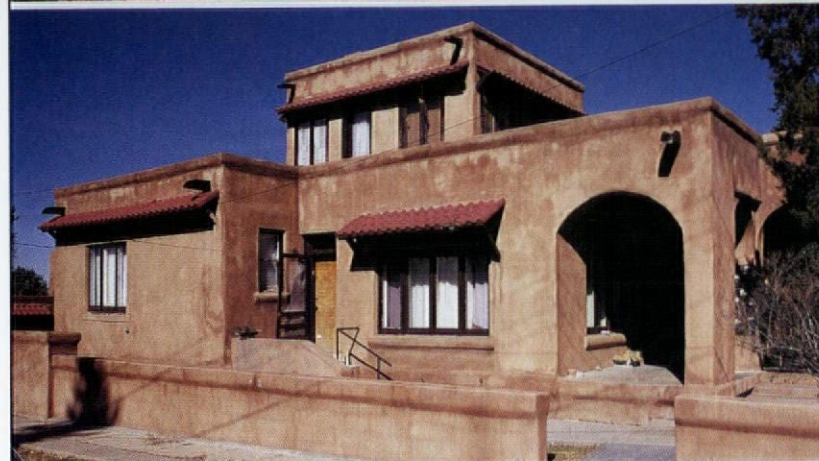
replicas, but they did use traditional construction methods. Frank Applegate, an artist from Illinois, had intended only to study New Mexico clays. But he became fascinated by the sculptural possibilities of



Street walls were important in defining the character of early-20th-century Pueblo Revivals, as in this handsome Corrales, New Mexico, house.



At left, a triple-arched front porch in Santa Fe, more typical of California than New Mexico. Below, an unusual Pueblo Revival combination of one- and two-storey sections with a handsome arched entry. The one-storey form was much more common.

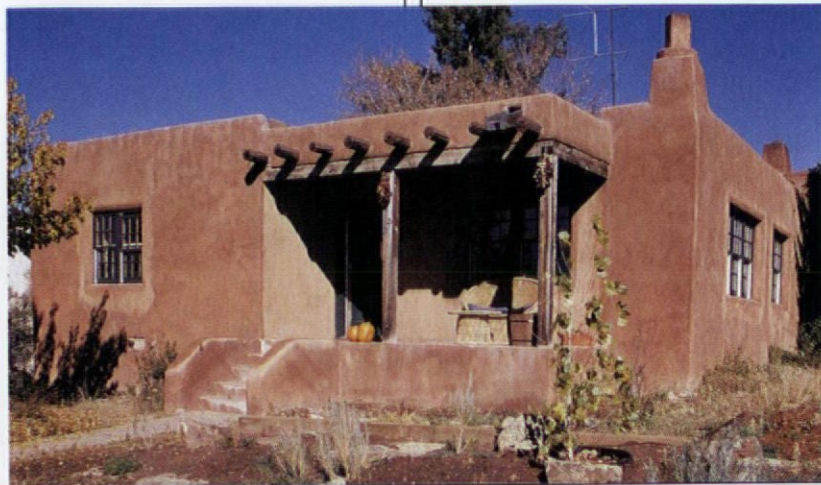


Aside from their consciously artistic conception, Pueblo Revival houses shared many characteristics: picturesque, stepped-back massing, invariably flat roofs with softly sculptured parapets, thick stuccoed walls, large chimneys with *ollas* (chimney pots), slightly battered walls with undulating surfaces. They also had certain inherent differences from the original models. For one thing, their *vigas* and *canales* were more consistently arranged and placed equidistant from the roof line. Decorated ends were common. Steel casement windows were a modern but practical innovation, and there were far more of them. In the 1920s pink stucco with turquoise wood trim at the doors and windows was popular, but those colors later gave way to earthier tones. Interiors usually had plastered walls and tiled floors. Large fireplaces (often the old corner *fogóns*) were ubiquitous. Otherwise, interior plans generally followed the standard, rather open layouts popular in the period and were easily modified by later owners.

adobe building and designed structures that incorporated battered walls, buttresses, and undulating lines in an artistic way. Alice Clark Meyers, the third woman to hold a degree in architecture in the United States, settled in Santa Fe and designed a very grand house with a very non-pueblo basement and 30-inch-thick walls. Architect John Gaw Meem arrived in 1920, hoping to cure his tuberculosis. He eventually recovered but stayed to become one of New Mexico's most prominent designers and the champion of a burgeoning pueblo-preservation cause: Largely through his efforts, the ancient Sky City of Acoma Pueblo was thoroughly photographed and recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1934 — the only pueblo village ever studied in such detail. The pueblo influence was eagerly incorporated into the thinking of architects working in Art Deco, Modern, and Spanish Revival styles. California's Irving Gill, for instance, progressed from Spanish Mission Revival buildings to modern cubes softened by his vision of adobes and earth forms.

Mail-order catalogs also offered Pueblo Revival plans and houses. The one illustrated in our plate is particularly instructive, including many aspects of the Pueblo Revival style: flat roof with parapets, stepped massing, undulating walls, rounded corners, massive fireplace (though not placed in a corner), and simulated *vigas*. The casement windows and large arched entryway are typical Revival deviations from the original pueblo concept. Ready-cut versions, such as those from Pacific Homes, were likely to be no-frills interpretations in stucco over frame construction.

Most of the best Pueblo Revival houses date from the period between the two world wars. Although the style continued following World War II, adobe — seemingly the cheapest kind of building material — turned out to be too labor intensive in construction to allow its use for any but the richest of homebuilders. Instead, smaller, mechanically



A classic small Pueblo Revival home typical of many in its developed form, sporting a recessed corner porch and exposed vigas.

formed blocks of stabilized adobe, covered with concrete stucco, became the norm. The lines were inevitably thinner, harsher, and straighter-edged, and they did not weather well. Outside the Southwest, the pueblo form is rarely used today, but it still reigns, sometimes with the force of law, in its region. 🏠

The preservation movement has made great strides in awaking people to the beauty and charm of old houses, and preservation laws have saved a great many historic buildings. Yet many people still need to realize that our nation's history is not only housed in great structures, but in small and common ones as well. Government cannot, and will not, preserve these structures alone. Many of us who have experienced first hand the special joys of living in a piece of history know that the effort and sacrifices needed to keep an old building going are always worth it, but we need to be joined by others who are willing to become the private conservators of America's past.

In 1981, after renovating Victorian homes in Rochester, New York, I yearned to take on a real challenge: a house with what antique dealers call "provenance" (personal history). My wife and I were alerted to the Mud House, which was for sale at a very low price because no one could figure out how to repair it and the Landmark Society of Western New York had made it virtually impossible to tear down. From the very beginning, we loved the Mud House's rugged exterior and its pioneer feel, but it had been tenant occupied since 1938. Over the years, the mud walls had eroded away from the roof, leaving a six-foot hole clear through to the interior. We just assumed that somewhere, someone had records of how to mix and apply the exterior mud. Surely someone knew how to repair it, right? We were wrong.

According to an eye-witness account, the Mud House was built in Penfield, New York, about 1833. In the early 1830s, Daniel Penfield, an entrepreneur who founded the town, purchased two of the three lumber mills in the area, substantially raising the price of sawn lumber. The town's dirt farmers simply had no choice but to find an alternative building method for new homes. Such was the dilemma for the Samuel Gors

OLD-HOUSE LIVING IN A MUD HOUSE

By Gary P. Lehmann



Even in the early days, as seen in this 1895 photo we found, the Mud House's exterior was in a state of disrepair.

family, whose log cabin was overcrowded with Mom, Pop, Grandma, Grandpa, and six children. With sawn timber so expensive, they reverted to an older building method Samuel knew from his homeland in Eastern Europe: rammed-earth mud building.



As mud eroded behind it, large chunks of 1950s substitute siding detached from the walls, revealing extensive exterior damage.

First, a great pen of wood was built in the yard. Mud was hauled up from a nearby creek and mixed with straw and fresh manure. Two oxen, tethered to a post in the middle of the pen, were driven around and around to create a thick, well-blended mud mixture. At the site of the new house, a foundation was made of mortared stone, just like a wood-house foundation, but on top of it, a temporary, 18-inch-thick wooden form was constructed. Buckets of mud were dumped into the form and troweled together to join the clumps. Floor joists were then laid across the foundation, and wherever doors were planned, a thick door sill and frame exempted that area from the mud. After a circle of mud about eight to ten inches high surrounded the foundation, everyone went back to normal farm life for a few weeks to let the mixture dry. When the first row was dry, the temporary frame was extended and a new ring of mud was added. In this way, the Mud House went up in about a year

To fill in a 6-foot hole in the northeast corner, plywood was laid across newly-added support beams to make a form for the mud. But the wet mud's weight caused the wood to pop off.



and a half, including a second floor. Late in September 1835, the family moved in and one of Penfield's oldest houses began its very long history of continuous occupancy.

Even when it was first constructed, the freezing and thawing of fall and spring, the driving snows of winter, and the hard rains of summer caused the Mud House to need constant upkeep. Photographs from the late 1800s show that the house was variously in good and poor condition during its first century. We later found that heating the house to 70 degrees during the winter causes flaking because the house has no vapor barrier. Heat flows through the walls, and when the warm, moist air hits the arctic winter exterior, it freezes just below the surface of the mud causing little pieces of the house to break off all winter. Fun, no?

Success Is Inevitable

In trying to find out how to repair the Mud House, we hired an architect who eventually discovered that Upstate New York has nine existing Mud Houses. Richard Pieper, an Architectural Conservator at Cornell University, also discovered other mud structures in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, but our house appeared to be the only one with its original exterior intact. We solicited the help of the local historian, the Preservation Board, our regional Historical Association, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Park Service, and just about every old-time mason and masonry supplier who would listen. There's lots of information on adobe in dry climates, but nothing on maintaining a mud house in upstate New York's outrageous weather conditions — no historical records, no folk wisdom, nothing!

At this point, we were beginning to wonder if we had bought an albatross, but finally we followed Thomas Edison's lead. As the story goes, a reporter asked Edison if he wasn't discouraged after trying 297 formulations for the carbonized element in the electric light bulb. Edison re-



Left: A 1/4-inch application of "slop" dries on the wall. This layer of mud has to be reapplied yearly because it peels off every winter. **Right:** This wheelbarrow is filled with handmade bricks to rebuild



the 6-foot hole. After they were sun dried, I tested their strength by jumping on them. My "stress test" must have been accurate: They're still holding up the wall.

plied, "No, not discouraged. The more I work at it, the more I know that success is inevitable." Now in truth that was probably an exaggeration. You take on these tasks without a clear knowledge of how much work is involved. Virtually everyone said we would fail, even the architect. Yet, there was no law that said base metals could be made incandescent until it was accomplished. For us, that thought provided much-needed hope and perseverance.

Ah yes, and then there was the money. As we experimented with a wide variety of methods to repair the house, we slowly consumed all our savings and almost all the money the Landmark Society loaned us. So, lacking other alternatives, we simply tried every conceivable combination of plaster products.

None of them worked beyond the change of a season. The problem was that they were designed for use in a stabilized environment. Cement, stucco, concrete, chicken-wire meshing, metal posts, and nailed fishnet are all stabilized materials and therefore had an alarming tendency to break loose from the body of the house as soon as the season changed.

Getting mud to stick and dry evenly on a vertical surface was another noteworthy challenge. If it was too wet, it wanted to run off. If it was too dry, it didn't stick at all. If it had too much sand in the mixture, it wouldn't survive the first rain. If it had too much clay, the exterior



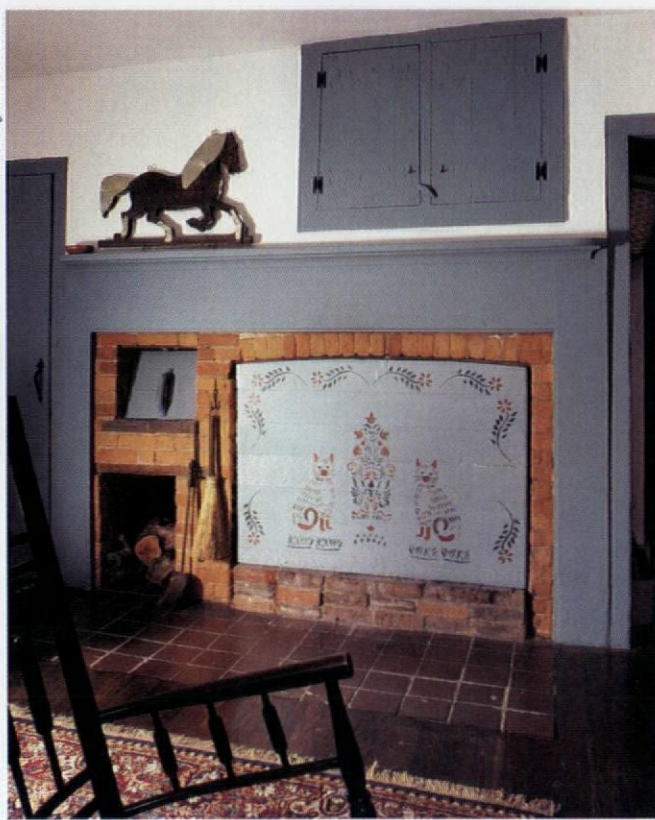
Inset: Drywall and furring strips are removed to uncover the original mud walls. **Right:** Our 18-inch-thick windowsills can be seen in this restored room.

curled up like potato chips and fell off all summer. Finally, we experimented with lime mixes. Some were too hot; others were too weak. We came upon a 15% mix of double-hydrated, unstabilized lime with local loam and water, which works quite well.

We used "construction mud" to fill the deep holes that appear from time to time, and "slop" to create a quarter inch of new surface to drop off during the cold weather. The building's "construction mud" has to be very thick and thoroughly moist. Although straw was used in the original mix, we found that it doesn't seem to help the drying process much and it weakens the adhesion a great deal.



Photo: John Griebach



I tried to keep the 19th-century character by replastering the walls with wet mud and matching existing woodwork.

We also have drawn the line at working with mud mixed with generous portions of fresh manure!

“Slop” (the architectural conservators call it “slurry”) is applied with a wallpaper brush, one stroke per dip in a bucket. Over time, we have discovered that slop with a slightly higher lime mixture provides a little bit harder surface and therefore more rain protection. We still have to get up on a ladder once or twice a year to go over the entire house, but we are now able to keep up the exterior with a reasonable amount of effort, depending upon how you define “reasonable.”

Living With The Past

The adventure of owning such an unique old building does not end with the construction. As you live in the house over time, you slowly accumulate stories and artifacts attesting to the sort of life the house has supported for over 67,000 days and nights. You gain a special sense of custodial responsibility. The Mud House was conceived and built while Andrew Jackson was President and Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett were fighting at the Alamo. Dickens was writing *Pickwick Papers* as the Gorses



moved in. As we dug dirt for our mud mixtures, we came across the old lime pit in the front yard, where they burned sea shells presumably taken from Lake Ontario (when its waters supported shell life!). Outside the kitchen windows, we also found pits where broken things were buried. We also located the site of several outhouses (few treasures there) and a smoke-house foundation.

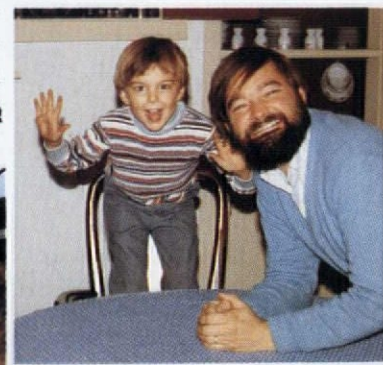
During our ten-year odyssey to repair the Mud House, the moral support we received from many people really kept us going. For instance, right while we were in the midst of our most trying experiments, a letter from Carol Devereaux Spangler at the National Trust for Historic Preservation arrived in which she said, among other things, “You are doing something very important.” Those words of encouragement meant a lot because they came at a time when the task looked darkest.

Other people came around to tell us stories of their own experiences in the house. One lady, who had lived in a cider mill by the creek as a child, told me about a very nasty farmer who lived in the Mud House. According to her, he used to beat his animals unmercifully if they did not work up to his expectations. On a dark night, one of the oxen kicked him hard and then trampled him to death in my barn.

The Mud House and the thousands of other old houses located in every community of this nation *are* the actual historical sites. Shepherding an old house back to health makes you feel like you are in the great flow of history.

As a realtor nowadays, I get inside more houses than most people and it saddens me that many people don't realize the value of the old houses. Little by little, though, I see a few people who are willing to take on the challenges of an old house for the special rewards such a house contains. These people have to overlook the “logical” reasons to buy a new house and let their hearts lead them into the great adventure of living in an old house. It's no easy path and the sacrifices can sometimes be very great, but the rewards are special, individual, and “very important,” to quote a great source.

Photo: John Griebisch



Left: The charm of the restored Mud House is evident on sunny days. Inset: Even my son Christopher is enthusiastic about the restoration.

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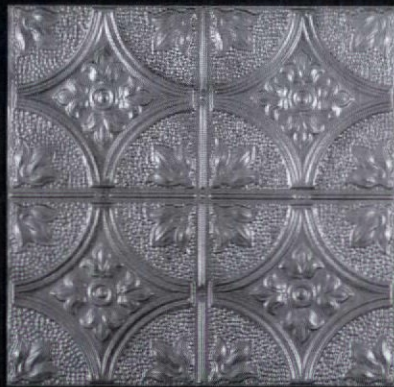
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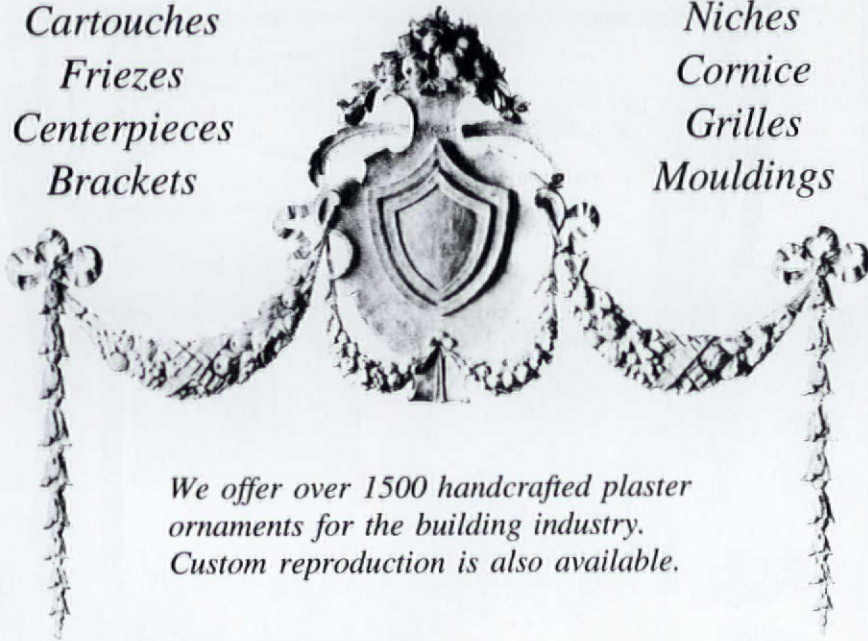
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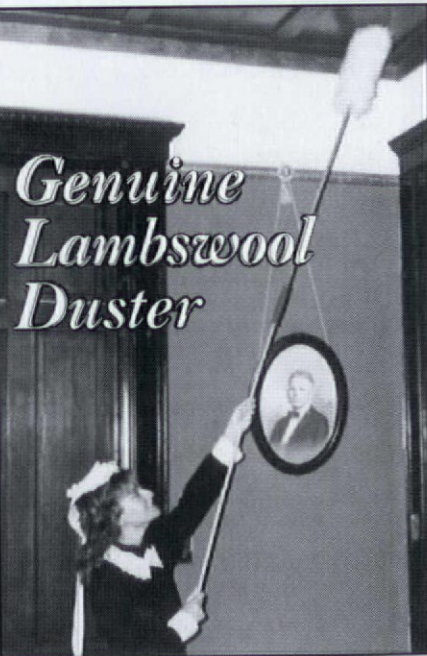
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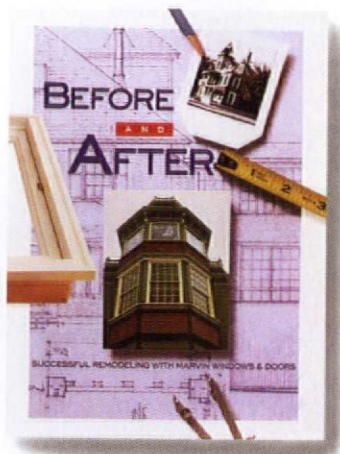
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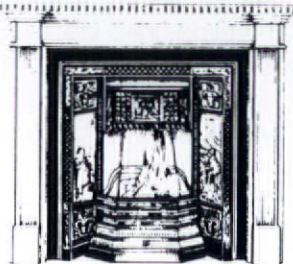
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- **Detailed floor plans** showing all dimensions for framing, plus detailed layout and location of electrical and plumbing components.
- **Interior elevations** are included in some plans, showing interior views of kitchen, bath, fireplace, built-ins, and cabinet designs.
- **A window and door schedule.**
- **Building cross sections:** cornice, fireplace, and cabinet sections when needed to help your builder understand major interior details.

- **Framing diagrams** that show layouts of framing pieces and their locations for roof, first and second floors.
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Mail-order plans have a long history in shaping the residential architecture of the country. Of the thousands of house plans available today, few exhibit good design and a grasp of historical proportion and detail. So, in response to requests from OHJ readers, the editors have "done the homework": We've hand-picked plans. In each issue, we offer the most attractive, authentic, and buildable of the historical designs, from all periods of American architectural history. Let us know what plans you're looking for.

You can order actual blueprints for all the houses featured. Plans conform to national building-code standards — however, *modifications are usually necessary for your site and local requirements, so you'll probably need the assistance of a professional designer (your builder may qualify) or an architect.*

Other notes: (1) Plans are copyrighted, and they are printed for you when you order. Therefore, they are *not refundable*. If you order additional sets of the same plan within 30 days of your original order, you can purchase them for \$15 each. (2) Mirror-reverse plans are useful when the house would fit the site better "flopped." For this you need one set of mirror-reverse plans for the contractor; but because the reverse plans have backwards lettering and dimensions, all other sets should be ordered right-reading. (3) Heating and air-conditioning layouts are not included. You need a local mechanical contractor to size and locate the proper unit for your specific conditions of climate and site.

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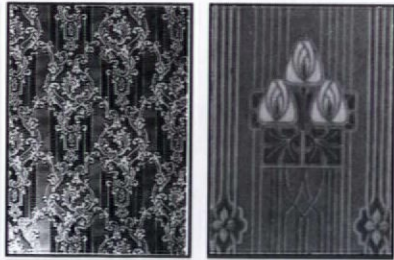
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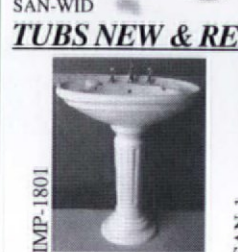
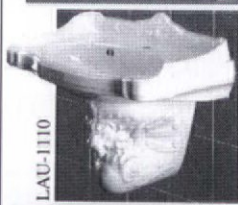
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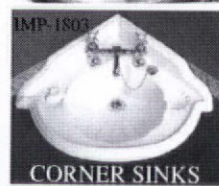
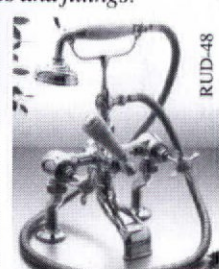
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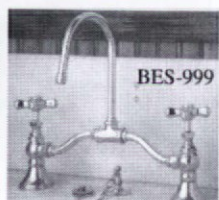
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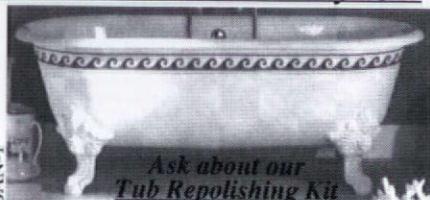
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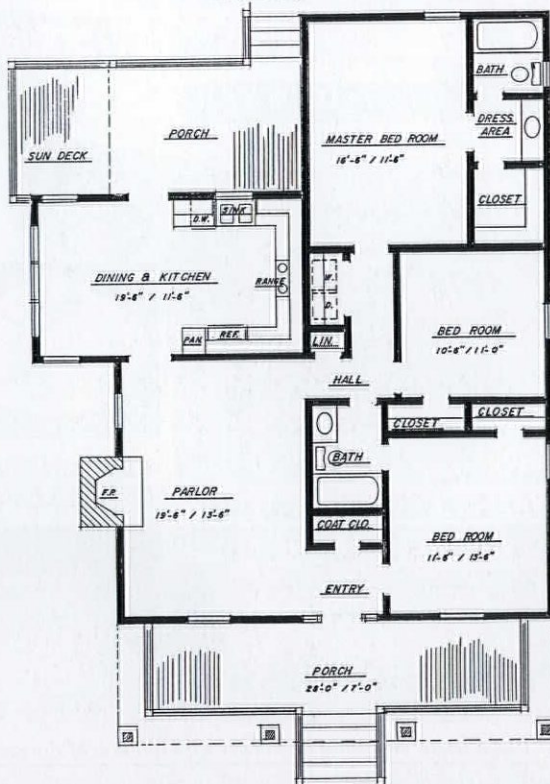
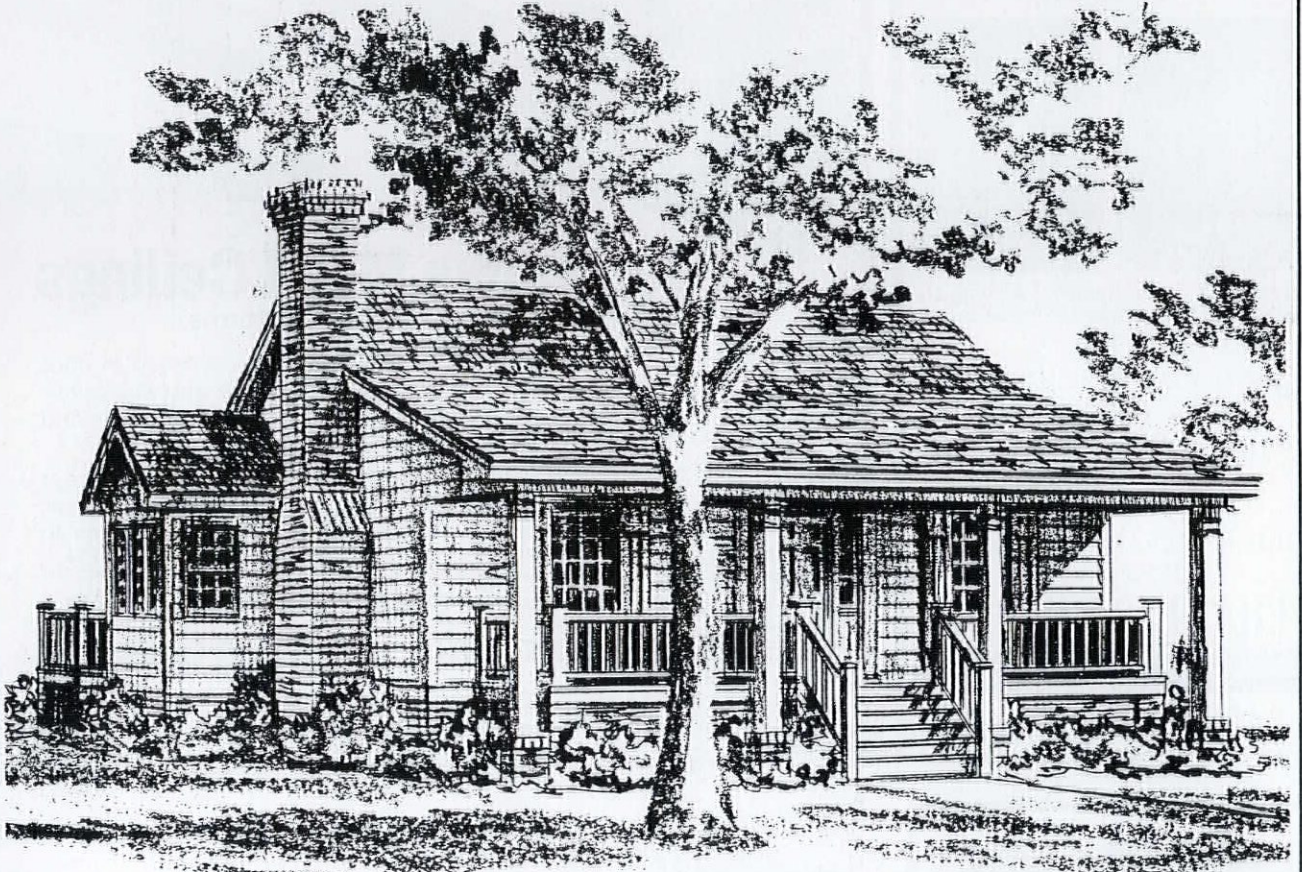
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Plan: V-02A-WL

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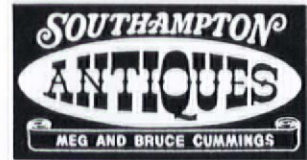
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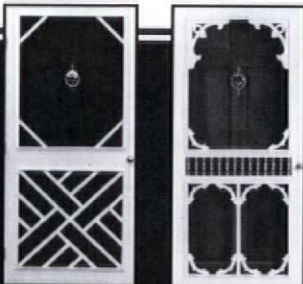
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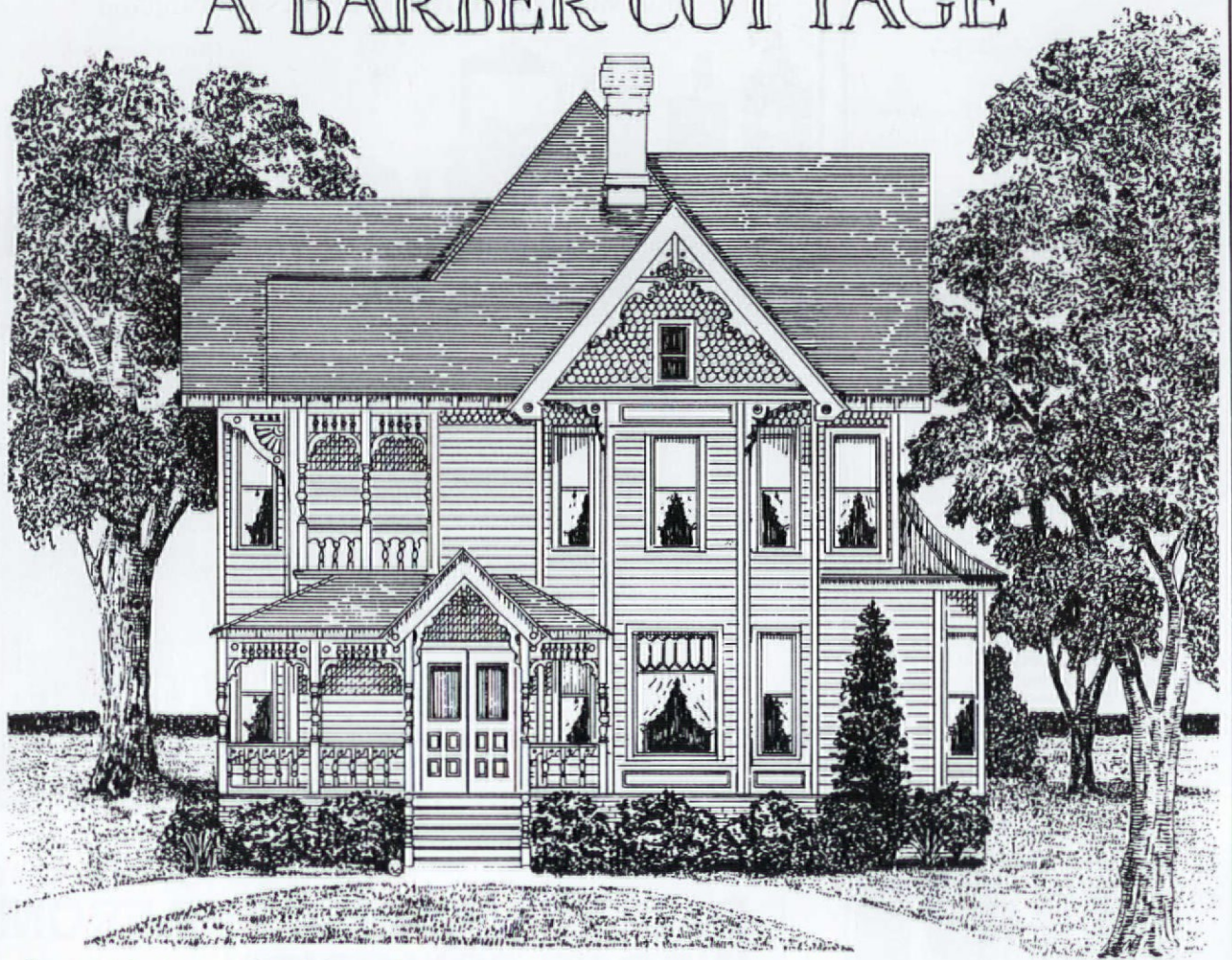
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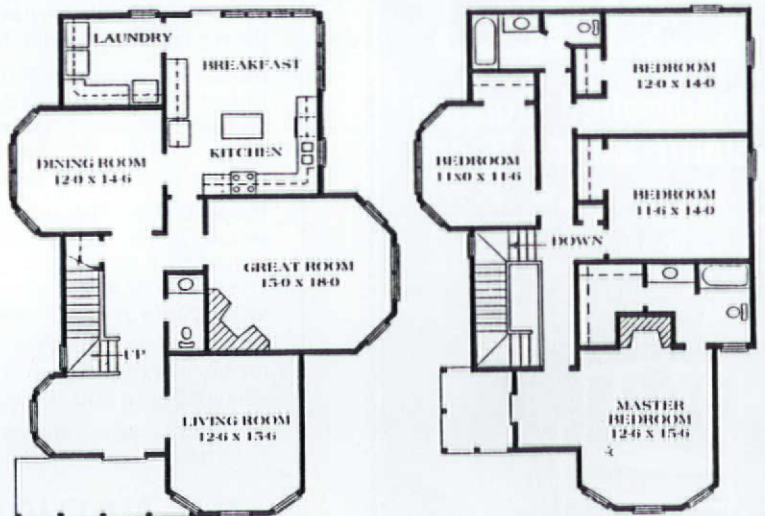


Inspired by house plan #41 in *Cottage Souvenir No. 2*, this charming Victorian house is typical of the multi-gabled, asymmetrical form favored by George F. Barber. A full complement of decorative woodwork — from fish-scale shingles to gable ornaments — is displayed on the exterior. Inside, an unusual bay in the foyer creates an elegant reception area. The floor plan is well organized and ideal for entertaining.

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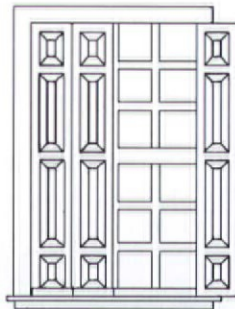
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First-time grainers will find this reproduction 19th-century graining comb a fun way to master decorative painting techniques. It's a traditional tool that can be used to create faux-bois or patterned-comb finishes. Made of blue steel, the graining comb comes in four sizes: 1", 2", 3", and 4". The three different teeth widths — fine, medium, and coarse — produce varied effects when dragged through glaze. The graining combs range in price from \$3 to \$4.50, depending upon the size. For more information, contact Gallier House Museum, 1118-1132 Royal St., Dept. OHJ, New Orleans, LA 70116; (504) 523-6722.



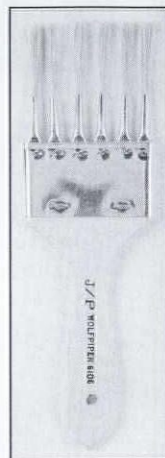
Graining Tools

Precise Painting

To add fine details to your grained finish, try using a piped overgrainer. Unlike floggers or stipplers, this tool is used to put on color rather than drag it off. Janovic/Plaza has two types of piped overgrainers: selected pure white bristle and ox-hair bristle. The pure white bristle overgrainers range in size from 4 pipes to 9 pipes; the ox-hair overgrainers have 3 to

5 nickel-plated pipes. Janovic also carries many other specialty tools and materials for decorative-painting projects. The piped overgrainers cost \$35.20 to \$54.56 for the ox-hair type and \$27.79 to \$60.19 for the white bristle ones. For information, contact Janovic/Plaza Inc., 30-35 Thompson Ave., Dept. OHJ, Long Island City, NY 11101; (718) 786-4444.

This overgrainer's short, sanded-wood handle allows for greater bristle control.



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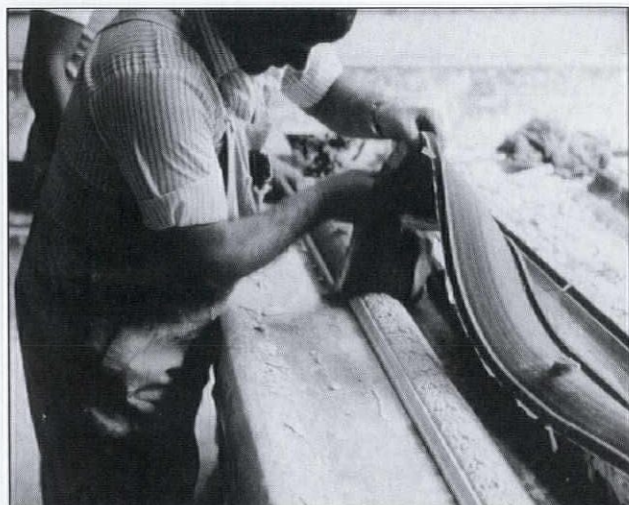
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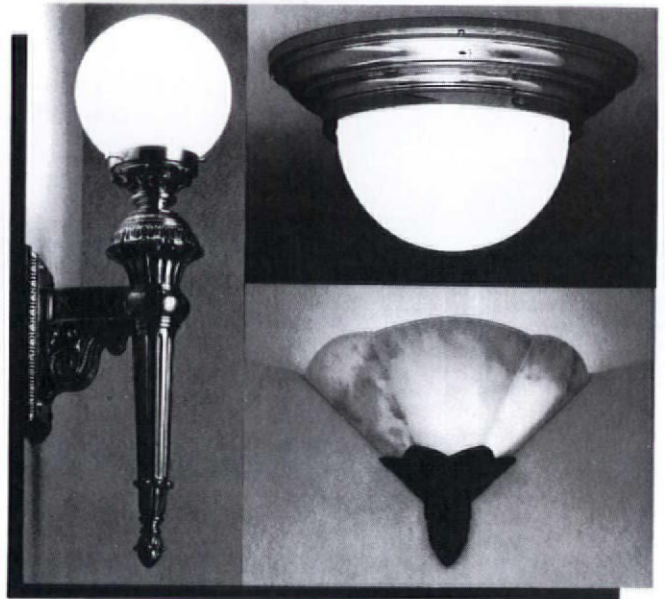
This ceiling medallion goes up with adhesive or finishing screws.

style design and measures 31-1/2" X 19-5/8". All the items can be painted or drilled to create openings for lighting fixtures. The ceiling medallions range in price from \$11.80 to \$130. For information, contact Outwater Plastic/Industries, 4 Passaic St., Dept. OHJ, Wood-Ridge, NJ 07075; (800) 888-0880.



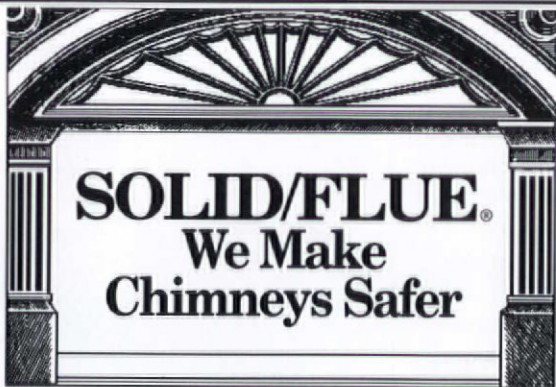
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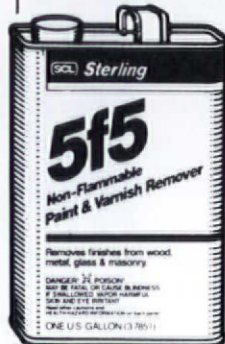


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The patterns for the toiles de Jouy are reproduced from the original engraved copper rollers.

monochromatic designs of historical, mythological, and seasonal events. "Le Couronnement de la Rosiere" (shown left) shows an annual French tradition of crowning the most virtuous woman in a village with roses. The 40-inch-wide fabric comes in two colors: teal or red. Other fabrics tell of man's first flight in a

balloon and the commemoration of the French/American alliance. "Le Couronnement" toiles de Jouy costs \$57 per yard. For a local distributor, contact (800) 8-PIERRE.

She Does Windows

French window treatments were popular among 19th-century decorators, who placed a great emphasis on the manner in which curtains were hung. Vintage Valances offers custom-made, historic window treatments in Empire, Renaissance- and Rococo-Revival styles. Using asymmetrically-cut fabric draped over the curtain rod, the French Swag (shown below) is complicated to make. The curtains are hand sewn or machine sewn depending upon the period and au-



In some designs, one or both cascades are extended to form full-length curtains.

thenticity required. Prices vary with fabric and trim. For information, contact Vintage Valances, Box 43326, Dept. OHJ, Cincinnati, OH 45243; (513) 561-8665.



Contoured ornamentation is the hallmark of Louis XV furniture.

The Richelieu Collection

The exuberant style of Rococo furniture can be found in the Richelieu collection from Martha M. House. The collection, which includes a sofa, love seat, and marble-topped coffee table, is available in four different finishes: white or fruitwood with gold trim, walnut, and mahogany. The decorative woodwork on these Louis XV reproduction pieces are machine-carved from maple. A large selection of brocades, tapestries, and velvets is offered for the upholstery. The pieces range in price from \$429.95 to \$1399.95. For information, contact Martha M. House, 1022 South Decatur St., Dept. OHJ, Montgomery, AL 36104; (205) 264-3558.

Sophisticated Seating

Often used in front of long windows, scrolled benches were a dramatic form of French Revival seating. This reproduction bench (shown right), originally designed by 19th-century decorator Elsie de Wolfe, would be an elegant addition to any French-style interior. True to the original, the Elsie de Wolfe bench is made of beech wood with a silver-leaf finish. It is upholstered in reproduction Scalmandre silk fabric and trimmed with crystal beads. The bench measures 42" W X 28" H, with a seat height of 18-1/2 inches. A

gold-leaf finish is also available. For information, contact Trouvailles Inc., 64 Grove St., P.O. Box 9142, Dept. OHJ, Watertown, MA 02272-9142; (617) 926-2520.

Designed for the John Wanamaker house, the original bench was later moved to the Rosecliff mansion of Newport, Rhode Island.



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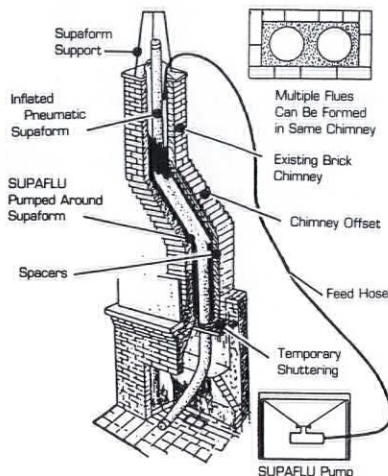
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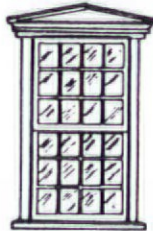
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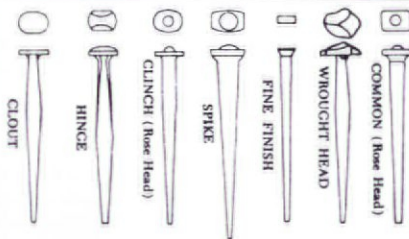
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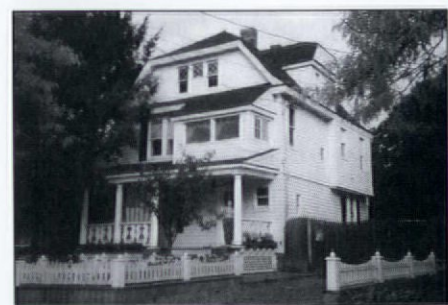
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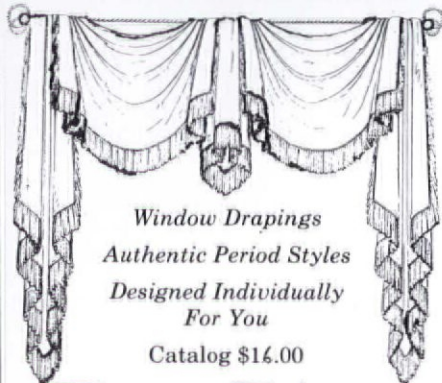
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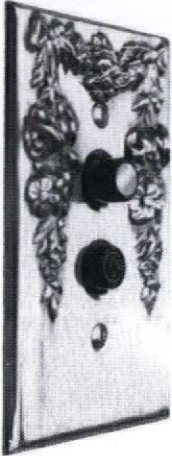


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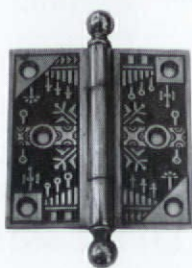
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OLD MAGAZINES — Nation's Business, 6/5/23; Town & Country, 8/1/19; Life, 3/17/21; McCalls, 3/22; Ladies Home Journal, Scribner's, Collier's, Saturday Evening Post, as well as any others. Please write M. Pormann, RD #2, Box 266C, Auburn, PA 17922, or call (717) 754-3080.

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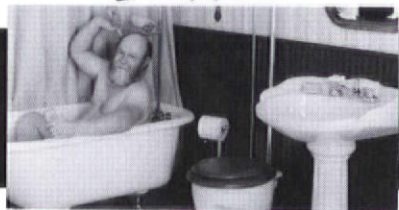
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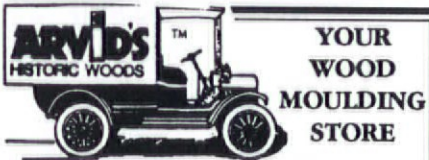
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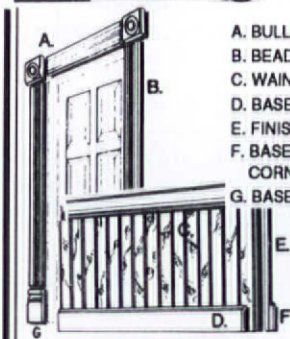
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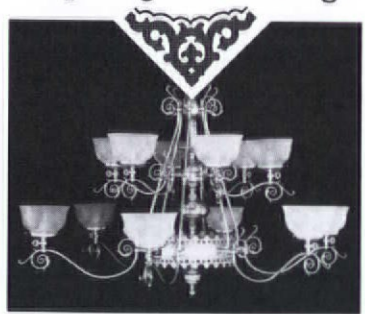
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Unreal Estate



Anyone in the market for a house? If you're looking south of Market Street in San Francisco, consider the two properties above, both built around 1912. Your selection depends on whether you want a house 'with or without' — with or without period character, with or without any visible connection to the streetscape, with or without beauty.

The house on the left has been maintained down to the last modillion and swag. The house on the right has been stripped of its ornament — only a lonely row of dentils

with its egg-and-dart moulding has survived this so-called 'maintenance-free' exterior. But what good is freedom from maintenance when it entails a blank surface of substitute siding (both vertical and horizontal!)? That new skin has also undercut the house's fenestration: The windows have been reduced to almost a quarter of their original size. To compensate, the center window has been drastically enlarged, an error compounded by the insertion of a window with horizontally-divided lights, despite its four vertically-divided companions — a perfect complement to the multi-directional siding.

So close yet so far: These two houses may be located in the same neighborhood, but they're still light years apart. (Thanks to OHJ reader Toby Williams for sending the photos.)

WIN FAME AND \$50. If you spot a classic example of remuddling, send us clear color slides. We'll award you \$50 if your photos are selected. The message is more dramatic if you send along a picture of a similar unremuddled building. Remuddling Editor, Old-House Journal, 2 Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930.

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Oilpatch Shotguns

The Shotgun house, a common Southern building type from the 1880s to 1930s, is often associated with the development of the oil industry in Oklahoma, particularly in the cities of Tulsa, Cushing, and Drumright. Oklahoma Shotgun houses, however, deviate slightly from the common floor plan by having front and rear doors that are often offset. Traditionally, all the doors, both interior and exterior, would be aligned so that, hypothetically, a shot from a gun could travel through the house without causing damage.

Shotgun houses did not appear in Oklahoma before the oil booms of the early-20th century. The house type was probably spread by a population tied to rail, timber, and oil industries. In an industrial setting, these structures were easily constructed by unskilled workers using local materials. If needed, the houses could be moved on rail cars or dismantled and then reassembled in a new location.

The pragmatic nature of building in an oil field dictated the simple, board-frame construction of these Shotgun houses. Walls were erected without studs and consisted of a single layer of wide boards that were set vertically across the plates, secured only at the top and bottom. The gaps were then covered on the exterior with narrow boards. Today, a relatively small percentage of Shotgun houses exhibit this original board-and-batten siding. Asbestos siding, wood siding, roll composition, and even bricks have been used to add strength and insulation to many existing buildings.

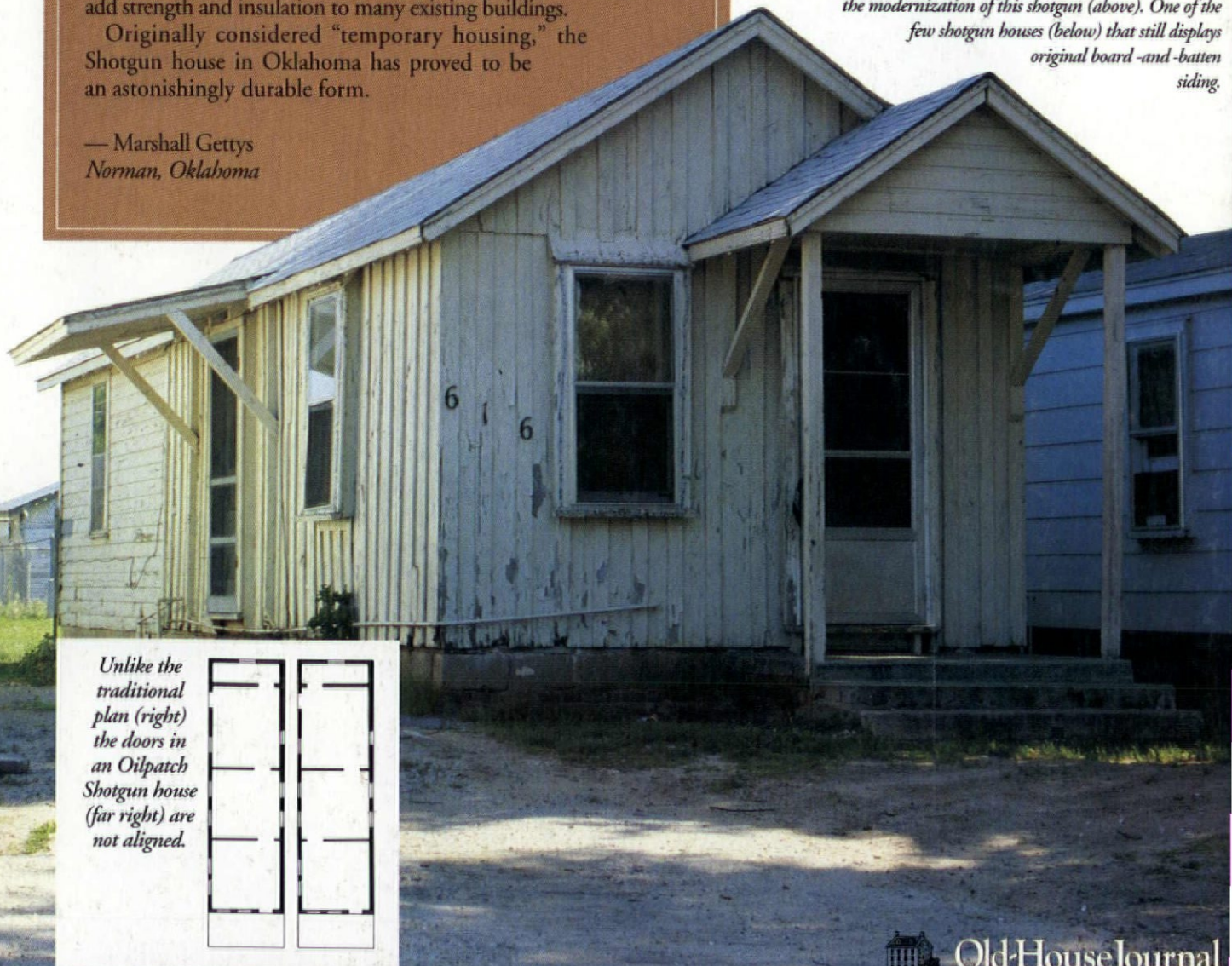
Originally considered "temporary housing," the Shotgun house in Oklahoma has proved to be an astonishingly durable form.

— Marshall Gettys
Norman, Oklahoma

Vernacular Houses



The shotgun's classic proportions (a length two times the width) is often exceeded in Oklahoma, as in this uncommon hipped-roof example (top). Substitute siding and new windows complete the modernization of this shotgun (above). One of the few shotgun houses (below) that still displays original board-and-batten siding.



Unlike the traditional plan (right) the doors in an Oilpatch Shotgun house (far right) are not aligned.

