

# OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

MARCH/APRIL 1995

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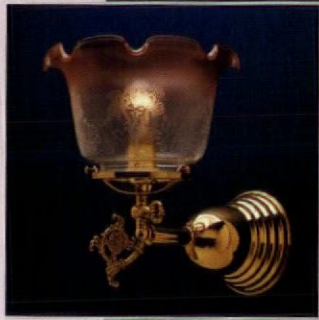


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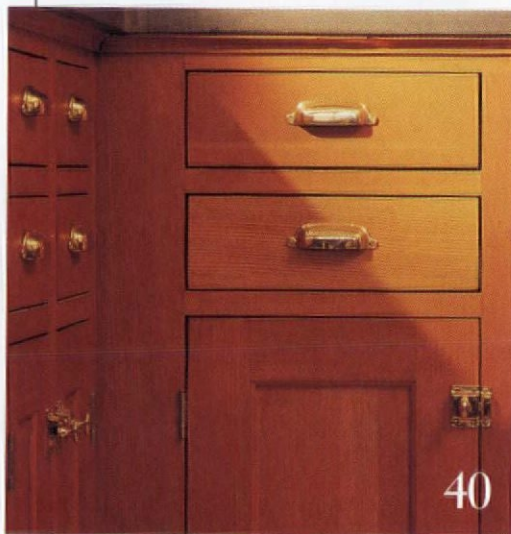
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ON THE COVER: Reproduction beadboard and binpulls add turn-of-the-century style to this newly built custom kitchen. Our thanks to homeowner Jan McEvoy and The Kennebec Company.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH  
BY STEVE MARSEL

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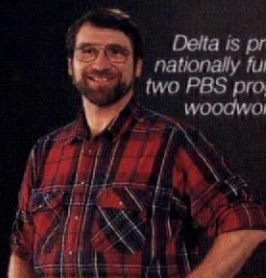
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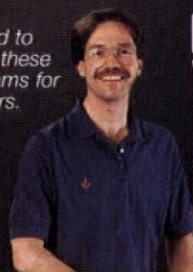
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# Kitchens and Concrete

**N**O MATTER HOW MUCH OF A RESTORATION purist you are, the old-house kitchen is where historical authenticity clashes with contemporary living. In a dining room, for example, it takes little more than an electrified chandelier to make 120-year-old furniture and decorations work for today's entertaining. Kitchens are much trickier to pull off.

Imagine a perfectly preserved kitchen from the late-19th century, even one equipped with running water and electricity. A late-20th century family would soon lose patience with the pantry dressers (cumbersome drawers and cramped counterspace for a microwave), lack of cabinet and wall area (no home for the dishwasher and refrigerator/freezer) or a lone light hanging from the ceiling. Just having a kitchen, in fact, is questionable in a house built before 1840, when meals came from the colonial hall — a living room with an open hearth.

So, few old-house owners would live with a museum kitchen, but most don't want to cook in a time warp either — say, 1970s avocado appliances injected in an Arts & Crafts interior. Since kitchens in any house, new or old, get a lot of attention, we've focussed on some specific design areas in this issue — building modern cabinets with period details, ranges and refrigerators in the historic kitchen, buying reproduction tile — to help with the old-house kitchen balancing act.

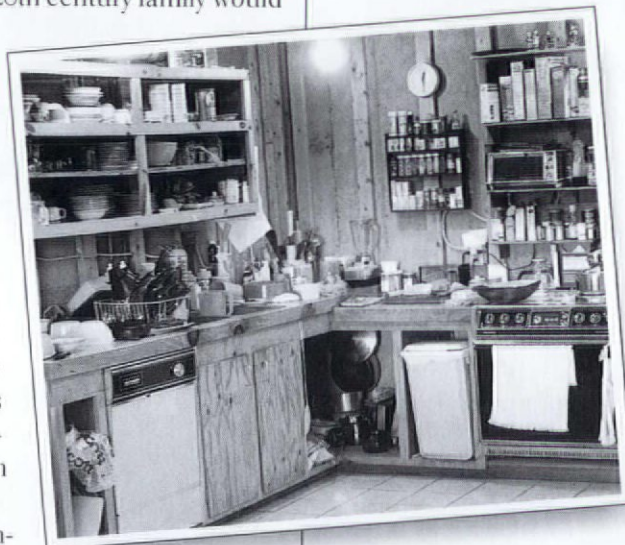
IN THIS ISSUE, TOO, IS A CLASSIC OHJ ARTICLE, ONE WHERE all the photos and information came from OHJ readers. Nearly a year ago, we asked for help in telling the story behind concrete block houses, those distinctive, turn-of-the-century buildings that stand in every town.

The response was nothing less than remarkable, and a true measure of how extraordinarily willing our readers are to share information about historic buildings.

Randy Cotton and I read every letter, bundle, and Fax. They came from as far afield as Texas, Oregon and South Carolina — 32 different states and one province in all. We looked at pictures of 30 Foursquares, 21 Bungalows, 12 Colonial Revivals, 27 cottage style houses, 7 farmhouses, 5 Dutch Colonials, and 4 Queen Annes,

not to mention an assortment of exotic houses and many commercial structures. There were old photos, new slides, antique manuals — even audio tapes. Several folks sent studies of concrete block building in their region, all very welcome. However, the broad range of responses enabled us to look at the phenomenon across the continent — giving us the unique overview we had hoped to have.

We could have filled the whole issue with information and photos but, of course, there wasn't room for everything. (Let us know if you'd like to see a future Old-House Living article on Block House tales.) Nonetheless, putting together the article, which starts on page 32, was both enlightening and heartwarming. "We need to keep these stories alive so we don't forget how much people are capable of doing," wrote one reader. "Our block house was built to last more than one lifetime," noted some folks in Michigan, "I have never felt it shift or creak; friends and neighbors tell us they wish they had our house during a bad, windy storm." Still another penned, "Thank you for opening my eyes to these structures." Speaking for the editors here, many, many thanks to all who wrote for being our eyes.



**After gutting a remuddling, which design path does an old-house kitchen follow — contemporary, historical, or some of both?**

*Edna Kroll*



  
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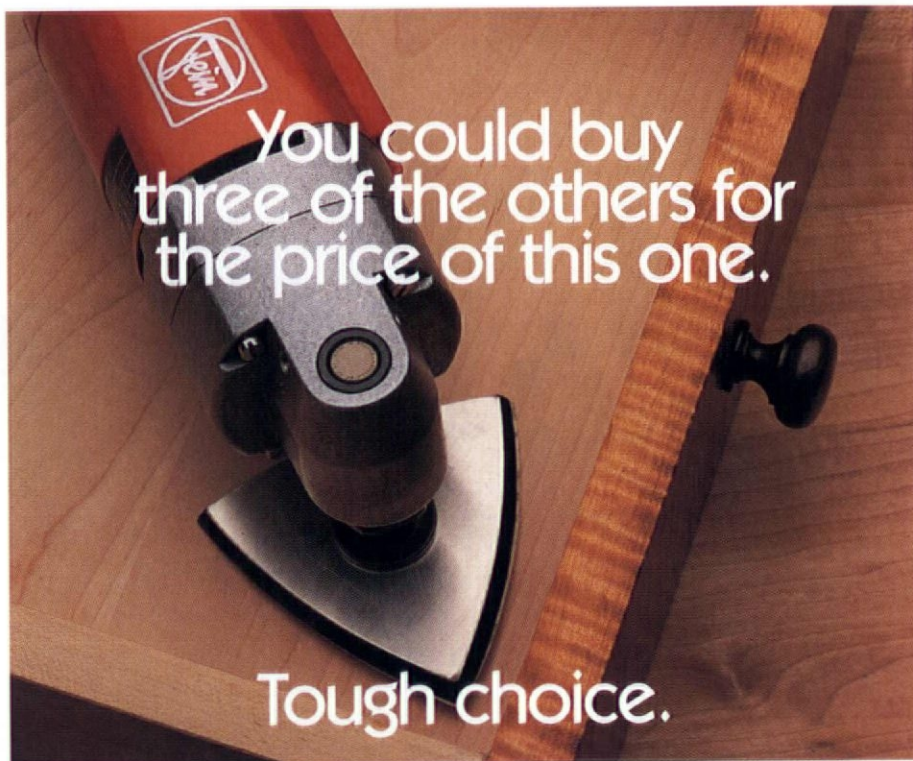
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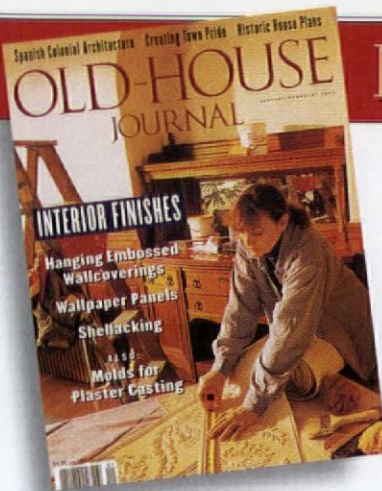
Now try to make the others do what you just did with the Fein. All the time asking yourself, "Is this what I really want?" (No choice.)



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## SPACE PANNELLING

Dear OHJ,

I HAVE BEEN PLANNING TO INSTALL wallpaper panelling, but I'd never seen anything in print about it. After reading "The Antique Art of Wallpaper Panelling" (Jan./Feb. 1995), I realized that my plan to run one border around the room (French panelling) was not what I remembered from my parents house — the model for my project. Now I plan to panel in sections corresponding to the doors and windows (space panelling).

— C. J. ALLEN  
Portland, Ore.

## DEFINE YOUR TERMS

AS A CHARTER SUBSCRIBER (AND A 1977 article contributor), I have enjoyed OHJ's growth and continued dedication to real information over the years. I also like the recent improvements in layout. However, I got a bit confused by some undefined terminology in the Jan./Feb. 1995 issue. In "A Guide to Hanging Lin-crusta & Anaglypta" you didn't explain the terms "dado," "frieze," or "panel." In the future, how about printing a sidebar that defines uncommon words used in the body of the article (especially those that have several meanings).

— DANIEL J. MEHN  
New Orleans, La.

*Editor's Note: No doubt about it, wallcoverings have their own nomen-*

*clature. We assume that our readers are familiar with general old-house lingo. For truly archaic or unusual shoptalk, however, we do often print a glossary as you suggest. The wall-papering words you had trouble with have a similar meaning to their standard architectural definition. (A dado is a wallpaper wainscot; a frieze is a wide border along the top of a wall; and a panel is a rectangle of wall-covering like a panel on a door.) For a good glossary of wallpapering terminology try Wallpapers for Historic Buildings, by Richard C. Nylander, available from the Old-House Bookshop (800-931-2931).*

## SPANISH COLONIALS

I READ, WITH PLEASURE, YOUR ARTICLE on Spanish Colonial houses (Jan./Feb. 1995). It moves me to offer an observation. The architecture of Spanish residences, missions, presidios, towns, and agricultural establishments in this hemisphere owe their origin to Rome through Spain. The residences discussed in the article are essentially a version of the Roman villa with the patio serving the same function as the atrium. The exteriors of the residences tended to be quite plain, but the interiors and patios could be elegant. I enjoyed the article and hope to see more

## A NEW OLD HOUSE



MY NEW "OLD HOUSE," WAS BUILT FROM YOUR Tudor Revival house plan (Sept./Oct. 1991). It is the only Tudor style house — and the only all-brick house — in this upscale development. Aside from a few cedar-sided homes, virtually every other house is "maintenance-free" plastic, including window frames and doors. Think what the future will be like when all these vinyl houses get old. I hope that grim prospect will be alleviated by a new generation of old houses.

— DONALD F. VITALIANO  
Troy, N.Y.

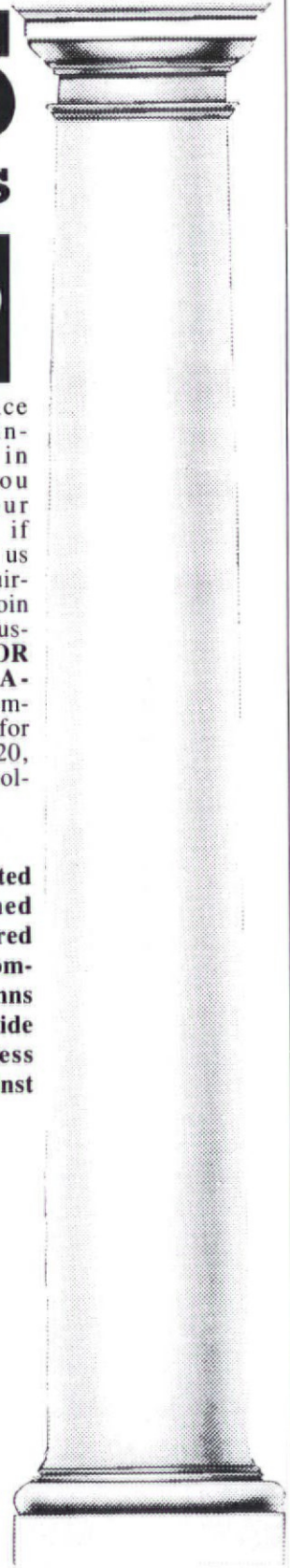
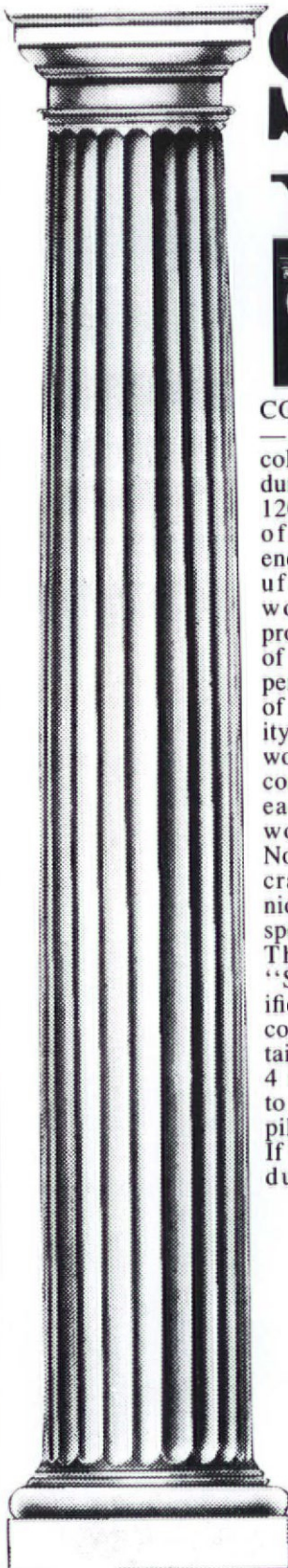


**A 1994 Tudor Revival, built from OHJ Historic House Plan P-03A-LG (see p. 70). Brick and half-timbered stucco provide a traditional exterior. A two-way fireplace between rooms highlights the interior.**

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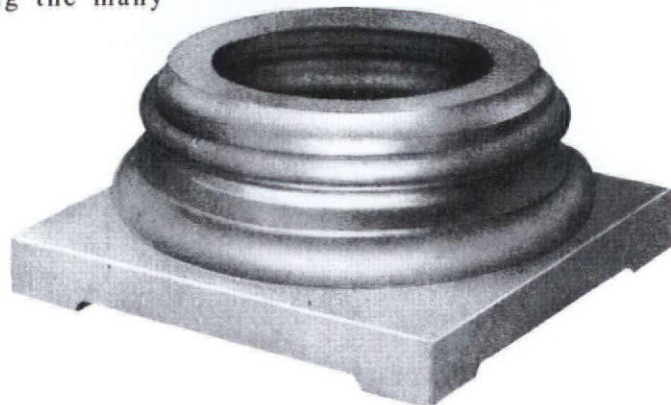
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— JOHN W. CLARK  
*Austin, Tex.*

## HEATER ELEMENTS

AN OHJ READER ASKED ABOUT A turn-of-the-century electric heater in the Jan./Feb. 1995 Ask OHJ. The heating elements she needs are available from the Eagle Electric Manufacturing Company, Inc., 45-31 Court Square, Dept. OHJ, Long Island City, NY 11101; (718) 937-8000.

— H. WILLIAM WINSTANLEY  
*Clawson, Mich.*

## VERNACULAR THANKS

IMAGINE OUR SURPRISE AND PLEASURE to look at the Jan./Feb. 1995 OHJ and discover our cottage on the back cover! It was the Christmas present of a lifetime since we think of OHJ as the "bible." We are addicted to restoring old houses, and don't know what we'd do without OHJ.

— FRANCES ELKINS & JAMES SHORE  
*Detroit, Mich.*



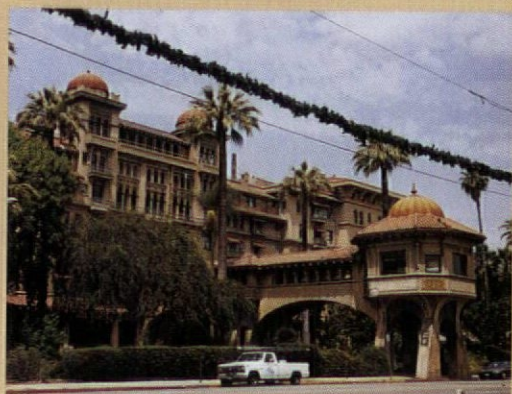
The Lubic home has the boxy shape, hipped roof, and full-width porch of a Foursquare. It also has a center hall, not uncommon in houses of this size.

## A CENTER HALL

AFTER READING "FIGURING OUT THE Foursquare" (Sept./Oct. 1994), I felt compelled to write. Yes, I agree with James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell, a Foursquare can have a

## APARTMENT RESTORATION

I ENJOYED "HOUSES OF HOMES" (Nov./Dec. 1994), especially because we have just purchased a unit at the Castle Green, an 1898 apartment building here in Pasadena. It was constructed as an annex to the fashionable Hotel Green. The hotel is gone, but the annex retains



Hard to believe, but the Castle Green was merely an annex to a fancy hotel. The hotel is gone, although the covered bridge remains.

much of its original detail, including: mosaic tile floor, elaborate cage elevator, marble stairway with ornate cast-iron balustrade and newel, and faux onyx wall treatments. The ownership group is just starting to become active in the restoration of this wonderful building.

— HENRY J. GOLAS  
*Santa Barbara, Calif.*

center hall. Our 1913 home (left) has a center hall that runs the length of the house. And it'd be hard to call it anything other than a Foursquare. We appreciate the information your magazine provides and the way it arrives just in the nick of time.

— MARY LUBIC  
*Asheboro, N.C.*

## SHELLAC A VOC

A SHORT COMMENT ON "A GOOD Shellacking" in your Jan./Feb. 1995 issue: Good article. I have fond memories of using lots of shellac in my high school shop days. One correction, however, denatured alcohol does emit volatile organic compounds as it dries.

— MARK NOWOTARSKI  
*Stamford, Conn.*

## ITALIANATE DUPLEX

I ENJOYED "HOUSE OF HOMES" (Nov./Dec. 1994). It was very interesting in light of the restoration

project I am preparing for. In my hometown of Eureka, Wisconsin, stands an Italianate duplex mansion (below) built by identical twin brothers in 1852. Their house sits abandoned, the decorative brackets and detailing shown in early sketches and photos washed away by time. It is my dream to restore this grand old building with advice from OHJ.

— DAN BUTKIEWICZ  
*Oshkosh, Wisc.*



The mirror-image apartments were decorated alike for identical twins.



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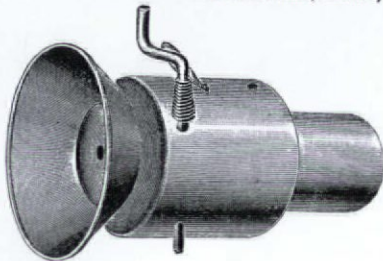
# Ask OHJ

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## Early Intercom

*After removing wallboard from a number of rooms in our old house, we uncovered an original communication system: tubes that run through the walls. The hollow passages are still intact, but there are no mouthpieces on the ends. What have we found, and where can we get replacement parts?*

— Don Wilkinson  
Oakland, Calif.



Speaking tube mouthpiece with a whistle (Trout Hardware Co. 1907).

OLD-HOUSE INTERCOMS LIKE YOURS were common from the 1850s to the early 1900s, especially in large houses, and where servants were employed. Yours is a speaking tube, a simple system consisting of tin or copper pipes, 1" to 1 1/2" in diameter, soldered together and run through walls (and sometimes underground between buildings). As you may have already discovered, they transmit voices remarkably well.

The mouthpieces varied. They were constructed of silver plate, ivory, or, most commonly, porcelain. They typically had spring-loaded covers or plugs that had to be opened to speak into the tube. This damper served to prevent them from becoming a means for overhearing conversations (a special concern

because they ran to servants' quarters). The mouthpieces also commonly had a whistle in the door. When closed, blowing into the mouthpiece attracted attention on the other end of the tube. Another call method consisted of a small rubber bulb, which, when squeezed, rang a bell at the other end. A hardware variation included a flexible hose so the mouthpiece could be removed from the wall.

As far as we know, there are no reproduction sources for speaking tube mouthpieces. (We'd love to hear from anyone who has found a source.) Other readers have reported success at architectural salvage yards, so be persistent and you might score a set. Another potential source is the marine industry. "Voice" tubes were used in ships for bridge-to-engine-room communication in case of power loss. You may find a marine safety supplier

who still has some in stock, but be prepared. They tend to be costly.

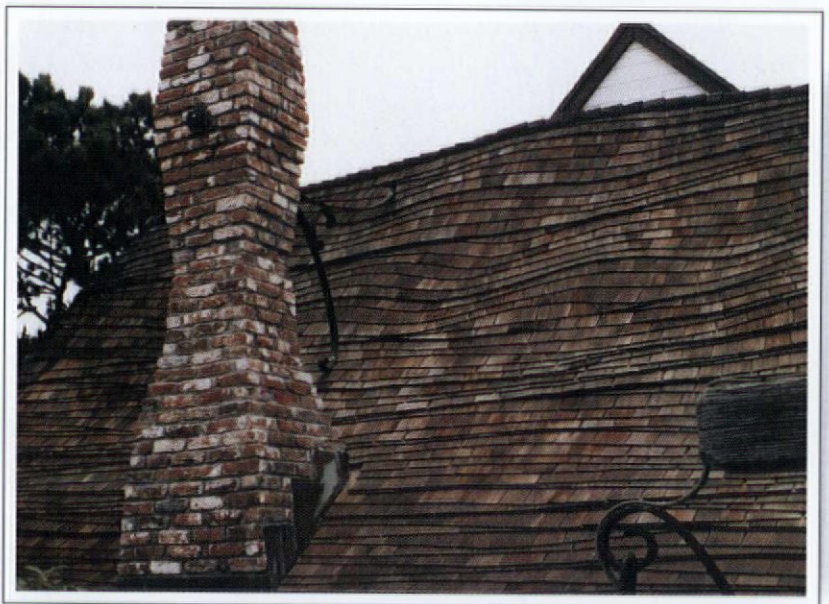
## Thatch Roof

*What can you tell me about "ocean wave" shingle roofs? Carmel, California, is famous for its storybook cottages, and many of the homes in the area use this style of roofing. My 60-year-old house is built in the old-English cottage style, but has green asphalt shingles. I want to bring back the ocean wave roof if likely once had.*

— Rick Steres  
Pacific Grove, Calif.

OHJ WAS THE FIRST TO REPORT ON thatch roofs back in 1983. With uneven courses and rolling eaves, these wood-shingle roofs, so *en vogue* in the 1920s, are designed to mimic straw or reeds. To produce

[continued on page 16]



A modern version of the traditional "ocean wave" roof, in Carmel, California. High spots and rounded edges are framed in under the wood shingles.



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## Ask OHJ

[continued from page 14]

the long, irregular waves, the shingle butts were factory cut to an uneven line. When aligned on the roof, these angled cuts created a wavy run. The exposure varied from 1" to 5", averaging 3".

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— Suzanne E. Andrews  
Malvern, Pa.

THE GROUND IMMEDIATELY SURROUNDING an old house has the potential for being archaeologically rich turf. Old-house owners and restorers, as well as museum-building stewards, are increasingly interested in what's below the surface of their properties, but interpreting what you find is not as simple as reading layers of wallpaper.



**This was probably a shed addition foundation, according to archaeologists who reviewed site information.**

Wade P. Catts, a principal archaeologist with John Milner Associates (specialists in architecture, archaeology, and preservation planning in West Chester, Pa.) offers the following advice:

"In general, archaeological excavations are difficult for a non-professional archaeologist to conduct. By nature, excavation is a destructive process; once a site is dug, it cannot be 'undug.' That's why proper and careful records (maps, profile drawings, photographs, field notes) need to be maintained at every stage. In particular, the 'stratigraphy' — the way that soils are layered at the site — and the artifacts that these layers contain are very important in understanding the sequence of construction of architectural features, such as foundations. Measured drawings of soil profiles are necessary to determine the chronology of this layering."

There are alternatives, however, to hiring an expensive service, he said. Some semi-professional archaeological groups are pleased to survey sites *pro bono*, as educational tools, or for local historical research. Catts recommends contacting local avocational archaeological groups, archaeological societies, and college anthropology departments. They may be looking for sites just like yours.



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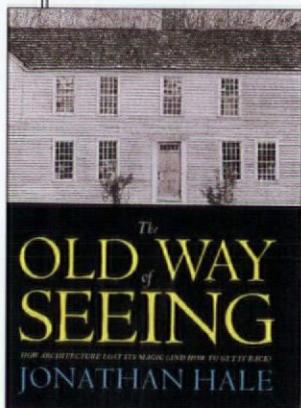


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# Building in the Fourth Dimension

BY GORDON BOCK

*Why do old houses often possess a timeless appeal, while so much new construction looks dull or ugly the minute it's finished? How does a structure continue to serve a purpose as generations and uses come and go? These questions are faced by anyone with ambitions to build for posterity. Separate, but equally unconventional answers come in two of the most thought-provoking architecture books of the past year.*



ORDER FROM HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO., ORDER PROCESSING, WAYSIDE RD., BURLINGTON, MA 01803; (800) 225-3362. (1994; 228 PAGES CLOTHBOUND; \$27.45 PPD PLUS LOCAL TAX; ISBN# 0-395-60573-3)

principles that animate memorable buildings “the old way of seeing,” and he makes a convincing case they’re what’s missing from a lot of today’s architecture. When a building is “designed as a composition of related forms,” he says, “it is informed by a system of proportions.” Through the hand of the designer, these proportions then reach us as visual patterns of light and shade. The patterns are not mysterious — often no more sophisticated than kindergarten blocks — but they do contribute the magic in a building that “works.”

The principles behind these patterns are ancient, and Mr. Hale is quick to note that their masterful use has continued, on occasion, up to our day. The natural proportions of the Golden Section show up in sea shells, Greek temples, and Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. The overlapping arcs of the *vesica piscis* link

SEEN FROM A DISTANCE, A classic building facade performs akin to a good poster. It’s the interplay of basic geometric shapes and shadows that impresses the viewer first — not the details — and these communicate directly with the eye and mind. The features in a facade can guide the eye to see particular parts, and lead it to make associations that give a building vitality, harmony, and interest. Don’t believe it? Try looking at an old church without gazing up the steeple, heavenward.

Jonathan Hale, an architect and critic working in the Boston area, calls the visual principles

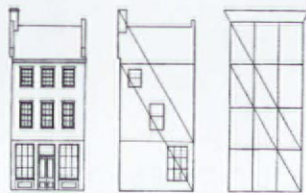
Gothic cathedrals with Louis Sullivan’s 1898 Guaranty Building and the 1929 Chrysler Building of William Van Allen (not to mention the CBS “eye” logo). The special gift of *The Old Way of Seeing* is

the lucid explanation of how the visual principles operate. Regulating lines are the author’s device (borrowed from Le Corbusier) for examining the patterns suggested by the placement of windows, doors, and roofs. When he dashes them across photos of houses great and small, they bring to light the underlying organization as miraculously as an X-ray scan.

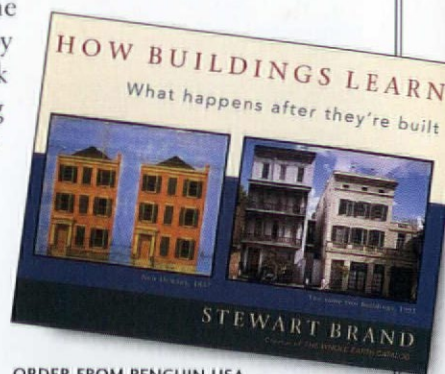
For Mr. Hale, the old way of seeing started to dim after 1830 — by no coincidence, about the time building design became homogenized by increased commerce and “denatured” by machine production. Today we’re left with houses, even those built with historical features, that often lack unity and grace because the elements lack organization; the pieces don’t fit. How to restore the old way of seeing? Hale’s call is to put back proportion — and creative departure from proportion. He rejects the use of formula ideas, and favors returning play and intuitive reason to the basic design process by altering the way we look at things — “designing on the right side of the brain” is one approach. “The lines,” says Hale, “come later.”

THE REWARD FOR irrelevance in architecture is often a wrecking ball. While we permit a few lucky specimens to survive

if they transcend fashion, most structures are doomed to extinction once they’re not in step with the purpose of the day. Buildings, after all, are not chameleons that can alter themselves to mesh [continued on page 20]



Regulating lines organize the elements in a facade.

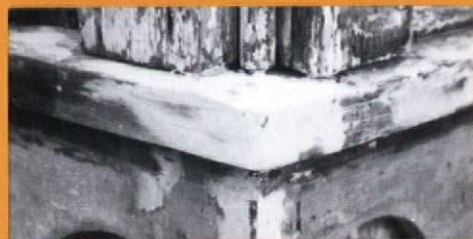


ORDER FROM PENGUIN USA, CONSUMER SALES, BOX 120, BERGENFIELD, NJ 07621-0120; (800) 253-6476 EX. 232. (1994; 243 PAGES CLOTHBOUND; \$32 PPD; ISBN# 0-670-83515-3.)

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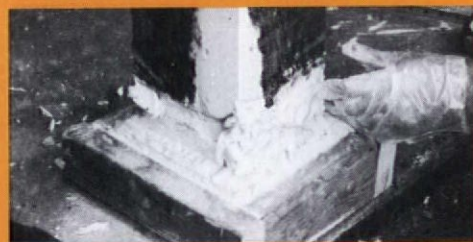
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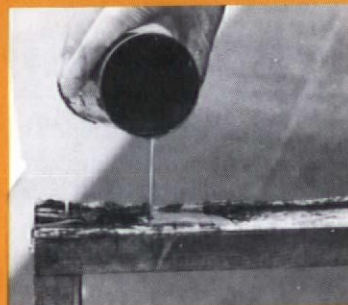
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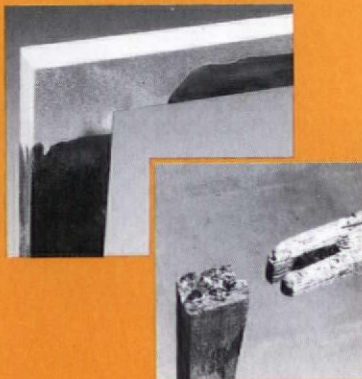
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[continued from page 18]

with a new environment, right? Stewart Brand thinks otherwise, and in an original book he offers surprising evidence of building "knowledge."

Perhaps it takes a naturalist's perspective to propose that the design phase of a building doesn't end once it's up. Mr. Brand, who redefined reference with the legendary *Whole Earth Catalog*, also happens to be a biologist by training. It shows in *How Buildings Learn* as he documents the different ways a building can metamorphose through a remarkable collection of before-and-after pictures (some first seen in *OHJ*). Assembled in the pages of a book, it's easy to see these buildings as examples of architectural Darwinism. Houses shed old skins and grow new ones, churches develop elaborate interiors, factories molt towers and sprout wings, all in a struggle for continued existence.

Casual readers might view this as an excuse for remuddling, but Mr. Brand has a deeper point to make: All buildings adapt, but few adapt gracefully. Such tasty field research leads the author to some choice observations ("Form follows funding"; "Finishing is never finished") as well as lots of suggestions ("Try things first"; "Build for change"). His favorite species are vernacular buildings (they learn from each other) and unpretentious but practical spaces like garages and lofts — what he calls "low road" buildings.

It's better to experience architecture — however good or bad — than to read about it, but as architecture books go these two are fascinating, friendly reads. Jonathan Hale writes with clear enthusiasm and purpose in a work that does not intimidate. Stewart Brand lets his telling trove of pictures do the talking, further sharpened by his keen, tart commentary. Each author challenges us to see a fourth dimension in buildings — time.

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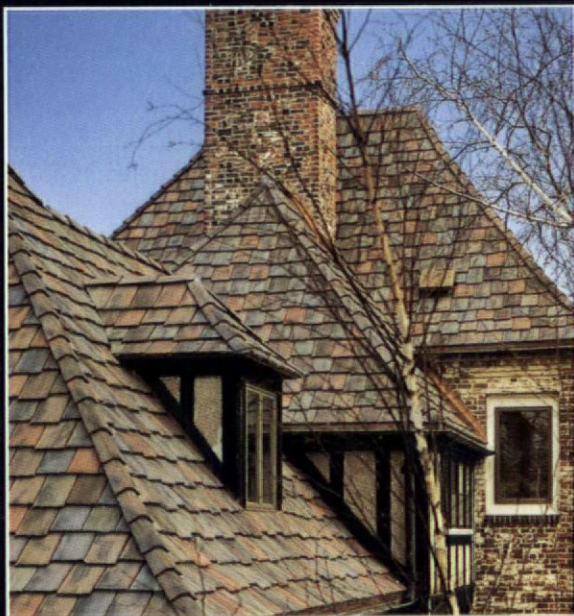
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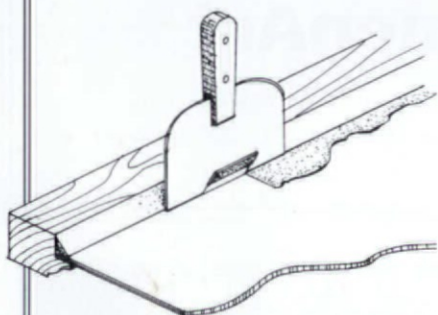
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# RESTORER'S NOTEBOOK

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**M**OST RESTORERS AGREE IT'S A good idea to allow window paint to lap slightly onto the glass for a good seal. With that in mind, here's a trick my uncle taught me for tidying up someone else's sloppy work while maintaining the bond to the pane. Hold a wallboard taper's knife against the sash rail or muntin as you scrape the glass with a razor blade. The width of the taper's blade will be left behind, pro-



The taper's knife maintains a sliver of paint on the glass for a good seal.

viding adhesion to the glass. It also provides a nice, even line and prevents damaging the putty.

— TY EARNEST  
Lexington, Ky.

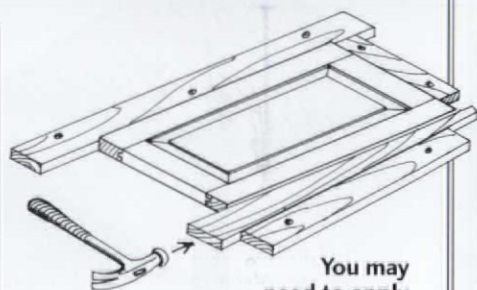
## A FINER LINE

**A**N OLD WOODWORKER ONCE SUGGESTED that I try a finer string in my chalk line. It worked great! Now instead of a thick, blurry mark, I get a crisp, thin line that's easy to see and much more accurate. The only minor drawback is that I have to re-chalk the line between each snap.

— PETE CECIL  
Bend, Oreg.

## OFF THE PIPE CLAMP

**I**F YOU'RE GLUING UP A WOOD frame, such as a panelled door, window sash, or cabinet face, there is an alternative to pipe clamps. Fasten straight boards to a work-



You may need to apply downward pressure to the workpiece to ensure that it lays flat in your homemade clamp.

table as cleats and set the workpiece inside. Then use wedges, cut to fill the voids between the blocks and the frame, to tighten the frame and hold it while the glue sets up. This simple clamp can be built to suit your project and is quickly adjusted for a piece of a different size. What's more, the wedges are quick release; simply knock them out. The blocks are easily removed (especially if you use screws).

— JIMMY DESIMONE  
Yonkers, N.Y.

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**R**EMOVING OLD LINOLEUM GETS sticky when you hit the black adhesive mastic. Here's a quick way to strip it from your hardwood or tiles. Apply a liberal coat of a petroleum-based hand cleaner used at car repair garages. (Goop is one brand name I've used.) Work the cleaner into the mastic until warm, then let it sit for an hour or so. The adhesive should wipe away with a paper towel. You may need to do a few coats if it's really thick. Be sure to work in a well ventilated area and to thoroughly wash the surface with a strong detergent when you're done.

— LOREN & SUSAN OMOTO  
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Wiping away linoleum mastic.

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— S. JONES  
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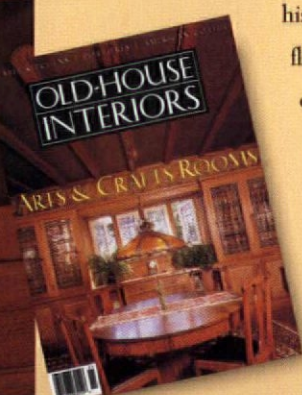
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## Defining Cape Cod

BY JAMES C. MASSEY AND SHIRLEY MAXWELL

WE RECEIVED A BATCH OF SNAPSHOTS FROM Hank Johnson, a realtor in Westminster, Maryland. With admirable skepticism, he questions the local custom of calling these 20th-century specimens Cape Cod houses. "They were built between 1936 and 1955," writes Mr. Johnson. "The houses are consistent in their jerkin-head roofs, coupled front windows, and paired-column porticos. 'Cape Cod' doesn't quite fit, to my understanding."

Right you are, Mr. Johnson. Those jerkin-head or clipped gables, the distinctive entrance porches, the paired windows, and the generous eaves do not follow 18th-century models in Massachusetts. Nor do these houses have much in common, stylistically speaking, with the great Cape Cod Revival that went on in many regions from the 1930s un-

til about 1950. The *form* of these houses is somewhat similar to that of the full Cape — a small, one-storey mass arranged around a center entrance. But details and derivation are different.

### The Massachusetts Cape

WHEN TIMOTHY DWIGHT, A PRESIDENT OF YALE COLLEGE, remarked on the special features of "Cape Cod houses" in 1800, the type was already well established. By 1740, such houses could be found throughout most of New England and across the Sound on Long Island. By 1790, they were in southern New York State. Homesteading farmers carried the house type into the Mohawk corridor of central New York, to the region around Lake Erie. And by 1830, Cape Cods could be found in Ohio and even Michigan. [continued on page 26]

**Are these houses properly called Cape Cods? Not really. Neo-Georgian details define these "colonial cottages" built 1936-1955.**





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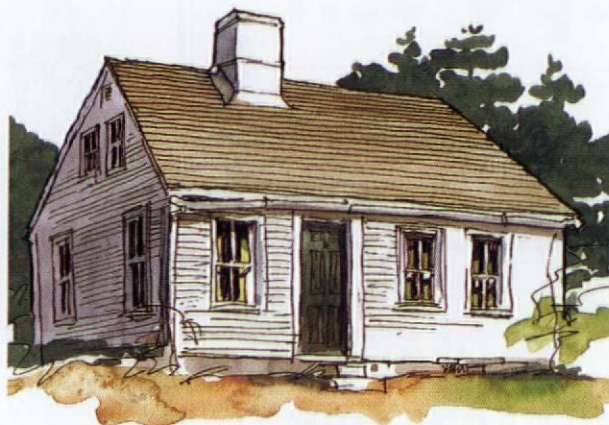




**The Half Cape:** a homesteader's starter house with one room plus loft.

[continued from page 24]

Those 19th-century houses commonly featured Greek Revival details, giving them a more formal look than the early originals on the Cape had had. The true Cape Cod house was a small cottage, without ornament except a transom and sidelights at the entry door. The houses were post and beam, their side walls sheathed with wide planks, shingled or clapboarded. Wood-shingle roofs were very steeply pitched. Cape Cods always had a center chimney (though it was often not perfectly in line with the entry door, for reasons of interior plan). Inside were steep stairs, small



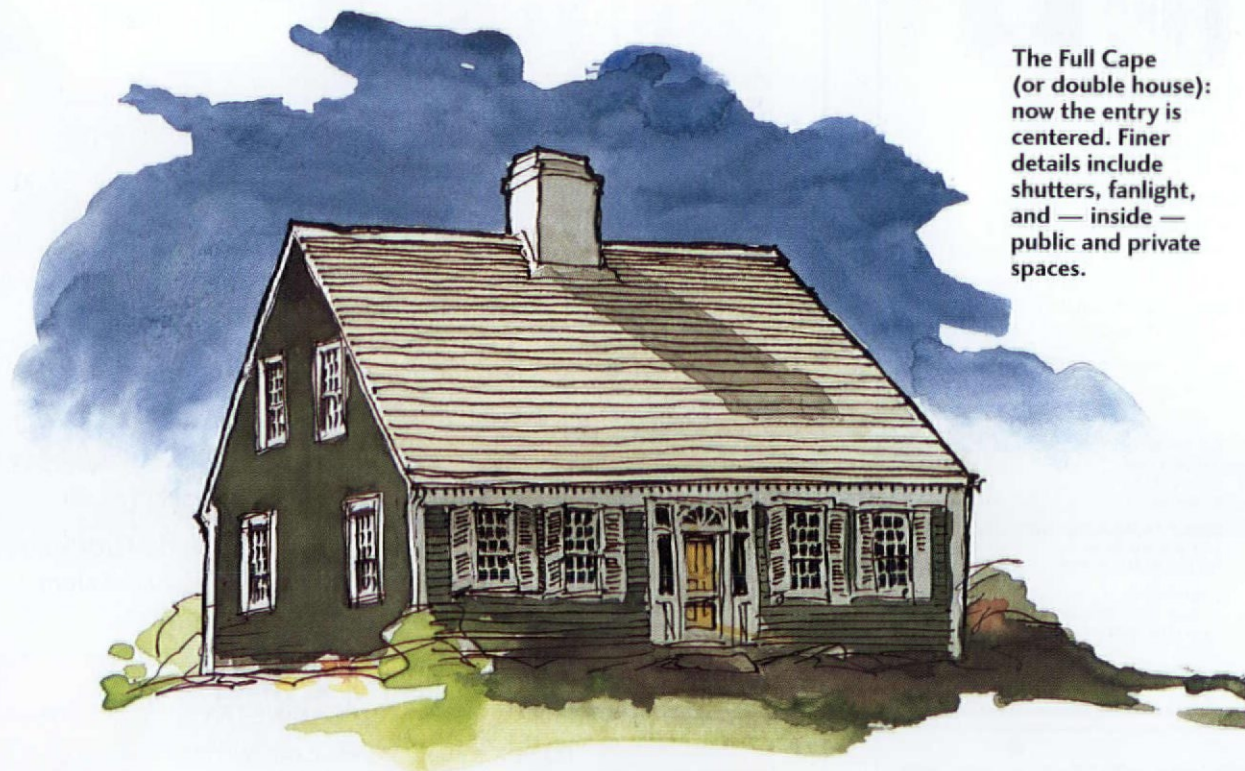
**The Three-Quarter Cape:** not quite symmetrical, but with a hall.

rooms, and little wasted space.

Settlers often built a half Cape to start: one room and a loft. Later construction would enlarge the house to three-quarter or full Cape, illustrated on this page. Further inland or up north, we're apt to find roof windows set in dormers to allow more light upstairs; away from the Cape, too, the use of a gambrel roof to increase headroom was not uncommon.

### Neo-Colonial Cottages

IF THE LITTLE HOUSES OF WESTMINSTER AREN'T CAPE Cods, what *should* we call them? "Workingman's



**The Full Cape (or double house):** now the entry is centered. Finer details include shutters, fanlight, and — inside — public and private spaces.

Cottages" has been suggested, but that generic term applies to millions of small houses built from 1925 on, especially during the post-war suburban expansion of the 1940s and early '50s. The Maryland cottages are part of the Georgian-derived Colonial Revival — small houses that don't necessarily follow a single prototype, but pick up details associated with English colonial houses (including the portico, columns, steep roof, and paired windows). The jerkin-head gables, too, have English colonial precedent.

In the prominence given to the entrance portico in what is otherwise a very small house, Mr. Johnson's examples are reminiscent of the 1920s Chevy Houses — also of Maryland — which were described in OHJ's Nov./Dec. 1994 issue.



This plan for a small house was called a "colonial bungalow" in 1925.

"Cape Cod house" is widely used to denote almost any small, white, one-and-a-half-storey house with a gable roof and center entry — the quintessential picket-fence cottage. The truth is, even revival houses finished with brick veneer are often called Cape Cods by virtue of their basic form. But there were, of course, no masonry prototypes. Further confusion results because the houses pictured on page 24 date from the same period as post-war Cape Cod revival houses — a form so ubiquitous, "Cape Cod" is far more associated with the 20th century (and the mid-Atlantic) than it is with colonial architecture (and Cape Cod!).

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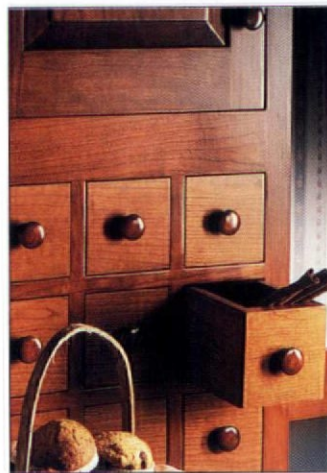
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# Growing Classic Hollyhocks

BY JO ANN GARDNER

**E**VEN GROWING IN A CITY PLOT, OLD-fashioned hollyhocks embody the virtues of a cottage garden. They are the flowers of innocence, simplicity, and childhood, an evocation of the past as we would have liked it.

Introduced from the Far East, hollyhocks have been grown in England at least since the 15th century, and in North American gardens since the early-17th century. The English writer John Josselyn, who left detailed accounts of the plants he saw growing in colonial gardens, places hollyhocks among “useful plants,” indicating they were grown for herbal as well as ornamental value.

Hollyhocks belong to the mallow family, *Malvaceae*, the Latin derived from the Greek *malakos*, meaning “softening”: like all mallows, hollyhocks contain a mucilaginous substance. Extracts were thought to be soothing for ailments associated with the lungs, miscarriages, and ruptures. The very dark purple-black variant, *A. rosea nigra*, has been used to dye wines and teas.

When they hear “old-fashioned hollyhocks,” gardeners at once envision a stately plant, a true biennial that produces a mound of heart-shaped foliage the first season, sending up in the second season a round, stout stem soaring six feet or more. Side stems give it a buxom air, as they carry an abundance of wide-open trumpets of five overlapping petals in pastel pinks, rose and purple, white and cream, some



with contrasting eyes and ruffled petals. In a well developed plant, the show continues all summer and on into fall.

Although they are generally regarded as venerable garden flowers, hollyhocks were not widely grown as ornamentals until the Victorian era. Then they became florist flowers, the subject of intensive breeding to create ever-new forms. The only cultivar of the period to survive is the double-flowered ‘Chater’s Doubles,’ still grown today.

Beginning in the 1930s, the tall classics, both singles and doubles, declined in popularity with the introduction of dwarf hollyhocks, always double flowered, which bloom from seed the first year and do not need to be staked. These have never entirely replaced the classic form in some gardeners’ hearts. Nevertheless, it was almost

impossible by the 1960s to find commercial seed or plant sources for the old-fashioned, single-flowered type.

Today, both the single and double classics are again available, as is the once-rare black hollyhock. All are valued as before for their impressive height, shown to advantage against weathered wood, stone or brick buildings, along walls and fences, and at the base of arbors as long-season companions to Old Roses.


## Growing Hollyhocks

HOLLYHOCKS ARE EASY TO GROW. IF CONDITIONS ARE MET — a sunny site and perfect drainage — they return year after year as if perennial. (In fact, they are regarded as both biennials and short-lived perennials.) The most common cause of failure is moisture collecting around root crowns. The soil should be friable (crumbly), even gritty, and enriched. But hollyhocks will grow in lean soil, too, as long as drainage is assured.

Plant seeds 1/8-inch deep in the summer. The following spring, well before the plants have had a chance to develop their long taproots, transplant the seedlings to their permanent site. During the second summer, plantlets will form at the base of the mother

**ABOVE:** *Alcea rosea nigra*, the black hollyhock, ranges from claret or maroon to deepest purple. **LEFT:** “Old Roses and Hollyhocks” celebrated in a book on tasteful houses, 1895.



A photograph of tall hollyhock plants with red and pink flowers in front of a white house. The plants are in the foreground, with a wooden fence visible at the bottom. The house is in the background, partially obscured by the foliage. The sky is dark and cloudy.

A stately screen, an innocent burst of color, an evocation of the past . . . hollyhocks are beautiful against walls or fences, and next to weathered wood, stone, or old brick.

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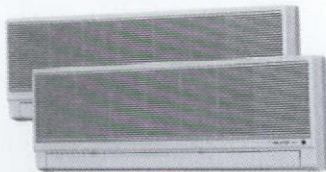
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plant; the following season, these daughters will mature and bloom. To ensure their healthy growth, cut down the old spent stalk at the end of the season (fall). The plantlets can also be carefully separated in the early spring or fall. Seeds will fall to the ground during the summer and eventually bloom, but if you want to keep colors separated, propagate hollyhocks from plantlets and discard seedlings.

If you're starting with purchased plants, set them in the ground in early spring, spaced one foot apart.

Classic hollyhocks usually need staking. Grown in lean soil and not exposed to wind, they may not need it. Stake when the plants are less



than half expected height: early in the season of their second year. Wooden stakes work well, with an old stretch jersey or nylon stockings cut into strips and tied in figure-eight loops at intervals along the stem and stake.

Rust, a fungus that discolors the leaves, may be a problem if air circulation is inadequate. Use a fungicide such as

sulfur dust, beginning in spring. Prevent the problem with clean cultivation, removing all plant debris.

*Jo Ann Gardner is the author of The Heirloom Garden (Garden Way, 1992). She lives in a remote area of Nova Scotia, where no phone call ever summons her in from the garden (no phone lines!).*

## HOLLYHOCKS CULTIVARS & SUPPLIERS

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■ **A. ROSEA NIGRA (1800-1825)** — The black hollyhock, a striking variant with black buds, is dark purple to claret or maroon in bloom, with white at the flowers' centers. Color rubs off when the flowers are wet. These are the hollyhocks Celia Thaxter grew in her late-19th-century garden, made famous by Childe Hassam. Take care to ensure that this type does not hybridize with

other colors. Propagate by root division (i.e., separate daughter from mother) whenever possible.

■ **A. ROSEA 'Chater's Doubles' (1888)** — Double-flowered hollyhocks were known since the 16th century, when John Gerard described them as "outlandish roses." 'Chater's Doubles' is highly valued because it comes true from seed, not always the case with variants. The flowers are fully double with no centers showing, in luscious colors including salmon, apricot, red, buff, maroon, and the usual pastels. 'Chater's Doubles' produce a feast if you love hollyhocks.

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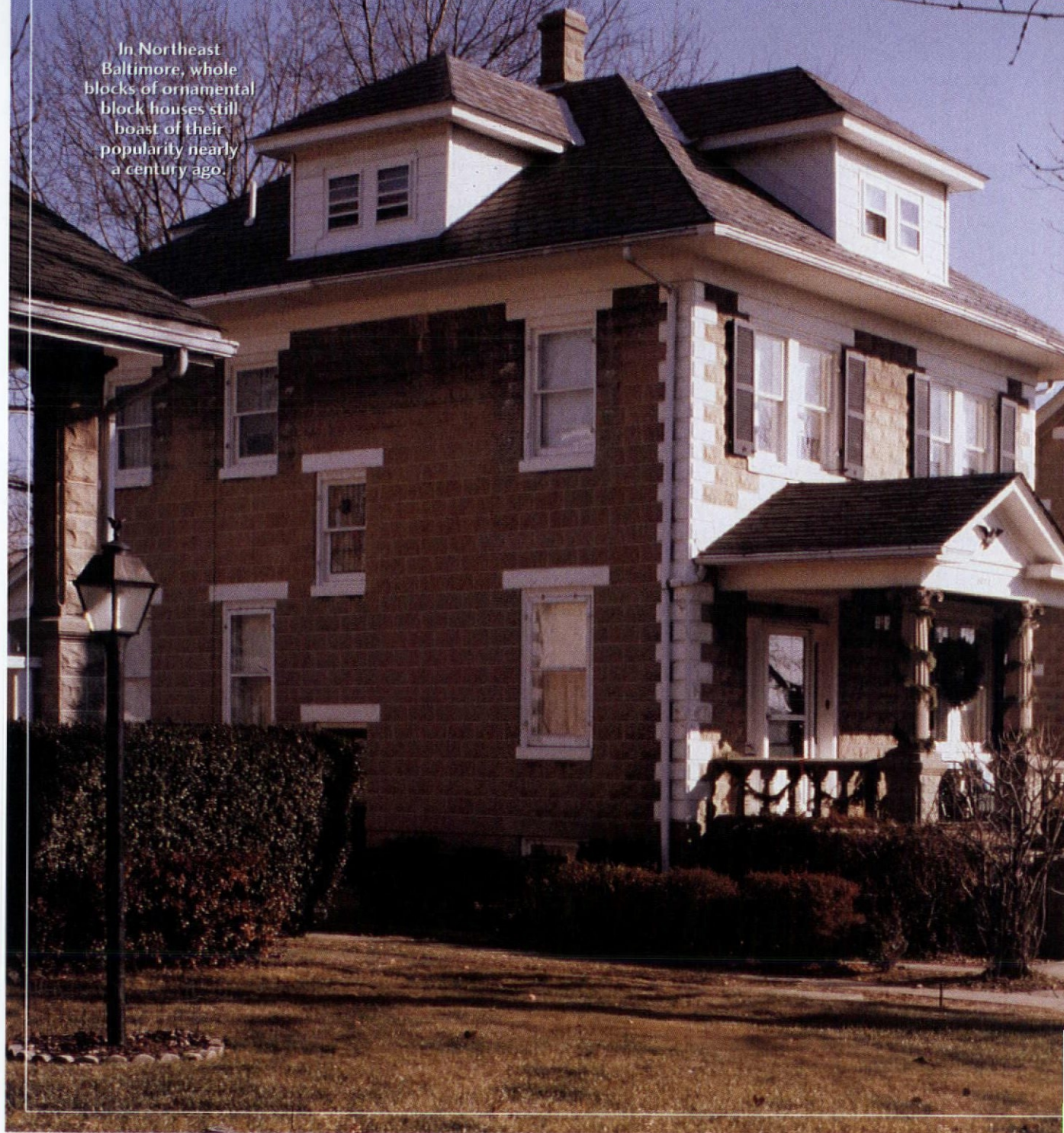
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# RETURN TO CONCRETE

In Northeast Baltimore, whole blocks of ornamental block houses still boast of their popularity nearly a century ago.







# CONCRETE BLOCK HOUSES

*"This is the concrete age and concrete offers the greatest opportunity today . . . The forests are going. Indeed they have almost disappeared. What shall take the place of wood? The answer is: concrete!"*

— FROM A C. 1910 HELM MACHINE CO. CATALOG.

**M**ERE PROMOTIONAL EXAGGERATION? Only partly so, for it seemed that concrete-block buildings were springing up almost overnight during the first three decades of this century. In the suburbs, in small towns, on farms, and even in urban neighborhoods, a new kind of construction brought the masonry house within reach of the average family, and left its mark across a continent. ♦ Concrete-block houses were built by do-it-yourselfers, or contractors acting as local real-estate entrepreneurs. The "cement blocks," as they were called, could be bought from a local building supplier but, far more likely, they were made right at the construction site (see page 38). As OHJ readers helped us learn through the photos and information shared in this article, it was an age when man-made building products and new techniques were replacing natural materials — asphalt and composition shingles for slate, for example. Progressive and popular, concrete block embodied the spirit of the times.

BY J. RANDALL COTTON

Concrete is little more than natural or manmade cement mixed with sand and other aggregates. Adding water starts a chemical reaction that hardens the mix into a monolithic mass. Although the Romans built with concrete, the material was nearly forgotten until the French re-popularized it in the early 1800s. In North America, large-scale production of portland cement after 1880 gave concrete a new level of quality and availability. Dramatic building projects, such as the Panama Canal, made it a miracle material of the new century.

### The Architecture of Ornamental Block

COMPARED TO TODAY'S PLAIN, MASS-PRODUCED CMUs (concrete masonry units), early concrete block had character. Interchangeable mold plates turned the block face into imitations of standard dressed stonework — ashlar, rubble, broached, or bushhammer. Ornamental designs were nearly as common. Egg-and-dart, wreath, rope, or



A castellated turret caps the wraparound porch of an Illinois Queen Anne. These blocks traveled 35 miles by horse from Joliet.

scroll “carvings” cast into blocks made them ideal for friezes or beltcourses. Beveled panel designs adapted well to corner quoins. Cobblestone-faced blocks provided a rustic look. Lattice patterns could be used for fences or concrete “skirts” under porches. Though critics claimed such ersatz masonry was untruthful, it gave the block visual interest — an appeal poured concrete



The one-story, pyramidal form, well-represented in the South, appears in this newly restored home in Texas (top), and St. Augustine's wonderfully vernacular coquina block houses (above).

houses of the time couldn't match.

There were triangular blocks for gables, trapezoidal blocks for inside and outside corners, and segmentally arched blocks for bay windows. Special blockmaking kits were marketed for casting porch balusters, rails, and columns topped by your choice of Corinthian or Ionic capitals. Need sills, lintels, arches, or copings? No problem — there was a mold for any purpose.

Like the material itself, the concrete block house's design was usually the work of the builder, copied from a planbook, manufacturer's catalog, or the house around the corner. Frequently, just the first floor was block, while the second floor was clad in clapboard or wood shingles. The house most often rendered in concrete block is the American Foursquare — no surprise since the uniform, rectangular blocks were ideal for creating the uncomplicated boxiness of the ultimate in practical dwellings. Rough-cut pattern of “rock-faced” and “granite-faced” blocks were highly popular and added zest to this otherwise straightforward house type. Panel-type blocks lent refinement, and seem to have been increasingly fashionable after 1910.

Houses in the post-Victorian Colonial Revival and bungalow styles appeared nearly



This classic Queen Anne, completely in concrete, shows the imposing strength block could give to a basically prosaic house.

as often in ornamental concrete block, as did vernacular cottages and farmhouses. Less common were Dutch Colonial, late Queen Anne, and Mansard-styled homes. Concrete block houses even took Spanish and Mission Revival forms in Florida and California. For example, an entrepreneur in St. Augustine used crushed coquina shell in the concrete mix, giving his concrete “Coquinabrick” houses a local flair.

Occasionally, in a typically American pairing of modern building technology

and historical architectural styles, someone would erect an exotic concrete-block house. Quoins, jamb “stones,” and roof parapets came naturally to the material, adding a castle feel to suburban housing. International traditions, however, inspired an occasional Japanese pagoda or a Bavarian manor house. There’s even an example of a rustic log house made of concrete!

There were other variations. Mineral pigments and colored aggregates incorporated in the concrete mix produced a colored block, usually in tones of gray or brown. In Wisconsin, a local lumber dealer made “Casberg Block” by adding chips of colored glass to the concrete for a cheerful, confetti effect. In Jacksonville, Florida, “Miami Stone” was embedded with sparkling rock aggregate.

The applications did not stop with houses. The automobile was still a novelty, and thought to be a fire hazard, so garages seemed safer when built of fire-proof concrete block. Many commercial buildings and churches when up in concrete block, especially in small towns. There are concrete block schools, hotels, con-



Building trade publishers, such as William Radford, pushed the block house with zeal equal to machine-makers by filling books with plans.



Stone-colored block and a multi-gambrelled design suggest this New York house took its cues from a machine-makers’ catalog.

Pigments in the concrete, or possibly the local Virginia sand, produced a striking brick-colored Foursquare — once home to the sisters of silent-screen stars Dorothy and Lillian Gish.



vents, railroad stations, bakeries, icehouses, feed stores, and carriage houses, as well as fences and retaining walls. Special curved block kits were offered to farmers who could put up concrete silos. By one estimate 640,000 were erected in a six-year period.

### Promoting Blockmaking

MORE THAN ANYTHING, THE RAPID RISE OF the concrete-block house on the North American landscape is the result of a massive and targeted marketing campaign by block machine makers and catalog retailers. Sears, Roebuck & Co., the mail-order masterminds, promoted the new industry

with typical sizzle in their 1908 catalog: "Anyone, anywhere, can make money, and lots of it by engaging in this new and attractive business! There is a big demand for concrete building blocks and this demand is increasing with wonderful strides."

Sears probably sold more blockmaking machines than anyone, but the Besser Manufacturing Company of Alpena, Michigan (today the world's largest producer of concrete block machinery), and the Ideal Concrete Machine Company of Ontario were other leaders. A basic outfit from Sears — a standard manual machine, eight special-purpose molds and attachments, plus accessories — was \$63.75 in 1910.

There were three primary markets for block-making machines: do-it-yourselfers, such as farmers; small-scale contractor-developers; and those already engaged in related businesses (building-supply retailing, lumberyards, cement manufacturing). "Farmers and small land owners who have gravel pits or sand banks on their property are the ones who can reap the greatest benefits," noted one block machine ad, "because, aside from the cement use ... their material costs absolutely nothing. The farmer can make concrete blocks ... on rainy days and at other idle periods." No wonder the majority of concrete-block houses stand in small towns, rural areas, or regions with the raw ingredients.

In North Dakota, a mix of late-Victorian bays and broad eaves sets off a Foursquare built in 1906. Note the two-tone block treatment at corners and storey levels.



Although concrete-block houses were built all across America and Canada, there was a certain middle-America quality to the phenomenon. No doubt to the concentration of cement manufacturing in those limestone-rich states helped; sparsely populated South Dakota alone had 38 concrete-block companies operating in 1909. Moreover, do-it-yourself blockmaking appealed to the self-reliant Midwestern spirit. Promoters capitalized on this regionalism by giving their block machines model names such as the "Buckeye" or the "Badger."

Real-estate entrepreneurs got in the game too. In northeast Baltimore, near the edge of the city, are several neighborhoods of bungalows, Colonial Revivals, and Four-squares, all exclusively concrete block. In Reading, Ohio, and its surrounding communities, German stonemasons put up dozens of block houses, and cottages. There, an Adam Koenig not only manufactured much of Reading's concrete block, but was president of the Home Loan and Building Company, a combination of professions repeated by others.

What, then, was the appeal? It's hard to separate fact from advertising hyperbole, but concrete block was touted as:

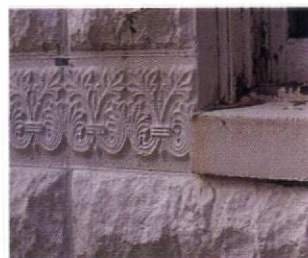
- ♦ Inexpensive — No doubt block was cheaper than stone and brick, but claims that it cost less than wood are dubious. It was said that 100 blocks could be made for \$5 in material and labor, and sold for \$8.
- ♦ Strong — Rural homeowners and farmers in the tornado-prone Midwest and Plains states liked the solidity of concrete block.
- ♦ Fireproof — Sections of Jacksonville, Florida, were rebuilt with "Compostone," a fireproof block. Similarly, in Halifax, Nova Scotia — partially flattened by a stupendous explosion in 1917 — the Halifax Relief Commission constructed hundreds of Tudor-styled freestanding and row houses of fireproof "Hydrostone," a T-shaped concrete block.
- ♦ Convenient — Concrete blocks were easy to build with — uniform in size and 33% lighter than stone.

## Block Grows Bland

THE DECLINE OF ORNAMENTAL CONCRETE-block houses came in the 1930s with the advent of mass-production machines that did not allow for cast, ornamental faces. The real potential of concrete was not in the form of decorative, pseudo-natural stones, but as faceless units (best covered over and never seen), or a fully plastic material.

There were a few notable exceptions, though. In the early 1920s, Frank Lloyd Wright cast his characteristic geometric designs into what he called Textile Block. At least one Wright follower, Alden Dow, developed the Unit Block System of trapezoidal and triangular concrete blocks. Dozens of Wrightian-style Unit Block houses were erected in and around Midland, Michigan, in the '30s.

Despite the early optimism, the "cement block" could not keep up with changing architectural tastes and new building materials, such as veneer brick, plywood sheathing, and artificial siding. In its heyday, however, ornamental concrete block was a homemade product that combined practicality with architectural style.

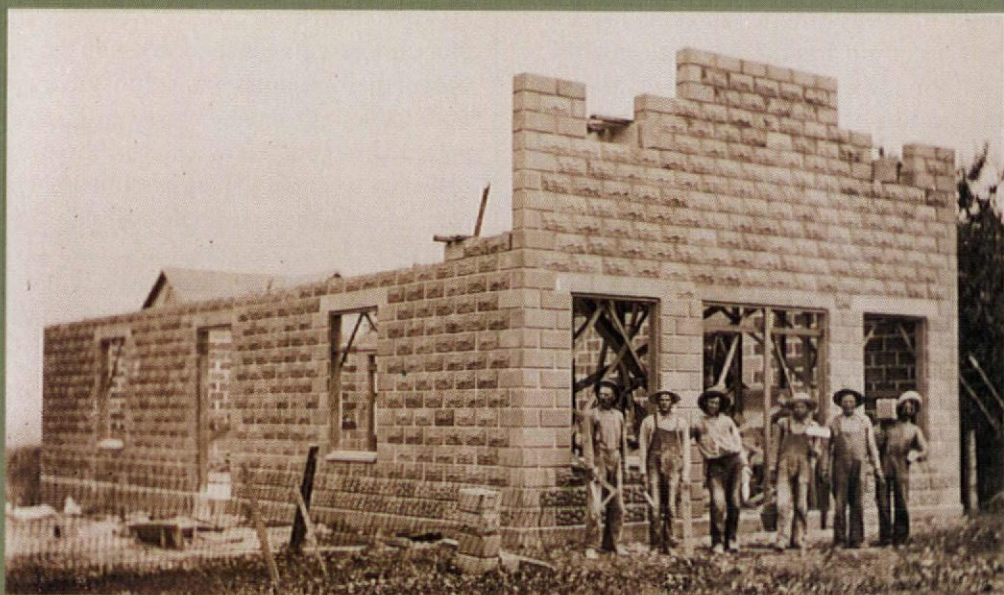


**ABOVE:** Surprising details enliven the regularity of many block buildings: belt course of delicate cast copings (top); woven-wall pattern produced by a "triple stone" design mold. **INSET:** Concrete block turned to the Colonial Revival in upstate New York.

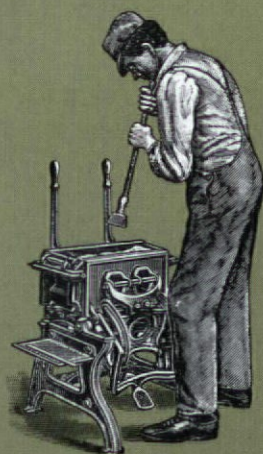


**Bungalows found a kindred medium in concrete block. This example, a regional favorite in White Hall, Illinois, takes the "airplane bungalow" to new heights with an uninhibited mix of ornamental patterns.**

Advanced material or not, ornamental block building called on lots of human muscle. Note all the hand tools at this 1905 Ohio job site.



# Concrete Techniques



Face-down machines, the preferred design, simplified casting and tamping around the core forms (tubes in box middle).

“ARE YOU SURE THESE BLOCKS WERE made on site?” quizzed one skeptical OHJ reader. Indeed, though block-making at the turn of the century used machines, most were hand-powered. There were two basic kinds. *Vertical-face* machines held the face mold plate at one side of the casting box. *Face-down* (also called *horizontal face*) machines, located the plate at the bottom of the casting box.

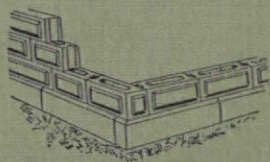
Hand-machine blockmaking used the *dry process*, close to what is called cast stone today. It permitted many quick castings with the same machine, and was a bit of an art. First the blockmaker lined the mold with facing mixture — typically 1 part portland cement to 2 parts coarse, sharp sand mixed with just enough water to hold together. In face-down machines this simply meant coating the bottom like preparing an upsidedown cake, but in vertical-face machines the mix had to be kept in place temporarily with a parting plate. Then came an equally dry body mix of 1 part ce-

ment, 2 parts sand, 3 parts gravel or stone.

Thorough tamping was the next essential step. Tamping eliminated air pockets and consolidated the materials to form a delicate block that could crumble if mishandled. One- or two-man operations worked with a large wooden hand tamper, or one of the simple pressure plates often built into these machines. Power-driven tampers were faster, but expensive.

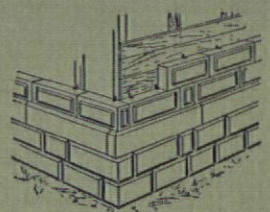
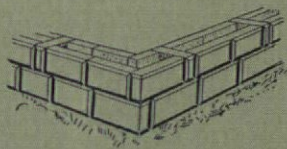
After withdrawing the core forms and releasing the box sides, the blockmaker gingerly moved the fresh block to a drying rack where it would cure with a daily sprinkling of water for two to four weeks — the longer, the stronger. (Large operations steam cured hundreds of blocks at a time in a building.) Washing a little cement off the ornamental face helped the stone effect.

The end product was either a solid or hollow block, in one of the scores of competing proprietary shapes. Solid blocks were used as veneer over a wood-frame or concrete block load-bearing wall. Hollow



Hollow blocks, usually 8"x8"x16," laid like modern CMUs.

Two-piece hollow blocks were common.



Metal anchors (or header blocks in masonry walls) tied solid blocks to the base.

blocks produced their own wall with an insulating cavity. Adjusting or partially filling the molds yielded the half, quarter, and pie-shaped pieces for corners, gables, and arches. Manufacturer's typically claimed one man could make 300 blocks in a day. A good-sized house might require 6,000 blocks.

EVEN WITH POWER EQUIPMENT FOR TAMPING and mixing, 300 blocks in, say, a 10-hour day is one every two minutes, not accounting for breaks, screw-ups, and cleaning. Could this really have been the regular pace of concrete block building? The reports from OHJ readers told a more realistic story.

"My father, an electrician by trade, was also a builder of cement block homes in the early 1900s," recalls Peg Dilworth of Brigham City, Utah. "My brother, mother, and I made many of the blocks; it was tedious work. I well remember making 10 to 12 blocks each morning before going to school." George Caddell of Westport, Indiana had some contemporary input. "I purchased a block machine at a farm auction. Since I was building a barn to store my antique steam engine, what better foundation than rock-faced blocks? This project took 250 blocks — five days of hard work."

Fortunately, it seems concrete block houses have proved themselves remarkably durable over nearly a century — a surprising testament to the original pro-

motion. The few restoration problems we heard of are in three areas.

**TIE FAILURE** — Metal ties, used to anchor veneer blocks to walls, were considered a potential problem even in the 'teens. The ties can rust through from roof or gutter leaks. For bulging walls, there are masonry anchors specifically made for resecuring veneers (try Hilti Fastening Systems, P.O. Box 21148, Dept. OHJ, Tulsa, OK 74121).

**DELAMINATION** — Several readers reported deterioration or separation of the ornamental face. Since hand tamping left the quality of the block up to the maker, blocks that were poorly cast could be failing today. Look into concrete consolidants and restoration materials (Abatron, Inc., 33 Center Drive, Dept. OHJ, Gilberts, IL 60136), and ornamental concrete repair products.

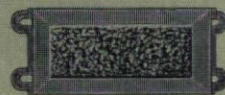
**REPLACEMENT BLOCK** — The top question is where to find new block for building matching additions. Some readers have found modern "split face" CMUs a suitable stand-in for cast rock face. Even better, we learned of two companies that still make true ornamental block: Victory Block Company (1215 Berlin Road, Voorhees, NJ 08043; 609-784-1438) and Cantelli Concrete Block Mfg. (1602 Milan Road, Sandusky, OH 44870; 419-626-0175). They both produce basic rock-face blocks with original machinery on a special-order basis (contact for details). If there's two, there's probably others waiting to be found across the country. — Gordon Bock



Broken Ashlar



Panel Face



Margined Rock Face



Cobblestone Face

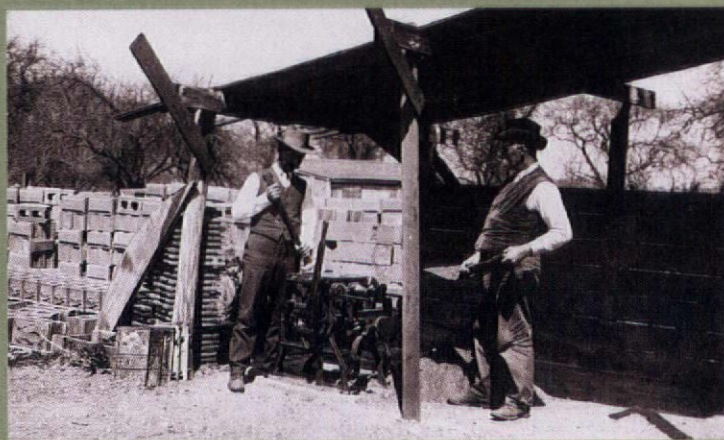


Rope Face

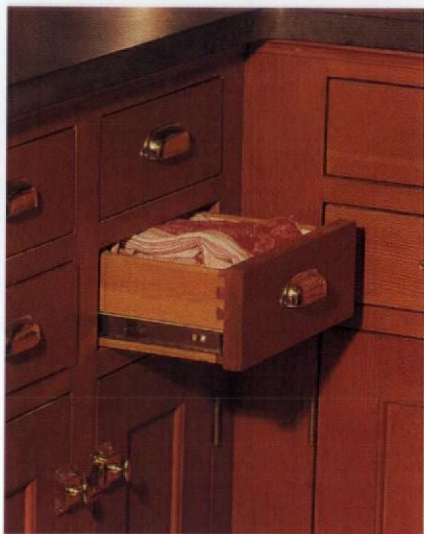


Whirlwind Scroll Face

**ABOVE:** Interchangeable mold plates put the face on ornamental block. Each company had their own spin on stone and coping patterns. **BELOW:** Typical for a small outfit, this makeshift roof in Oregon protected the "green" block until it cured.



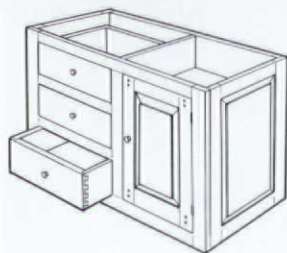
## Spec's for Traditional-Looking Kitchen Cabinets / By Josh Garskof



HOW CAN YOU RECONCILE THE NEED FOR A FUNCTIONAL KITCHEN WITH A desire to be true to the house's period? The answer, in a pie shell, is compromise. Construct cabinets that mimic free-standing kitchen furniture of yesteryear on the outside, with the latest in slide-out bins, lazy-Susan corners, and wipe-clean surfaces on the inside. Identify an appropriate exterior look and build it with solid wood. Then, inside (where practicality is crucial, but aesthetics aren't), use plywood, or melamine-coated medium density fiberboard (MDF). We surveyed period patternbooks and visited two traditional cabinetmakers' shops to work up a set of specifications for traditional-looking kitchen cabinets. The pointers will help you whether you're a carpenter constructing cabinets or a homeowner looking for details.

# DOORS, DRAWERS

**ABOVE:** Modern interior mechanicals, such as metal drawer glides, make the cabinets ergonomic. **BELOW:** Much of the aesthetic difference between traditional and modern cabinets comes from the construction methods for the doors and drawers.



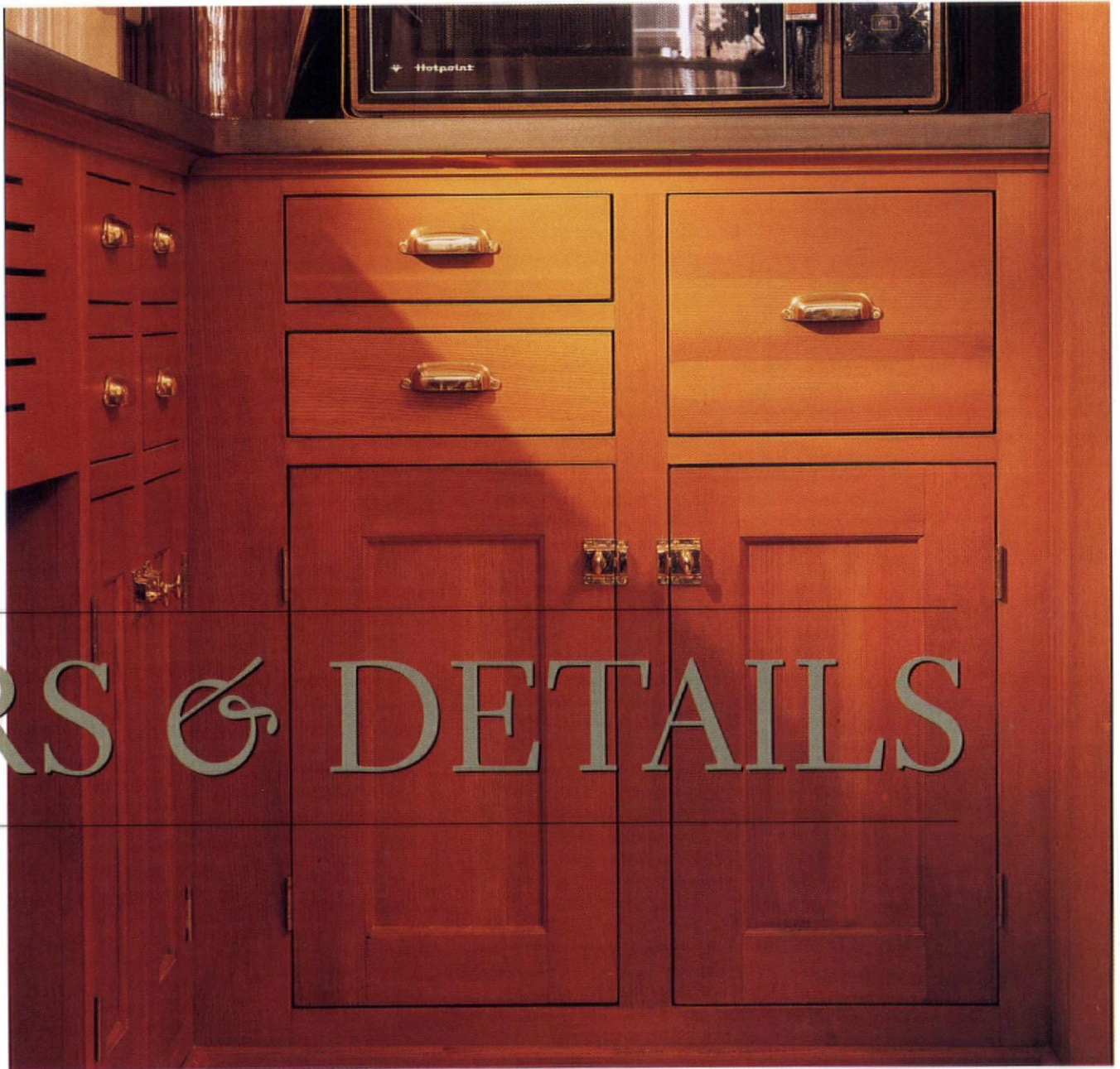
AS ALWAYS WITH OLD-HOUSE WORK, YOUR best design resource is the building itself. "The older the house is, the more appropriate primitive joinery is for the outside of the cabinet," says Dave Leonard, a period cabinetmaker and owner of The Kennebec Company in Maine. Often, the original butler's pantry has survived. It can provide clues about door and drawer types, moulding profiles, wood species, and finish. Also, look beyond the kitchen — even where some original elements remain. Remember, kitchens were not usually given the high-style detail that parlors and halls received. Seek out panel styles, moulding profiles, and other details from the house as models for the new cabinets.

Contemporary cabinets (top left) are smooth and flat, with little or no detail. Doors and drawer heads completely cover the fronts. Hinges are invisible and pulls are often abandoned for fingerlip edges. Traditional cabinetwork (bottom left) is con-

structed in place using a solid wood framework and cleats on the plaster walls. Doors and drawers are generally flush mounted and the joinery provides its own design contribution. Compromise between the two systems, using production boxes for cabinet cases and a single face frame for each bank of cabinets after they are installed. Use stock that's  $\frac{1}{8}$ " or so thicker than your door frame stock and about 2" wide. Old-fashioned dowel joinery or modern biscuits are your best bet. A thumbnail moulding is an excellent inner frame decoration. "The plain  $\frac{1}{8}$ " bead with a quirk is probably the most common detail throughout all periods," says Peter Veronneau, owner and operator of New England Pattern & Joinery in Connecticut, specializing in traditional woodworking.

Cabinets are defined by their doors and drawer heads — the parts we see and touch. Building these with traditional methods goes a long way towards creating a kitchen that looks authentic.





## I. DOORS

*Before the introduction of plywood, carpenters used wide boards for doors. When the space was bigger than the stock, they attached multiple boards along their edges, using panel or batten joinery, which offer great traditional looks today.*

### PANEL DOORS

THE MOST POPULAR DESIGN IN OLD HOUSES of all ages is the panel door. It uses a wood frame to hold the edge-joined boards together, providing a long-lasting unit and plenty of opportunity for eye-pleasing detail.

■ **Frame:** Join stiles and rails with mortise-and-tenon joints, unsurpassed for strength and

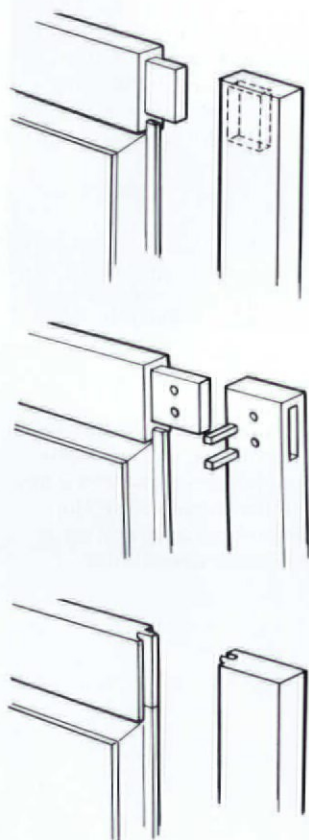
sag-resistance. Some tips from Dave Leonard: A good detail for early Colonial house cabinets is the open mortise, where both the top and side of the tenons are exposed at the edge of the stiles. Later Colonials should have through mortises, where only the end is exposed. In either case, pegs add an authentic detail. Tap glued-up square pegs into round holes for a tight hold. For Victorian and later

Traditional face frame, panelled doors, and reproduction hardware give these new kitchen cabinets, by The Kennebec Company, an authentic appearance.



The first thing you see in this new kitchen, by New England Pattern & Joinery, is an authentic built-in piece. Note, too, the wrought-iron H-hinges and raised panels.

**BELOW: Frame joinery types (top to bottom): blind mortise; through mortise with square pegs; cope and stick. CENTER: A simple quarter round, or more intricate moulding, serves to hold the glass in the frame.**



cabinets, use a blind mortise.

Frame size and detail depend on the house's era. As a rule, the lower rail is about  $\frac{1}{2}$ " wider than the rest of the frame, and its larger tenons support the weight of the door. For 1700s and early 1800s cabinets, the frame is about 3" wide, including the moulding, which should be shaped into the frame stock. For Victorian homes, a good frame guideline is  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " inches. Shape separate stock for the moulding, miter it, and nail in place with brads. "The Victorians chose not to shape the frame stock," says Peter Veronneau, "perhaps because of the complexity of their mouldings." For turn-of-the-century houses, the stiles and rails are a uniform (no wider lower rail)  $2\frac{3}{4}$ ". Arts & Crafts-style cabinets have a uniform frame, about  $3\frac{1}{4}$ " wide, and no moulding.

■ **Panel:** Select edge-grain stock with matching grain and glue it up. (Flat-grain wood may cup along its growth rings, leading to a warped door.) While it's drying in the pipe clamps, use C-clamps with scrap hardwood across both ends to keep the boards aligned flush. Edge joinery is not required because the frame will hold the panel tight. The panel should be sized to float slightly in the frame dado, allowing for expansion — do not glue or glop up with finish later.

The panel detail depends on the period desired. Again, follow the house's lead. For 17th- and early-18th-century cabinets, use a raised panel. Veronneau uses a  $12^\circ$  bevel he has reproduced from old cabinet work. It's a flat, continuous taper, with sharp edges. (Modern panels have rounded edges, with the bevel turning the corner onto the field, and swooping into the frame.) Colonial cabinet panels should have a narrow, say 1", bevel showing and the field should stand flush with door's frame. Use  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick stock and raise it on both front and back. One Colonial variant uses beadboard for the panel. For a Federal-era look, the raised panels are only in front and fields stand proud of the door frame, and have a wider (maybe  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ") bevel. Also, use thicker stock, say 1" or even  $1\frac{1}{8}$ ". Victorian, turn-of-the-century, and Arts & Crafts pieces get a flat panel. You can use thinner stock, say  $\frac{1}{2}$ ", and even as thin as  $\frac{1}{4}$ " for Arts & Crafts.

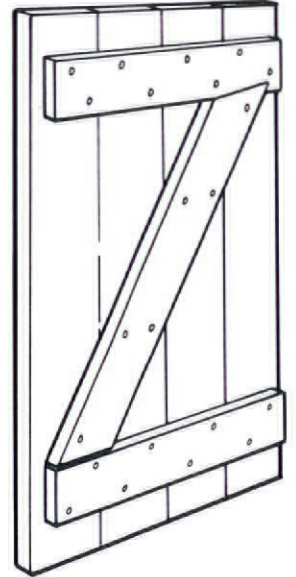
■ **Glazing:** Glass panels were quite common through the Victorian era and early part of this century for upper cupboards. A plate rail — a narrow rabbet in the shelving — was used to stand china for display. One good

17th-century design is 6" x 8" panes, set in broad, moulded muntins that stand proud of the glass. The muntins can be between 1" and  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. You can use old-fashioned,

cylinder glass, either recycled or from a reproduction maker (one good source is S.A. Bendheim Company, Inc., 61 Willett St., Dept. OHJ, Passaic, NJ 07055; 800-221-7379). Tack on a moulded cleat to fasten the glass in place (center). Or use leaded glass with square or diamond panes (locate a local source, or contact Golden Age Glassworks, 339 Bellvale Road, Dept. OHJ, Warwick, NY 10990; 914-986-1487.) Another popular panel option, especially appropriate for Colonial houses, is punched tin (available from Brubaker Metalcrafts, 209 North Franklin St., Dept. OHJ, Eaton, OH 45320; 800-950-5834).



LEFT: Glazed doors with muntins turn upper cabinets into showplaces for fine housewares.



ABOVE: A Z-brace is a good idea for oversized batten doors to keep them square. For added strength, let in the brace (upper end).  
BELOW: Mouldings create shadow-lines over the joints (top to bottom): a V-groove detail hides a tongue & groove connection; the bead and quirk masks a spline resting in two grooves; a detail from a 1675 house in Connecticut and a shiplap joint.

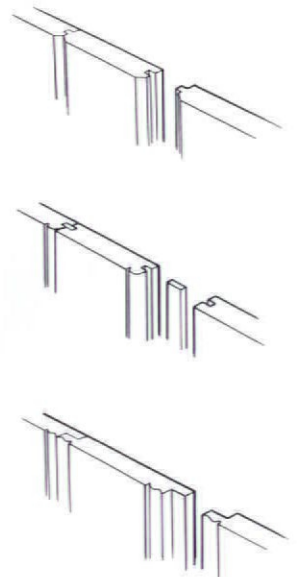
**BATTEN DOORS**

THE BATTEN DOOR — ALWAYS CONSIDERED less sophisticated in construction and appearance than the panel door — is popular today in country-style kitchens. Perhaps the simplest edge-joining technique, it employs horizontal members, or battens, to fasten planks together. Simple mouldings on the boards' edges mask the seams.

■ **Beaded Board:** The standard batten door should have three boards. Size the outer ones equally, and the center piece at between one-half and two-thirds of their width. Maintain this proportion for all the cabinets by varying the size of the boards depending on the door's dimensions. Tongue & groove boards (often available in stock millwork) make an excellent joint, but not necessarily a historic one. The shiplap also masks gaps between boards created by ex-

pansion and shrinkage. Incorporate the bead into the milling of the shiplap by cutting the bead first, and then cutting the shiplap so the decoration is on its tongue.

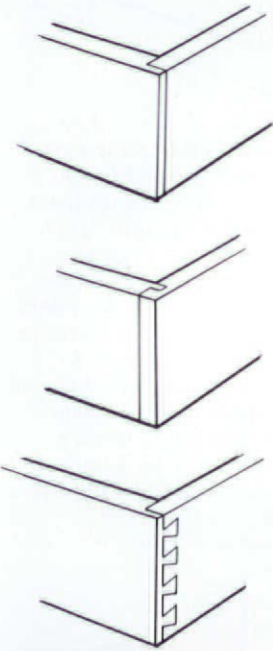
■ **Batten:** On standard cabinet doors, use two battens about 2½" to 3" wide. For an authentic door, use cut nails (available from Tremont Nail Company, 8 Elm St., P.O. Box 111, Dept. OHJ, Wareham, MA 02571; 800-842-0560). Nail from the batten through the beaded board, and clinch over the tips. If this look is not preferred, use shorter nails and add glue to the joint. Another alternative is to screw the battens on, covering their heads with wood plugs. Mortising the battens into the beaded board ¼" is a good idea for two reasons: it helps keep the door square, and it reduces the projecting thickness of the battens — and the clearance they require when the door is closed.



## II. DRAWERS

*Old-fashioned drawers ride on wood rails, with a block to keep them from pulling all the way out and a coat of wax to counter friction. Today, metal roller-and-track slides allow drawers to glide effortlessly, even while holding pounds of flatware.*

**BELOW:** The three most popular drawer joint types in order of increasing quality and construction time (top to bottom): a simple dado leaves adhesion to the glue and fasteners, but does not require an added drawer head; the dado and lip holds well because the face, which receives the pulling force, is let into the sides; the best, and most authentic, is the dovetail, which has tapered interlocking teeth for a strong hold. **BOTTOM:** Refrigerator and stovetop are built into the cabinets in this New England Pattern & Joinery kitchen.



■ **Construction:** If you're using plywood or MDF, join the drawer parts with a rabbet joint, letting the front and back of the drawer into the two sides. These can be glued and screwed. To hide edges, cut slightly oversized solid wood edge banding, then putty and sand to width after applying. Or use wood edge tape. For a more traditional drawer, build with solid wood. Dovetails are by far the most authentic and longest-lasting connection. However, even with today's jigs that turn your router into an automatic dovetail cutter, this is a labor-intensive job for a small project. Some cabinetmakers choose a rabbet joint even for a traditional box. The joint should stand the test of time, too, especially because modern slides reduce the wear and tear on the drawer's connections.

■ **Mechanicals:** Side-mounted slides — the modern standard — are the most convenient, especially if you're using plywood or MDF to make your drawer box anyway. They offer full extension of the drawers. Because the drawer head is recessed, and the drawer box is smaller than the frame, you'll have to build out from the box for the slide's track. Install cleats to bring the slide even with the frame (for most sets, 1/2" clearance is required on each side). If you're seeking an entirely old-fashioned drawer, however, a side-mounted slide can detract from the appearance of the solid wood and dovetail



**Attach drawer heads after cabinet is assembled. Use small spacers to ensure that they are centered. Note the turned wood pulls, a good "Shaker" cabinet detail.**

joinery. The metal units read modern when the drawer is open. The other option: use under-mounted slides, which are invisible unless you're lying on the floor (available from Julius Blum, Inc., Highway 16 — Lowesville, Dept. OHJ, Stanley, NC 28164; 800-438-6788). These slides don't allow the drawer to extend as far (stopping about three-quarters of the way) and they are expensive, but where drawer authenticity is an issue, they are the slide of choice.

■ **Heads:** Fasten solid-wood drawer heads onto the drawer boxes — after you've installed them in the assembled cabinet — using an adjustable drawer front attachment (available from your drawer slide supplier). This modern contraption allows you to adjust the head so it can fit perfectly in the recessed opening even if the drawer is a fraction off. A simple, flat, un moulded drawer head is perhaps the most authentic type. However, for large drawers, a panel may be necessary to account for wood movement.



### III. DETAILS

*With traditional doors and drawers, your cabinets will blend right into your old house. Here are some of the little things you can do to make the cabinets look even more authentic.*

■ **Materials:** Use pine for Colonial-style cabinets. Maple is a good choice for cabinets that will be painted. Cherry, red birch, and oak are best for 19th- and 20th-century houses where the wood will not be painted. For hardware, select surface-mounted or mortised-butt hinges and authentic pulls from a quality reproduction supplier (such as Crown City Hardware Company, 1047 North Allen Avenue, Dept. OHJ, Pasadena, CA 91104; 818-794-1188).

■ **Toe Spaces:** Modern practice says workstations require toe-spaces. Go with the industry standard of 4" high and 3" deep and build them as an integral part of the cabinet. But where people don't actually lean over to chop, scrub, or knead, go without them because it looks more furniture-like. A trick that helps play down the toe-spaces visually, is to put feet on the ends of each run of cabinets (right). This is done by dropping the last stile to the floor and adding a slight radius to it. Also, cap all cabinets that have exposed sides with a panel.

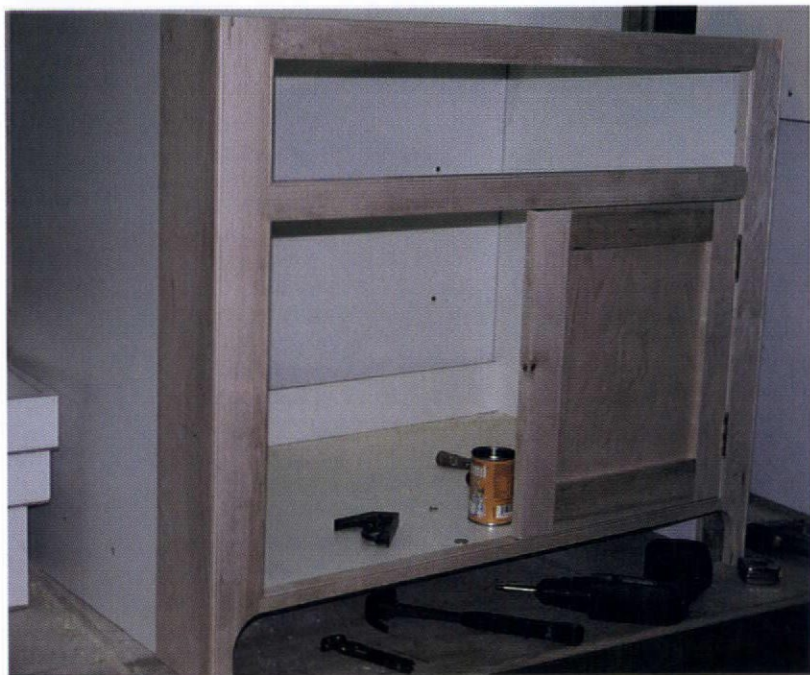
■ **Appliances:** Most large appliance manufacturers these days offer equipment that can receive a wood panel front. By sinking the appliance into a cabinetlike box and installing a wood face, even large refrigerators and dishwashers blend in. Some builders put stove-tops into cabinets (much like sink boxes). Other traditional kitchen designers do not mask modern appliances (saying the deception is not very effective); they let appliances stand among the cabinets.

■ **Surfacing:** Instead of power-sanding your cabinetwork smooth, use traditional surfacing methods, and you'll get a terrific look. These are tricky techniques, requiring practice on scrap wood and maybe even a lesson from an old salt. Hand-plane softwoods, using an old-fashioned surfacing plane. The plane itself is standard, but the blade is cambered to prevent gouging the wood at its edges. If you're going to hand plane the boards, use extra thick stock (say  $\frac{1}{16}$ " for  $\frac{3}{4}$ " final width). If need be, some 200-grit hand sanding can be used as the final with-grain surfacing. For hardwoods, you can

sand or use a hand scraper. Pulling it across the wood will smooth it and will raise the grain slightly for an aged look.

■ **Finish:** Perhaps nothing is more important than the finish you choose. Modern plastic finishes can be sprayed on to create long-lasting coverage, but will ruin the old-fashioned look of the cabinet. Apply your finish by hand. Use a traditional finish appropriate to

**A sink base — found in every kitchen — takes on a traditional, furniture-like look when feet are added to each side. Panel moulding will be applied to the doors after they are primed so that future shrinkage does not expose unfinished wood.**



the era and the house. For painting, use oil-based or milk paint (available from the Old Fashioned Milk Paint Co., 436 Main St., Dept. OHJ, Groton, MA 01450; 508-448-6336). Aniline dyes are a good old-fashioned alternative to stains. Whether painting, staining, or dyeing, use multiple coats of different shades and hand rub the finish for a look that approximates patina. Varnish is the best hard-coat finish, but oil finishes have the most authentic look — the downside is that they require regular maintenance. (Aniline dyes and rubbing oils are available from Finishing Products, 8165 Big Bend, Dept. OHJ, St. Louis, MO 63119; 314-962-7575.)

Remember, use the house as a model and match cupboards to its scale: ornate cabinetwork just won't look right in a simple, builder's style house. 🛠️

*Special thanks for technical assistance:*

Peter J. Veronneau,  
New England Pattern & Joinery,  
379 Summer St., P.O. Box 862,  
Southington, CT 06479; (203)  
621-0248.

Dave Leonard, The Kennebec  
Company, One Front St., Bath,  
ME 04530; (207) 443-2131.



Take your pick:  
The intricate pat-  
terns, earthtone  
glazes, and cloi-  
sonné reliefs of  
reproduction tiles.

# The Ceramic Circus

*Choosing reproduction tiles to match your period house can be confusing.*

*Get the low-down on tile styles and suppliers — past and present.*

BY JAMES C. MASSEY & SHIRLEY MAXWELL

**W**HAT A DIFFERENCE THE decades make! Twenty years ago the market for reproduction tiles for fireplaces, floors, and walls in historic houses hardly existed. Oh, there were plenty of plain, slick pastels — just right for the newest ranch or split-level. But the only option for museum-quality restorations was to order custom replicas, most of which were less than convincing.

Since then the market has matured — boomed, in fact — and it is getting better all the time. Tiles suitable for use in period interiors and historic restorations are now widely available; high-quality, custom-made replicas are routine; and custom colors to match the homeowner's decor can be provided on demand. The period tile makers range in size from small artisan workshops to large international firms. Now that mass-production tile makers have caught on to the idea, the latest trend in factory-produced tiles is toward historical designs and adaptations. Some of the latter are quite at home in the vintage house — and they are probably more readily available than custom handmade replicas.

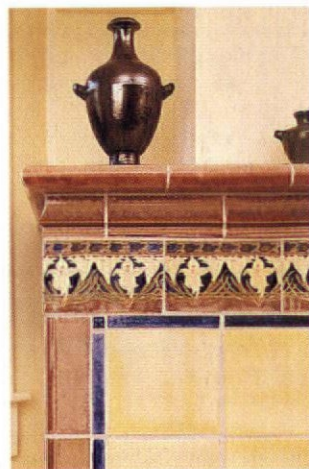
## A Brief History of Tile

TILES HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR A LONG TIME — as early as the ancient Egyptian and Babylonians, in fact. But the history of tile making in America is relatively brief. When

America was first colonized, there was no means of tile making, so tiles were imported from Europe. In the 18th century, for those who could afford them, *Delft tiles* — blue and white or polychrome tin-glazed ware from Holland and England — and *transfer-printed tiles* (a method of applying a print on the tile surface with a copper master plate) from Liverpool decorated fireplaces in pre-revolutionary homes.

In the early 19th century, Herbert Minton in England used newly patented manufacturing processes to create, as he called them, *encaustic tiles* — actually *in-laid tiles*, a 13th-century method of filling different clay colors into pressed designs, which fused during firing. Encaustic tiles and unglazed geometrics became very popular in the United States and, by the 1850s, they covered the floors of many entryways, both private and commercial. Like many Victorian decorative elements, tiles became of a symbol of social position and good taste. But surprisingly, most were still imported. This was about to change, however.

At the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia, an impressive display by European tile manufacturers combined with a strong nationalistic movement made the time ripe for industrious Americans to create their own wares. These first decorative tiles were called *art tiles* — relief tiles depicting natural scenes or classical motifs. The innovative John Gardner Low, founder of the J. & J. G. Low Art Tile Works, cre-



A floral border matched with luminous ivory and green field tiles makes an impressive display on an Arts & Crafts mantel.

ated a refreshingly simple tile making method called *natural process*, which involved pressing organic matter such as leaves into soft clay. Although England remained a leading producer of tiles, other American companies, such as the American Encaustic Tiling Company, also began



## Early American Tiles

From reproduction Delft tiles to actual antiques, these companies specialize in tiles suitable for early American — or even Colonial Revival — homes. Keep in mind that this is a partial list of the many styles available.

### COUNTRY FLOORS, INC.

15 E. 16th St., Dept. OHJ  
New York, NY 10003  
(212) 627-8300

An extraordinary range of historic-period tiles. Includes 16th- to 18th-c. designs, Delft tiles and crackled-glaze tiles.

### DUTCH PRODUCTS AND SUPPLY CO.

166 Lincoln Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Yardley, PA 19067  
(215) 493-4873

Crackle-glazed Delftware in blue and polychrome from the venerable firm Westraven (above). Also have pictorial tableaux.



### LAUFEN INTERNATIONAL CERAMIC TILE

Box 6600, Dept. OHJ  
Tulsa, OK 74156  
(918) 428-3851

Reproduction Victorian, blue Delft tiles, and an Art Nouveau mural are among a variety of modern designs appropriate for old houses. Available through distributors.

### SUN HOUSE

9986 Happy Acres W., Dept. OHJ  
Bozeman, MT 59715-9583  
(406) 587-3651

Although not reproductions, tiles stamped with buttermilk patterns (left and p.49, top right) are suitable for early American houses. Also have a line of Victorian-style borders.

### SUMMITVILLE TILES, INC.

Dept. OHJ  
Summitville, OH 43962  
(216) 223-1511

Reproduction English 18th-century fireplace tiles (bottom, floral basket) and a humorous Macaroni figure series based on 18th-century engravings, done in cooperation with Colonial Williamsburg. Also a new series complementing Fitz and Floyd china. Sold through distributors and showrooms.

### HELEN WILLIAMS/RARE TILES

12643 Hortense St., Dept. OHJ  
Studio City, CA 91604  
(818) 761-2756

Importer of original antique tiles, including Delft, Liverpool, Spanish, and Portuguese as well as original Victorian and Art Nouveau tiles. Prices range from \$25 to \$100.

to make inroads on the market.

Despite this growth, the mass production of Victorian tiles left little room for original artistic expression. In late 1890s, a taste for handmade decorative tiles emerged, as Americans learned to appreciate craftsmanship. By 1910, American tile making was in its heyday, producing tiles of great originality. Instead of attempting realistic and detailed images like the Victorians, subject matter became more artistic and stylized. Matte finishes were preferred over glossy translucent glazes; handcrafted irregularities were prized. The use of decorative tiles went beyond fireplaces or floors — finding its way into the kitchen, along walls and arches, and on stair risers.

Henry Chapman Mercer, who founded the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works (see "Who They Were," January/February 1995), was instrumental in bringing about these changes. He created straightforward designs based on historic — often medieval — subjects. William Grueby of the Grueby Faience Co. produced the now well-known matte green glaze that was widely used during the Arts & Crafts movement. (*Faience*, by the way, was originally a term for all tin-glazed earthenware, but came to mean architectural ceramics, structural as well as decorative.) Other imagi-



Reproduction matte green art tiles along the backsplash and wall add to the period feel of this modern kitchen.



native glazes, such as Rookwood Pottery's waxy matte treatments and Pewabic Pottery's iridescent blues, were also formulated during this period.

California was slower to develop its tile making capabilities. However, once started, West coast tile makers showed much originality by drawing from the California landscape for their subjects. The tiles had an earthy appearance, and many used bright colors and geometric shapes that blended with the Spanish Colonial houses of the area. Ernest Batchelder created a mottled effect on his tiles by partially rubbing off a colorant (not a glaze) to expose the clay underneath. Malibu Potteries produced particularly beautiful glazed *press-molded tiles* (machine-made from dust clay that is molded under pressure); California Faience installed tiles designed by architect Julia Morgan.

The Great Depression caused the closing of most tile manufacturers. Later, the public lost interest in the handcrafted look, and only cookie-cutter pastel tiles were available. However, just like a century ago, the whims of taste shifted again. In the late 1960s and early '70s, there was a re-emergence of historical designs, which has led to a burst of creativity in reproduction — and original — tile making today.

### A Period Tile Revival

MUCH LIKE EARLIER THIS CENTURY, THE number of successful artisan tile makers is growing. Now, however, more of them are selling through distributors rather than by mail order, considerably increasing the availability of their wares and, not inci-



## Victorian Tiles

Whether you're looking for encaustic floor tiles or a five-part fireplace border, the choices for Victorian tiles have never been better.

**BLAKESON, INC.**  
Huron Lane, P.O. Box 25303, Dept. OHJ  
Little Rock, AR 72221  
(501) 221-9441  
Importers of Victorian tiles for fireplaces (left, five-part border).

**DESIGNS IN TILE**  
Box 358, Dept. OHJ  
Mt. Shasta, CA 96067  
(916) 926-2629  
Custom tiles in Victorian, English and American Arts & Crafts (including William De Morgan designs), Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and California art tile designs.

**H&R JOHNSON TILES, LTD.**  
P. O. Box 2335, Dept. OHJ  
Farmingdale, NJ 07727  
(908) 280-7900  
The pioneer firm in reproducing Victorian encaustic and geometric tiles by Minton, Hollins Co., as well as other Victorian, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco designs. Also do custom restoration tiles and murals.

**ILLAHE TILEWORKS**  
695 Mistletoe Rd., #E, Dept. OHJ  
Ashland, OR 97520  
(503) 488-5072  
Produce custom handmade tiles; Victorian relief and liners are kept in stock; and also furnished in custom glazes.

**K. J. PATTERSON CERAMICS**  
590 Ayon Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Azusa, CA 91702  
(818) 815-2695  
Custom handmade tiles and a variety of genuine encaustics, reproducing medieval patterns with a handmade look. Sold through Country Floors (p.50, encaustic).

**L'ESPERANCE TILE WORKS**  
237 Sheridan Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Albany, NY 12210  
(518) 465-5586  
Museum-quality Victorian reproductions including encaustics and majolica relief tiles in designs by Low and American Encaustic Tile.

dentially, leaving themselves with more time to make tiles. The greatest growth has been in early 20th-century tile reproduction and adaptation, especially the great California designs of Malibu, Batchelder, and Julia Morgan. Larger tile sizes — up to 24" x 48" — are becoming popular.



**SHEP BROWN ASSOCIATES, INC.**  
24 Cummings Park, Dept. OHJ  
Woburn, MA 01801  
(617) 935-8080  
Distributes imported lines of historical reproductions, including printed medieval encaustic-type designs, Victorian tiles, Victorian majolica and decorated tiles, and stunning Art Nouveau tiles.

**STARBUCK GOLDNER TILES**  
315 W. Fourth St., Dept. OHJ  
Bethlehem, PA 18015  
(610) 866-6321  
Custom handmade reproduction tiles in custom colors. Fine turn-of-the-century majolica relief tile reproductions.

**TERRA DESIGNS**  
241 East Blackwell Street, Dept. OHJ  
Dover, NJ 07801  
(201) 328-1135  
Offer handmade mosaics (p.50) and Victorian-style tiles, particularly mouldings in Greek key and floral patterns.

**TILE SHOWCASE**  
291 Arsenal St., Dept. OHJ  
Watertown, MA 02172  
(617) 926-1100  
A large range of reproduction historical tiles, including English Victorian designs.

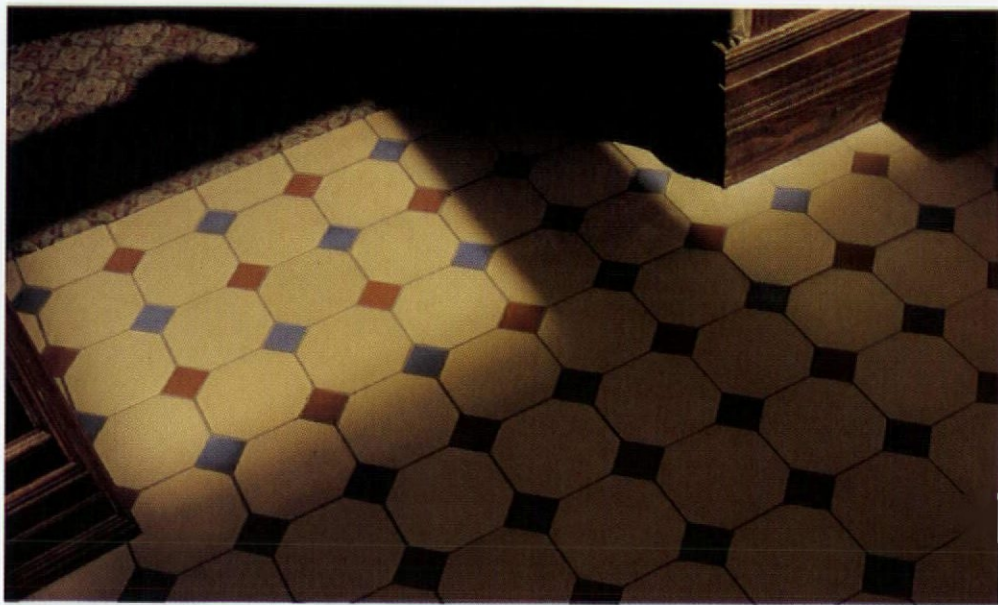
## How to Buy Repro Tiles

- ◆ Always examine sample tiles before placing your order, especially when dealing with handmade tiles.
- ◆ Expect to see a difference between the uniformity of machine-made tiles and the inevitable (and desirable) variations of handmade ones.
- ◆ Order early. There may be a long delivery time for handmade and imported tiles.
- ◆ Remember that handmade tiles may cost up to twenty times as much as machine-made tiles.
- ◆ Custom colors are available from many tilemakers. Keep in mind, however, that colors and glazes vary somewhat in production.
- ◆ Wall, floor, and counter tiles all call for different levels of hardness, or abrasion resistance. Tile hardness is grouped by number, in ascending levels of abrasion resistance:

1. Wall tiles
2. Light residential — for example, bathroom floors
3. All residential and light commercial (including entryway and kitchen floors).

Level 3 is adequate for residential use.

- ◆ Slip resistance is essential for floor tiles.



Overseas, Spain and Italy are the principal centers for industrial production, and Mexico makes an increasing variety of traditional tiles with a handmade look for the Spanish Revival house. Holland and Portugal continue to turn out their famed 18th-century designs.

It was in Europe — England, to be exact — that the tile revival started. The H. & R. Johnson Company caught the public's attention with handmade Victorian encaustic and geometric tiles, and continues to be the leader today. Also at that time, Henry Mercer's Moravian Pottery resumed production in the original Pennsylvania pottery, using his molds and glazes. Now many companies, specializing in reproductions, are expanding their Victorian lines.

Many familiar pottery names from the early 20th century, such as Fulper, Handcraft, and Pewabic, have continued or resumed old production lines. Others, such as Deer Creek, are new companies using old tile molds. Summitville Tile, a large industrial firm, also offers a wide range of historically appropriate tiles and colors. Large national distributors such as Country Floors and Laufen International have compiled an amazing array of imported and domestic historical design and replica tiles. Their catalogs alone are a treat for the eye.

Among the larger industrial firms, Natucer of Spain has a new line inspired by the Spanish Catalan architect Antonio

**Unglazed floor tiles in earthy colors are an authentic Victorian touch for vestibules and hallways.**

Gaudì, while others, such as Pedro Beltran, recapture the spirit of ancient Moorish and classical mosaic designs. Artesanos, a Santa Fe firm, imports and offers through their catalog a wide range of fine, colorful Mexican tiles that fit well in many early-20th-century houses.

Perhaps the most attractive feature of the early 20th-century Arts & Crafts-period tiles is their lustrous colored glazing in a wide range of rich translucent hues. Several tile makers now recreate these unique color glazes. The Arts & Crafts-movement tiles, with their impressionistic designs and fine colors and glazes, are most appropriate for the early 20th-century house, whether Craftsman, Foursquare, or Bungalow.

Traditional 18th-century-style blue Delft fireplace tiles are also widely available. Summitville's Delft lookalikes in a variety of designs are endorsed by Colonial Williamsburg. Other firms, such as Dutch Products and Supply, import traditional Delft tiles from the Netherlands, which are particularly appropriate for early American houses. The imports include both modern screen-printed reproductions with handpainted designs and handmade tiles with antiqued crackled glaze, such as those made by Westraven, a Dutch firm that started tile making in 1661. While these are certainly the most authentic choices for



a restoration, they can be expensive, at prices ranging up to \$60 per tile.

Now that replacement tiles are widely available, some artisan tile makers are specializing in restoration work, matching missing or worn tiles to order. The Tile Restoration Center and Bertin Studios are two companies that will replicate the color, design, glaze, relief, and size of old tiles — though their work may not be cheap. Prices can range from a low of \$4 to more than \$100 per tile. However, some tile makers prefer to handle the large orders of a commercial rehab, such as a courthouse. At most small tile makers, reproduction tiles are generally custom jobs, handmade and

## Arts & Crafts Tiles

The most imaginative Arts & Crafts tiles are now reproduced, and many lustrous glazes — the hallmark of the period — have been revived. Also, quite a few companies offer restoration services for original tiles in any style.

### ALCHEMIE CERAMICS STUDIO

1550 Gascony Rd., Dept. OHJ  
Leucadia, CA 92024  
(619) 942-6051  
Arts & Crafts and Art Deco relief tiles, including Batchelder. Custom reproduction available in terra cotta.

### ARTESANOS

Drawer G, Dept. OHJ  
Santa Fe, NM 87504  
(505) 983-5563  
Mexican tiles appropriate for Spanish Colonial and Pueblo Revival houses. Although not reproductions, these attractive tiles are inexpensive.

### BERTIN STUDIO TILES

11 Munson St., Dept. OHJ  
Port Washington, NY 11050  
(516) 767-7308  
Handmade ceramic tiles with early-20th-century glazes. Also provides custom restoration tiles and restoration services.

### DEER CREEK POTTERY

305 Richardson St., Dept. OHJ  
Grass Valley, CA 95945  
(916) 272-3373  
40 historical tile molds, including Julia Morgan designs (above, circle). Through distributors; custom restorations.

### EPRO, INC.

156 E. Broadway, Dept. OHJ  
Westerville, OH 43081  
(614) 882-6990  
Handmade tiles in appealing Arts & Crafts translucent glazes.

### FULPER GLAZES, INC.

P. O. Box 373, Dept. OHJ  
Yardley, PA 19067  
(215) 736-8512  
Handcrafted tiles made with the original Fulper glazes (above, crab) by descendants of the founder.

### HANDCRAFT TILE

1696 S. Main St., Dept. OHJ  
Milpitas, CA 95035  
(408) 262-1140  
Founded in 1926, make Arts & Crafts pieces from old molds (above, Celtic knot).

### MORAVIAN POTTERY AND TILE WORKS

130 Swamp Rd., Dept. OHJ  
Doylestown, PA 18901  
(215) 345-6722  
The fabled tileworks produces a large range of picturesque Henry Mercer tile designs (above rabbit; p.50, building).



### MOTAWI TILEWORKS

33 N. Staebler, Ste.2, Dept. OHJ  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
(313) 213-0017  
Custom handmade tiles inspired by the Arts & Crafts Movement.

### PEWABIC POTTERY

10125 E. Jefferson Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Detroit, MI 48214  
(313) 822-0954  
Custom tiles from a historic pottery, using historic and modern molds. Offers extensive Arts & Crafts glazes and colors.

### CHARLES RUPERT DESIGNS

2004 Oak Bay Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Victoria, BC V8R 1E4  
(604) 592-4916  
Specialists in reproduction tiles, including Arts & Crafts, Victorian, Art Nouveau, and William Morris lines (p.49, middle).

### TILE RESTORATION CENTER

Marie Glasse Tapp  
3511 Interlake North, Dept. OHJ  
Seattle, WA 98103  
(206) 633-4866  
Handmade reproductions of Batchelder and Clay Craft tiles. Tile conservation services.

### VENICE TILE COLLECTIONS


24425 Woolsey Canyon Rd., #12, Dept. OHJ  
West Hills, CA 91304  
(818) 346-7858  
Reproductions of Malibu and Catalina tiles as well as historical adaptations.



Often restorations requires replacing tiles with replicas. In this case, however, the painted ornamental tile was cleaned and the damaged field tiles on the fireplace surround were repaired.

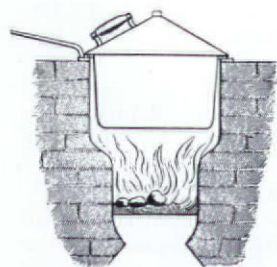


colored to order, with few stock items.

The expansive growth of reproduction tile makers is good news for old-house owners. There is an incredible choice of authentic Delft imports and reproductions; floral Victorian tiles — from Gothic to Art Nouveau — abound; and lustrous Arts & Crafts glazes are inspiring a renaissance. So add a backsplash to a period kitchen or match damaged vintage tiles, the job has become a little easier. 

F I R E  
& I C E

## Looking at Ranges and Refrigerators in the Historic Kitchen *By Gordon Bock*



Count Rumford, father of the Thermos bottle and the efficient fireplace, made cooking scientific around 1800 by putting the fire in a box — what a concept!

**R**ANGES AND REFRIGERATORS — THE TWO LARGEST appliances — have pretty much defined the up-to-date kitchen since they appeared in the salad days of the industrial revolution. After all, kitchens were service areas, not showplaces until well into this century, and there wasn't much else to look at in this realm of servants and food preparers. Pleasant paint colors, attractive tile, or floors beyond functional appeared only when the kitchen became the epicenter of family eating and activity. ¶ One way to understand kitchens of the past, and gain design ideas for an old-house kitchen today, is to examine the development of these two appliances. Refrigerators and ranges began as near opposites in every way: built from different materials, running at temperature extremes, and often not



placed in the same room. Over 80 years of improving technology, they grew closer in proximity and appearance until, in the 1940s, they looked almost alike. In fact, at one point they merged into the same appliance! If that sounds hard to believe, come with me on a little a rocket tour of kitchen history with an eye on the ranges and refrigerators.

### Fixtures of the Fin de Siècle

**THE RANGE** — A FLAT-TOPPED HEAT SOURCE combined with an oven — is less than two hundred years old. Benjamin Thompson, better known as Count Rumford, designed the earliest such cooking fire to scientifically conserve heat around 1800. Cast iron wood-

and coal-burning ranges followed, revolutionizing kitchens from the 1820s to 1850s.

Cast iron could take the temperature swings of cooking, and it was an ideal medium for surface ornament. Motifs often followed Victorian fashions, from geometric Eastlake-style patterns in the 1870s to floral lines of the Art Nouveau period around the turn of this century. An umbilical exhaust pipe tied the cast-iron stove to a new kind of chimney — tall and thin enough to draw for a stove. In pre-1830 houses, where there was only a large central chimney and open hearth for cooking, whole new kitchen ells were often built just to accommodate the radically different range.

Commercial refrigeration had been feasible since the 1860s, especially for cold

**A study in legs, this 1931 ad shows an all-electric, porcelain-on-steel Frigidare standing solo in the kitchen. These bottom-compressor refrigerators also integrated with the new built-in cabinetry of the day.**



Gay '90s refrigerators, sometimes styled as sideboards, might inhabit the dining room if the payload was wine or beer. A waste pipe drained off water from melting ice. **BELOW:** This modern bungalow kitchen eliminated the butler's pantry and put the cabinets in with the coal cookstove — an uncommon idea in 1910.

storage in meatpacking, beermaking, and railroad transport, but refrigerators for houses weren't advertised regularly until the 1880s. Block ice — cut from ponds during winter or manufactured in city areas with early ice-making equipment — was the source of chilling power and the nickname "ice box." Manufacturers did their best to maintain the cold with state-of-the-art insulation: sawdust, charcoal, or ground cork.

These "family" refrigerators were furniture-like appliances made of hardwoods (typically oak and ash) or softwoods, lined with painted or galvanized metal. With a top-loading ice compartment, most resembled a tall chest. They were sited in a cool part of the kitchen, away from the range or sometimes on a porch.

### Convenience at the Century Mark

AS THE AGE OF INVENTION PEAKED, THE search was on for other heat sources. In the 1880s and '90s, when gas was still primarily an illuminant, pioneering gas ranges were squared-up, cast-iron versions of wood or coal stoves. By the 1910s, however, gas companies were losing the lighting business to electricity, so they turned to the kitchen market. Gas ranges, in no need of a heavy iron firebox, developed their own, lighter form — the "cabinet range." The standard layout

was a baking oven above a broiling oven, both at right or left of a five-burner top.

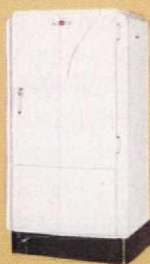
A new type of range, the vapor stove, capitalized on petroleum. Common by the 1890s, these iron and steel stoves were light and portable, not unlike treadle sewing machines of the day. In the 1910s and '20s, the "combination range" became quite the kitchen rage. These stoves were fired by gas as well as wood or coal — just gas for summer cooking; coal or wood for winter warmth. Simpler surfaces had reduced ornament, but they could be ordered in color (a few porcelain-enameled whites and greys) by the mid-1920s.

Refrigerators, too, were getting "cleaner" as they became more sophisticated prior to the first World War. The wood case, now sheathed in metal and "everlasting" porcelain, had smooth faces and rounded corners. Zinc, glass, or white enamel interiors aided cleaning. Hardware, though, remained beefy and prominent. Nickel-plated brass T-hinges had to hold heavy bevelled doors, and unique cam-and-lever locks drew them airtight with a single swing.

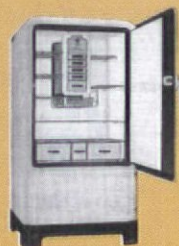
Increasingly like modern appliances, refrigerators were appearing in more upscale kitchens — that is, unless they were built-ins. Fixed-in-place, cabinet-style refrigerators, built-ins were finished to match exist-



# HISTORICALLY APPROPRIATE APPLIANCES



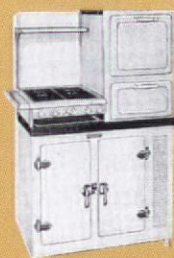
1940s  
Streamlined  
Refrigerator



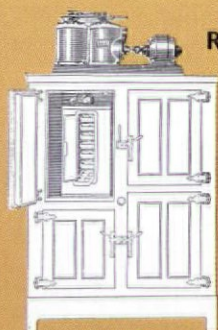
1937  
Gas Refrigerator



1931  
Monitor Top



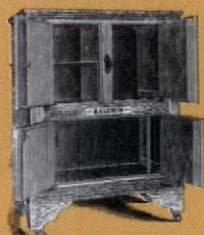
Combination  
Refrigerator-Range,  
1930



Built-in  
Refrigerator,  
1919



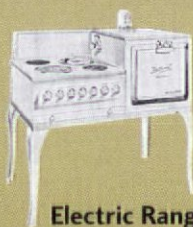
Ice-cooled  
Refrigerator,  
1914



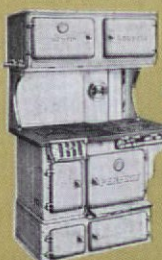
1890s  
Refrigerator



1937  
"Dashboard" Range

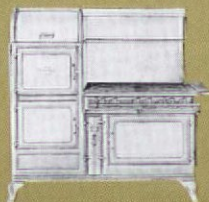


Electric Range,  
1930



Combination  
Range,  
1929

1927  
Cabinet  
Range



1890s  
Vapor Stove

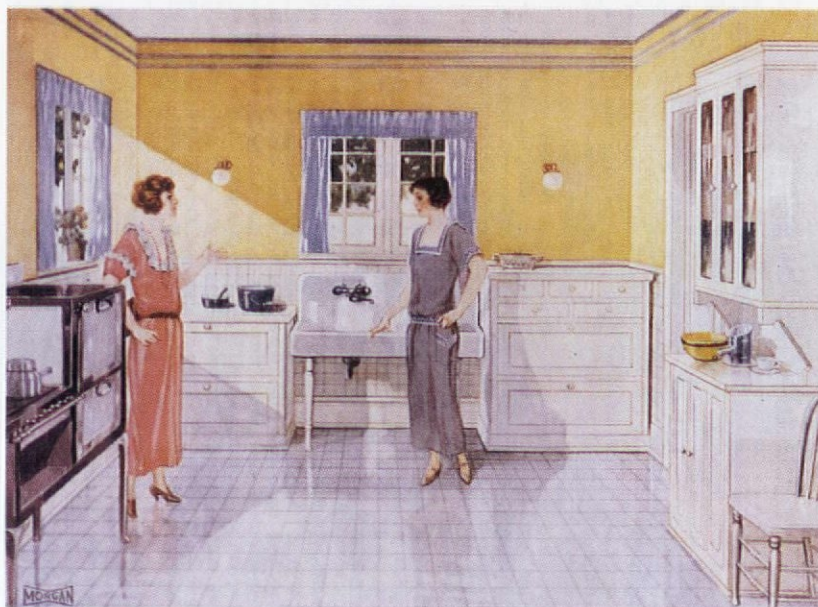
1889  
Coal Range



**A**ntique or classic-design stoves are snapped up quickly by old-house owners, and for two reasons. First, a period stove goes a long way in helping to make an old-house kitchen look historically appropriate. To service this need, there are several companies making reproduction cookstoves — that is, lookalikes for woodburning units that today run on electricity or gas. Second, many folks want to invest in a high-quality, long-life appliance, and feel that restored pre-1940 stoves are better-built than those manufactured today. Gas stoves from as early as the first decade of this century are particular favorites, with price tags topping \$1000 and more for restored units. Look for working oven thermostats, upgraded insulation, and code-complying pilot safety shut-off valves when shopping for restored gas stoves.

The earliest wood refrigerators have been popular with homeowners for decades as accent furniture in dens and private bars, and they can be even more appealing for an old-house kitchen. The market for these items at antiques shops and flea markets is lively, albeit increasingly pricey, yet they offer useful storage after a new coat of varnish or paint. While a built-in could theoretically be retrofitted with a modern commercial compressor, there is at least one company that does sell classic oak ice boxes ready-to-go with modern insulation and cooling equipment.

Early electric refrigerators, are increasingly favorites for mating with a period kitchen or range — especially everybody's favorite, that unmistakable Monitor Top. Though small by today's standards and getting hard to find, these appliances are reliable and surprisingly efficient — if bought in good condition. When shopping for antique refrigerators, only consider a "sealed system" machine that you see running. While some small parts such as door gaskets and controls can be renewed with universal replacements, recharging the cooling system is basically out of the question. The coolant in many old refrigerators is highly toxic (Monitor Tops ran on sulphur dioxide) or obsolete (gas-powered refrigerators have their own formula). The best bets are units from the 1940s and later.



**ABOVE:** Gas cabinet ranges of the 1920s stood on slender cabriole legs among the other freestanding kitchen "furniture" — a legged sink and pantry dresser (at right). **BELOW:** Efficiency for this 1931 kitchen was the Monitor Top refrigerator, Hoosier cupboard, and some built-in sink cabinetry.

ing cupboards — typically in the pantry. Besides literally blending in with the woodwork, a built-in could be loaded with ice from outside the building.

Ice is nice, but coolants are convenient. Though machines for making artificial ice date to the 1850s, home refrigerators had to wait for the electric motor and small gas engine before they could be "independent of the ice wagon." By 1914, it was possible to

install a house refrigerating system — if one had the means. About \$10,000 fitted a built-in refrigerator with coils and piping that ran to a compressor and motor located in the basement or back room. Brine or ammonia circulating in the pipes removed heat. It was a luxury set-up, not for the average man's house, but it did avoid the cost of ice. Retrofit sets were small enough to perch a compressor on top of a separately purchased refrigerator in 1919.

### "Thirties Technology Triumphs

IN THE EARLY '30S, KITCHEN RANGES HAD PROGRESSED "well-nigh to perfection" according to *House Beautiful* magazine. Coal or wood-burning stoves, as well as vapor stoves, were still being sold, but they tended to find homes in rural areas, or where there were no hook-ups to city services.

Gas ranges quickly assumed a new persona as the "chest of drawers" range once the manifold feeding the valves vanished. Covers that pulled down over the burners left the appliance "hardly recognizable as a stove," if you believed ads that suggested they might even double as tables. There was low-maintenance chromium trim instead of







The continuous countertop kitchen took over by 1940, mustering range and refrigerator into the same rank of cabinets. The mirror and desk were part of a kitchen-as-boudoir fad.

nickel, all-steel construction, and real porcelain blue, green, or pink. Drawer-type handles and decorative legs continued the notion that appliances were furniture.

The electric range, an upstart that was a glorified table-top hotplate in 1917, gained new ground by 1930 as the nation pushed to wire for power. Manufacturer's mounted the active parts in a legged cabinet similar to a gas stove, or made them a partner in a gas-or-coal combination stove.

By the end of the decade, the "built-in look" had arrived. Both gas and electric stoves quickly stopped trying to be free-standing cabinets. Instead they grew dashboardlike backs that hugged the wall, and square-cut corners that fit flush with countertops at either side. Legs became greatly reduced or disappeared altogether. Streamlining was passing through the kitchen. Inspired by the new aerodynamic contours of planes, cars, and trains, designers were adding airfoil curves and chrome speed lines to the most stationary of appliances.

### Ranges and Refrigerators Fuse

THROUGH THE 1910S ENGINEERS STRIVED to bring the ice maker ever closer to the ice box. In the 1920s, early manufacturers, such as Frigidaire (General Motors), could en-

close the working parts behind a grille at the bottom of an all-metal cabinet. A few direct competitors flipped the idea around and put the guts at the top. In 1926, General Electric debuted the classic compressor-above refrigerator — the Monitor Top. The entire cooling system was a compact unit wrapped in an unmistakable halo of cooling coils that sat atop the insulated cabinet, with room below so the box could stand on legs like gas stoves of the same era.

Moreover, the depressed but creative 1930s inspired designers to even amalgamate the main parts of refrigerator and range in a single appliance. The proud owner of a combination range-and-refrigerator got four burners and an oven mounted above a two door provision cabinet — both powered by gas. Indeed, the gas refrigerator itself was an elegant but contradictory mating of both devices. Coolant circulated through the coils via convection, rather than a compressor, produced by nothing more than a pilot-sized flame.

As of the 1934 model year, the latest word in refrigerators had the compressor buried, once again, in the bottom of flat-topped, round-shouldered case. The streamlining movement also swept up the refrigerator. Hardware was especially automotive, with concealed hinges but highly styled handles. Legs, of course, were gone without a trace. Though it might be shaped closer to a sarcophagus in the '50s, or gain color in the '60s, by 1940 the basic, big, white boxy refrigerator had arrived. 🐾

### SUPPLIERS

**ELMIRA STOVEWORKS**  
145 Northfield Dr., Dept OHJ  
Waterloo, Ontario  
Canada N2L 5J3  
(519) 725-5500  
Reproduction ranges,  
several styles

**ERICKSON'S ANTIQUE STOVES**  
2 Taylor St., Box 2275  
Dept. OHJ  
Littleton, MA 01460  
(508) 486-3589  
Gas and combination stove  
restoration, sales.

**HEARTLAND APPLIANCE, INC.**  
5 Hoffman St., Dept. OHJ  
Kichner, Ontario  
Canada N2M 3M5  
(519) 743-8111  
Reproduction ranges in gas and  
electric; Reproduction refriger-  
erators.

**JOHNNY'S APPLIANCES AND  
CLASSIC RANGES**  
17549 Sonoma Highway,  
P.O. Box 1407, Dept. OHJ  
Sonoma, CA 95476-1407  
(707) 996-9730  
Stove restoration and sales.

**KEOKUK STOVE WORKS**  
1201 High St., Dept OHJ  
Keokuk, IA 52632  
(319) 524-6202  
Stove restoration and sales.

**LEHMAN'S**  
One Lehman Circle,  
P.O. Box 41  
Dept. OHJ  
Kidron, OH 44636-0041  
(216) 857-5757  
Non-electric gas stoves and  
refrigerators

**MACY'S TEXAS STOVE WORKS**  
5515 Almeda Rd., Dept. OHJ  
Houston, TX 77004  
(713) 521-0934  
Stove restoration and sales.

**NORTHERN REFRIGERATOR  
COMPANY**  
21149 Northland Dr.  
P.O. Box 204, Dept OHJ  
Paris, MI 49338  
(616) 796-8007  
Reproduction refrigerators

# KEEPING RADON OUT OF OLD HOUSES

by John D. Wagner and  
Marylee MacDonald



**TOP:** Cracks in concrete should be sealed with urethane caulk. **MIDDLE:** Fill penetrations in first-storey floors with radon-blocking foam. **BOTTOM:** A sump pump cover ventilates ground-source air from the pump to the outside.

**T**HERE'S A MYTH FLOATING AROUND: old houses are so leaky, they can't collect high levels of radon. It's not true. To the contrary, conditions in old houses make radon accumulation likely. Old dirt-floor basements, porous masonry foundations, and crawl spaces can give radon an easy route from the ground to living areas. Theoretically, drafts under doors and around windows should reduce radon levels, but in some cases, a cross breeze actually encourages the gas up out of the ground. Besides, most old houses have been tightened up by energy retrofits, and are not so leaky anymore. You may be willing to live with radon risks (see p. 61), but if you've dismissed radon as a concern strictly for new house owners, think again.

## The Stack Effect

AS YOUR HOUSE BREATHES, WHICH ALL HOUSES do, it can open the door to radon. When heat escapes, when appliances and exhaust fans vent air to the outside, or even when a simple cross breeze draws cooler air up from lower floors, new air rushes in to take its place. Cumulatively, this vacuum is sometimes called the stack effect. Replacement air comes from everywhere: through porous walls, leaky windows, vents, open windows and doors — and as much as 20% is drawn from the ground below, through foundations, floors, and walls that contact it.

It's this ground-source air that may contain radon, an odorless, colorless radioactive gas that vents up through bedrock

and soil (see opposite). Full basements present higher radon risks than slabs, because there's more surface area in contact with the soil. Stone, cinder block, and brick walls give some protection, although they are porous enough to pass radon. A poured foundation is a slightly better barrier, but even modern foundations and slabs under recent additions have floor drains, wall joints, and pipe penetrations that may allow radon to enter.

## Passive Protection

IN MANY CASES, SIMPLE AND INEXPENSIVE passive mitigation can reduce radon levels in an old house. A few simple hands-on techniques restorers know well — caulking, repointing, and installing vapor barriers — can block radon's entry points.

**DIRT FLOOR:** Cover exposed soil with plastic, but not where people walk. (You can also use plastic on walls if the seams between the adjoining sheets are sealed properly.) Use polyethylene at least 6 mils thick, overlapped 12 inches, sealed at the seams, and thoroughly caulked at wall joints or where the wall meets the floor.

**POURED CONCRETE:** For floors, seal any cracks, including wall junctions, using a urethane sealant. Urethane adheres well, even to dusty surfaces, and has a long life. (It is toxic during application, so carefully follow manufacturer's safety instructions.) Be sure to tool it into cracks and joints. For walls, sealants are also most efficient, but filling cracks with mortar will work, too.

**PENETRATIONS:** One of the easiest entry routes for radon (at least in basements with

Radon flows up from the ground below, and can get into old houses through exposed soil, porous masonry, and cracks.



## Testing for Radon

Radon is invisible and odorless, so the only way to determine whether this gas is in your old house is to set up a detector. There are two types of tests, short term and long term. Short term tests consist of a charcoal pack you set out on the first living level of the house. The charcoal absorbs the radon and the lab determines its level by measuring average radon concentration. Wait four to seven days, and promptly send it to the lab for analysis. If you delay, or if the detector absorbs excess moisture or other contaminants, it may give a false reading.

Many radon professionals frown on short-term tests, especially as grounds for mitigation work (which can be costly). Radon levels can fluctuate widely day to day, or week to week. A passing low-pressure weather front, for example, can double the radon level. Radon levels also change seasonally. If you get a high reading from a charcoal test, engage an EPA-approved professional to do a long-term test — a better analysis, and more accurate.

One kind of long-term test is the alpha tracker. These detectors measure alpha particles, a type of radiation emitted by radon daughters. Some alpha trackers employ a sensitive strip of plastic. The particles bombard and score the plastic, leaving a record. You send the device to a designated lab that determines the radon level. Another alpha tracker plugs into a wall socket for continuous radon readings. It has a readout you can check at any time for spot or historical readings. It is slightly more expensive and can be used by a professional, or you may be able to read it yourself. Another kind of long-term detector, called E-Perm, measures radon electrically. It, too, must be sent to a lab for analysis, and it works well for either a short- or long-term test.

Whatever radon testing device you use, insist that the maker demonstrate EPA approval. If you hire a professional, be sure the individual who takes the readings (not just the head of the company) has the EPA's Radon Measurement Proficiency Program rating.



Both the continuous radon tracker (left) and E-Perm detector (right) offer short-term tests for quick results, and long-term for average levels.



Short-term testing is cheap and easy, and usually the only option for homebuyers, but determines radon levels only for the days it is set. Tests in winter give the highest readings.



concrete floors) is through gaps around pipe penetrations, floor drains, and sump-pump lids. Seal these with mortar or urethane foam. Special covers and liners for sump pumps are available, as are drains, designed to prevent radon seepage.

**SMOOTH SURFACES:** Any uniform surface can be coated with a paint engineered to block radon seepage. These include polyurethane-based elastomeric sealants and polyamide epoxy coatings. They lay on a barrier to block radon migration into the house. (As always, if you have an ongoing moisture problem, do not attempt to seal your masonry.)

**BRICK AND STONE:** Point open joints with mortar. The condition of masonry in old houses can vary widely. If, after repointing the joints, the radon level has still not dropped, you may need to provide a better seal. For brick walls, parge with a standard mix, and paint the parging with a radon-defeating paint. For stone, cover with plastic as described above.

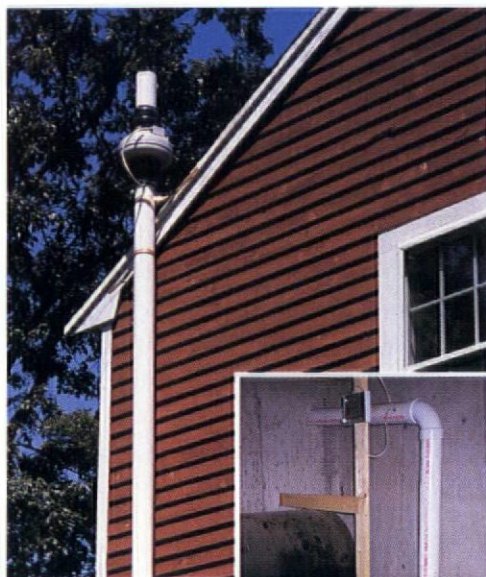
**CINDER BLOCK:** Radon gas seeping through the blocks' porous concrete can be frustrated with sealant, but cinder blocks present radon with another easy route to follow. The stack of hollow cores can act as a chimney for radon, carrying it from the earth to under your first-storey floor. Block this conduit by filling the cores in the top course with cement or urethane foam.

### Active Mitigation

IF HIGH LEVELS OF RADON PERSIST AFTER you've put in passive systems, your abatement options narrow. If you can't block it, you can try ventilating to exhaust contaminated air. This requires hiring a professional. Find someone who has been trained in the Radon Contractors Proficiency Program. (Check with your local EPA office.) Active mitigations can cost as much as \$3,000, but most average between \$1,200 and \$1,600.

**POURED CONCRETE FLOOR:** A radon contractor will jackhammer a hole in the basement floor, insert a pipe into the soil underneath, and vent the pipe safely above the house's eaves. The radon will be sucked





A fan pulls air from below the basement floor to exhaust contaminated ground air to a point above the [old] house.

through the pipe by an in-line fan designed for just this application. If you still have high levels of radon after you've sunk a below-slab pipe-and-fan system, the contractor can add more pipes.

Be sure your contractor installs a sys-

tem that won't cause a backdraft. A poorly designed sub-slab pipe and fan ventilator can create a vacuum inside the house, competing for air flow with appliances such as furnaces, wood stoves, and gas-fired dryers. This can create a backdraft, sucking dangerous flue gases, such as carbon monoxide, into your living space — and that is an *undisputed* danger.

**DIRT FLOOR:** Piping won't work if the earth is exposed. Your best active mitigation choice (short of pouring a floor and actively venting beneath it) is ventilating your basement to the outside. The system pushes the bad air out and takes in outdoor air to replace it. To avoid piping your heat out, too, use an air-to-air heat exchanger to recover the heat from the exhaust air. Your contractor should separate the intake and discharge pipes by at least 10 feet; otherwise, you'll be recirculating the contaminated air.

Radon abatement, at least to date, is a matter of personal choice. Take it a step at a time, and test thoroughly after each procedure to see whether your mitigation efforts have been successful. 🏠

*John Wagner, Montpelier, Vermont, and Marylee MacDonald, Evanston, Illinois, have been building and writing about building for three decades.*

## RADON RESOURCES

**NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL**  
P.O. Box 33435, Dept. OHJ  
Washington, D.C. 20033  
(800) 767-7236  
EPA Radon Hotline  
(800) 557-2366  
EPA Radon Helpline

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**AIR CHEK INC.**  
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Spokane, WA 99202  
(509) 536-2014  
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**SUN NUCLEAR CORP.**  
425A Pineda Court, Dept. OHJ  
Melbourne, FL 32940  
(407) 259-6862  
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**TELEDYNE ISOTOPES, INC.**  
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Dept. OHJ  
Westwood, NJ 07675  
(800) 666-0222  
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## How Risky Is Radon?

We live with many potential dangers in old houses: old wiring, lead pipes, asbestos, and lead paint, to name a few. Radon may be another hazard, although scientists don't agree about the risks associated with this naturally occurring radioactivity. There are thus far no laws requiring radon abatement. Increasingly, however, radon has become a serious health fear, and some home buyers won't ink a deal without a test showing low levels.

Radon comes from radium, a byproduct of decaying uranium. When radon works its way up through soil or cracks in bedrock, it doesn't last long. Its half life is only 3.8 days. But radon's decay products, called radon daughters, are atomic particles that can lodge in lung tissue. There they emit radiation that in sustained high levels may cause cell damage that could lead to cancer.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency estimates that radon is responsible for 7,000 to 30,000 lung-cancer deaths annually. Yet not one epidemiological study has confirmed a statistically significant relationship between indoor radon and lung cancer. The EPA's

statistics are extrapolated from cancer incidents among uranium miners exposed to hundreds of thousands of picocuries for prolonged periods. The EPA used models that project a linear relationship between radon exposure and cancer — in other words, the agency assumes no safe threshold of exposure. Many scientists find the extrapolation, and the EPA's assumptions, flawed.

The EPA has established a level of 4 picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L) as the action level, the reading at which they recommend abatement. The EPA says that the 4 pCi/L level is an "optimized cost-benefit alternative," because anything lower presents prohibitive costs to vast numbers of homeowners. The 4 pCi/L figure has a controversial history and is based on unproven assumptions. Indeed, by international standards, the EPA has established a conservative action level. European countries have standards ranging from 8 to 12 pCi/L; the Canadian action level is 20 pCi/L. Ultimately, to abate or not to abate is a personal decision. We feel comfortable suggesting you attend to out-of-date wiring and lead pipes first.

— *The OHJ Editors*

# You're So Vane—An Old-House Steeplejacking Story

BY JOHN M. KRENN

*All experience is an arch, to build upon.*

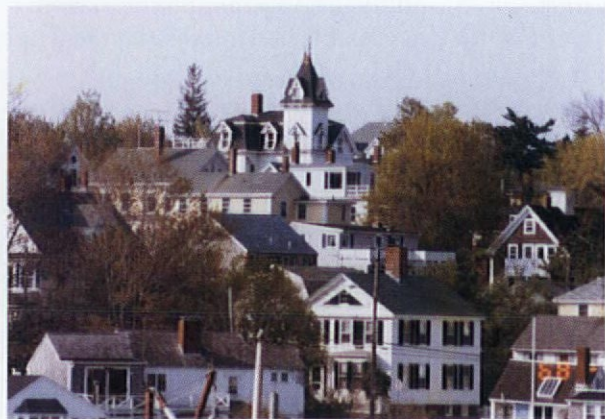
— HENRY BROOKS ADAMS, 1907

*That goes double for work on an old-house tower.*

— JOHN M. KRENN, 1995

**I**N THE FALL OF 1989 WE CONTRACTED TO REPLACE the roof, gutters, and fascia of our 1877 home in Rockport, Massachusetts — a mixed breed with traces of the Queen Anne, Stick, and Second Empire styles. Since the roofers' 100' crane, to be parked on the neighbor's lawn, presented a one-time opportunity, and two sides of the tower are virtually inaccessible, we included removal of the house's sadly battered, Victorian weathervane in the contract.

The wrought iron sheet-and-strap vane, with lead duck's head and ball counter balances, was 99" tall, weighed in at over 25 pounds, and stood 70' above the street level. Its decorative quills were entirely eroded away; balloon-sized zinc balls on the lightning rod and the mast were corroded. It may have been a standard metal shop job in its era, but I have never seen a weathervane that was half as ornate. We were pretty much on our own for installation details.



**ABOVE:** The tower and vane can be seen throughout town, and even from boats in the Atlantic.  
**TOP:** Of the four cardinal points, only "N" remained.

After encountering profound disinterest or astronomical quotes from weathervane builders and sheet metal workers near and far, we found a local artisan who couldn't resist the challenge. Besides a big metal-bending brake and other formidable tools, he had 10' of 1 3/8" diameter bronze tubing hanging around the shop just waiting for the right project. Maybe this was the only reason he decided to go with copper and brass, rather than galvanized sheet steel and wrought iron. At the time the medium was immaterial to me (no pun intended).



Over the next 18 months I received bills for sheet copper, bronze, what seemed like tons of solder, and occasionally even a charge for labor. Finally, the assembled parts were ready to take home. The old sculpture was deftly recreated. The banner was cut and soldered, but it was my job to sculpt the lead duck's head counter weight, employing wet rags as casting dams and rasps for final shaping. For copper balls and mast decorations, I used Victorian toilet tank floats from a reproduction plumbing parts supplier.

The only stipulation I made in the redesign was that it had to be assembled from bolt-on pieces. When I tried a dry run of the parts in the back yard, I had a wicked time getting the brass collar back off the bronze mast. A precision machine shop, it seems, cannot make a wide-tolerance fit even if it is so ordered. I had to convince the machine shop that I really needed a sloppy fit so that parts could be disassembled up on the roof if need be. It proved to be a prophetic move.

## Going Through the Roof

I NEVER SAW THE ORIGINAL MOUNTING SCHEME, AND THE roofers left only a crude sketch, so I had little more than a guess about how to get the darned thing back up without a crane. I came to the conclusion that someone sat inside the tower, pushing the mast up through the roof while someone else clung to the roof outside putting on the pieces: the collar for the cardinal points,



the banner sleeve, and the straps that hold the decorative quills and balls. The whole operation would work like those baby toys where the colorful doughnuts stack on a post.

Armed with a strategy, I invaded the tower room looking for access to its attic. I cut an 18" x 18" hole in the ceiling. This turned out to be a false ceiling, but directly above was the original 24" x 24" trap door. I had decided early on that I would be "the inside man" for the installation, pushing the mast out to my son. We bought a couple of toy store walkie-talkies so we could communicate through the roof, and above the ocean wind.

We had discussions — some might call them arguments — about the scaffolding plan for a couple of weeks. The tower is 14' from the gutter to the top and the roof has considerable flare below the dormers on each side. Ladders would not give us sufficient freedom.

Our most intractable problem was how to build a stage over a roof with a steep slope in an area we couldn't reach, and without nailing into the

**RIGHT:** My son Christopher and I put it together in the back yard. **ABOVE:** When you start working above your highest handhold, it gives a new meaning to your safety belt.

new roof. A "hollow" rectangle of staging lumber, held together with carriage bolts, and flipped over the top of the tower like a ring toss, did the job. We'd simply unbolt the corners and lower the pieces on safety lines to remove it after the weathervane was in place.

As we prepared to install the new vane, it dawned on us that the infamous bronze mast, cut to match what we presumed was the full length of the old iron one, was going to be too short to brace from below. So we extended it with a 5' piece of hard copper pipe.

### Blowin' in the Wind

ON THE BIG DAY IN JUNE EVERYTHING WENT AS PLANNED — even in the 25 mph breeze. True, not all the new components lined up with the old roof holes, and we had to do a little cramped chain saw and rasp work on the beams



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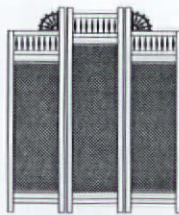
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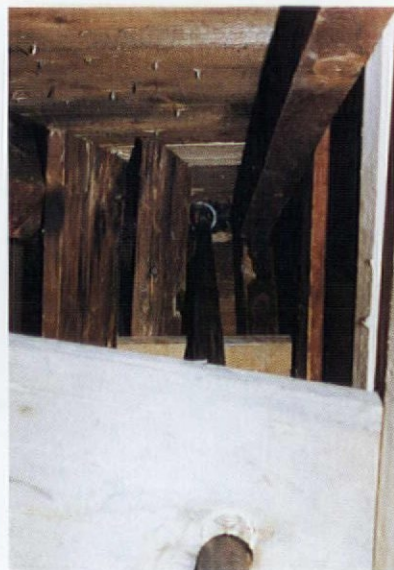
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and decking, but it all worked out. Details, like reinstalling the old lightning-rod cables, required leaving the scaffolds in place for a while. Good thing.

While working we noticed a swarm of honey bees around a tower window. Since I couldn't stop to deal with them then, I anchored a live vacuum cleaner hose just outside their entrance hole to deplete the hive. They couldn't handle the vacuum, so I sucked up a couple of pounds of them that way. (Score one for an old restorer, eh?) Later, a stethoscope and drill located the hive. Under the window, the drill came up dripping with honey. I cut an arm-sized hole in the decking and there it was: hundreds of beautiful combs like some science-fiction apartment building. Final score, Bees: 12 well-placed stings; Homeowner: 31 pounds of dead bees, insecticide-poisoned honey, and comb.

Turned out we had bigger problems. The next day it really started to blow (a Nor'easter, on the order of 50 mph), and when I went up to check the structure, I could see the mast leaning and the skirt flexing. The copper skirt, which was faithfully copied in every detail, was not as stiff as the original terne coated steel, nor was the copper mast up to the job. Back to the drawing board.

The following day, the wind was back down to 25 mph and we

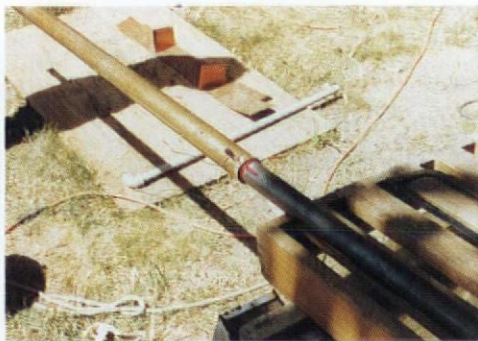


The mast extends 10 feet down into the tower.

removed our sick monster. Since we were obviously not as adept in designing the vane as the original builders (and we had little desire to repeat this exercise), we decided to over-engineer this time around. A 10' piece of solid steel 1 3/8" round stock replaced the copper tubing. Getting this machined for another sloppy fit was also a tussle. So was hoisting the new, longer, and much heavier mast into the tower. (This time I had to disassemble part of the handrail.) But it all went together.

I used my boat compass to calibrate the north point, but made the embarrassing mistake (especially for a sailor) of setting "N" to magnetic north. This 15-degree error was immediately pointed out by my yachtsman neighbor, who had watched from his window. The next day I was back into the tower again with a Stilson wrench to twist the mast so "N" pointed true.

So far we've weathered 55 mph gusts, and the ensemble seems to have stayed put. And yes, the banner twitches quite nicely in the breeze.



We extended the undersized mast with a little seat-of-the-pants engineering.





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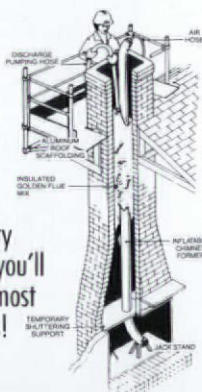
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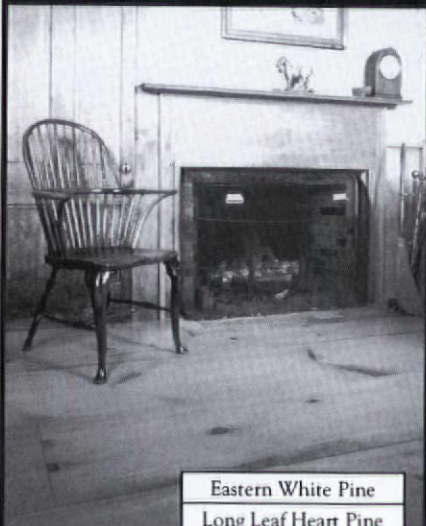
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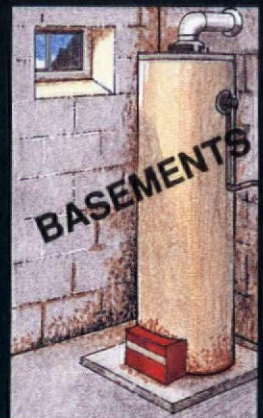
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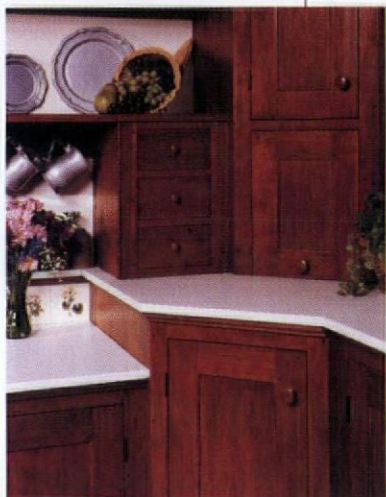
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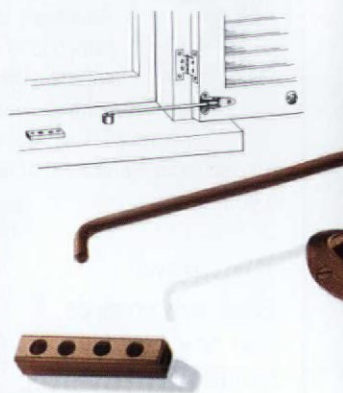
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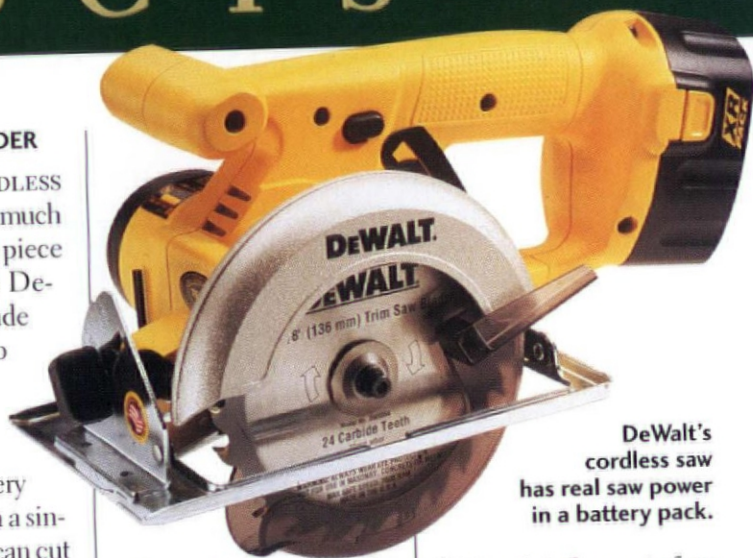


Victorians used the Zimmerman fastener to open one shutter fully (inset) and the other halfway to catch the wind like a sail.

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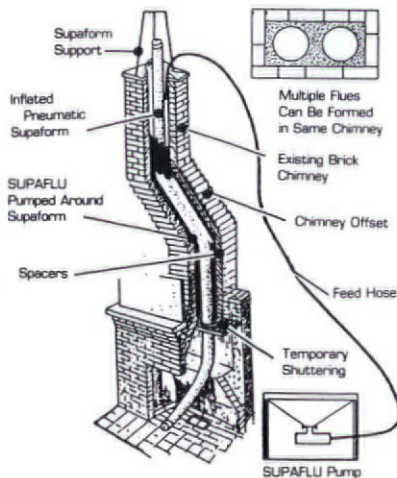
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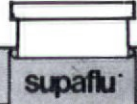
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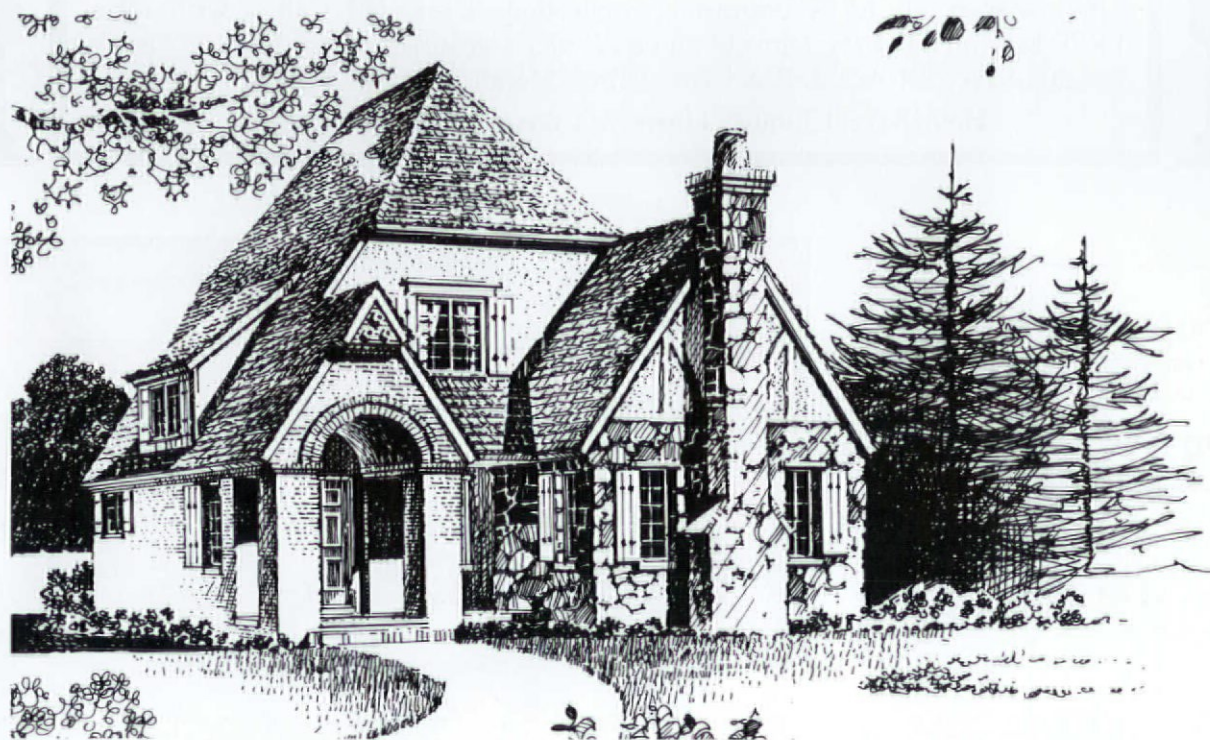
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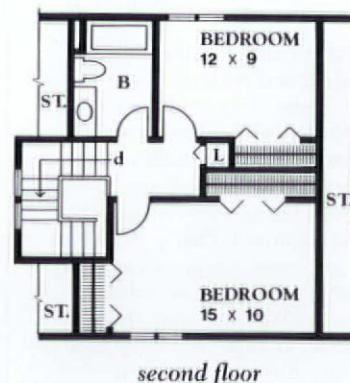
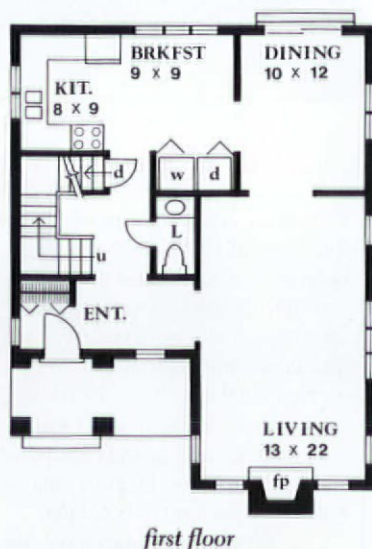
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<b>Plan PP-01-PV</b>	
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Bedrooms.....	2
Bathrooms.....	1 1/2
Square Footage.....	1,395'
First floor.....	870'
Second floor.....	525'
<b>Ceiling Height</b>	
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Second floor.....	8'
<b>Overall Dimensions</b>	
Width.....	28'
Depth.....	38'





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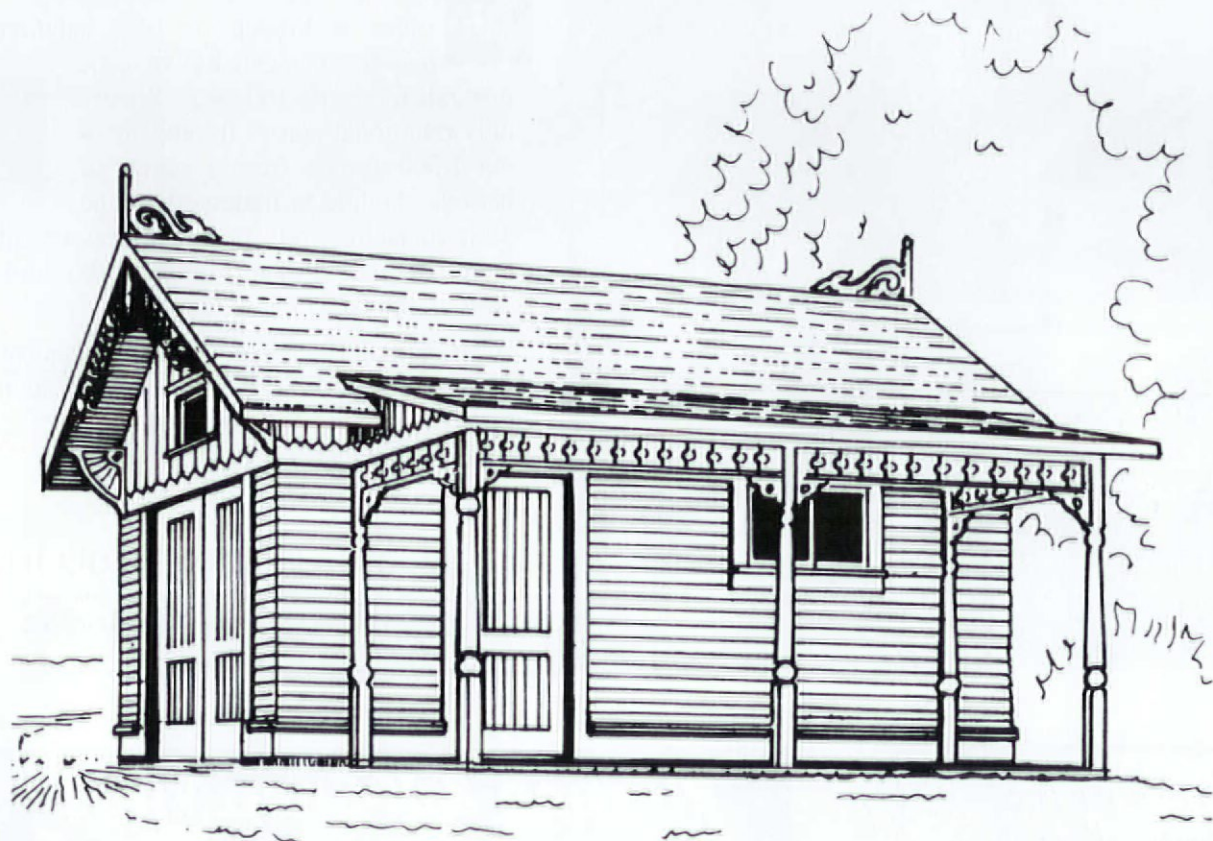
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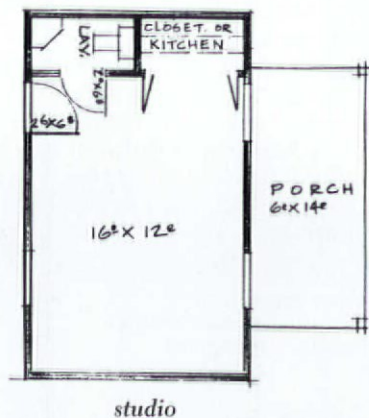
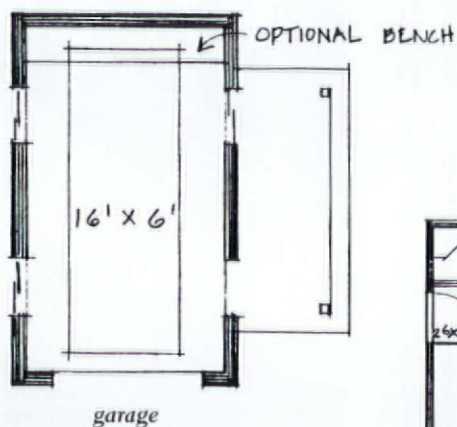
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**Plan LC-01-GA**

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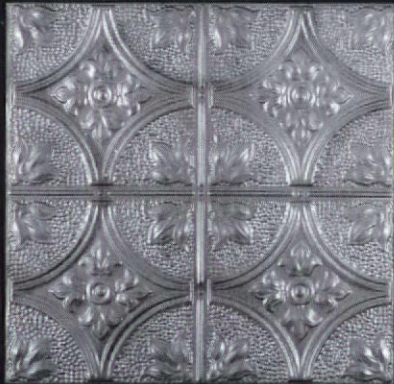
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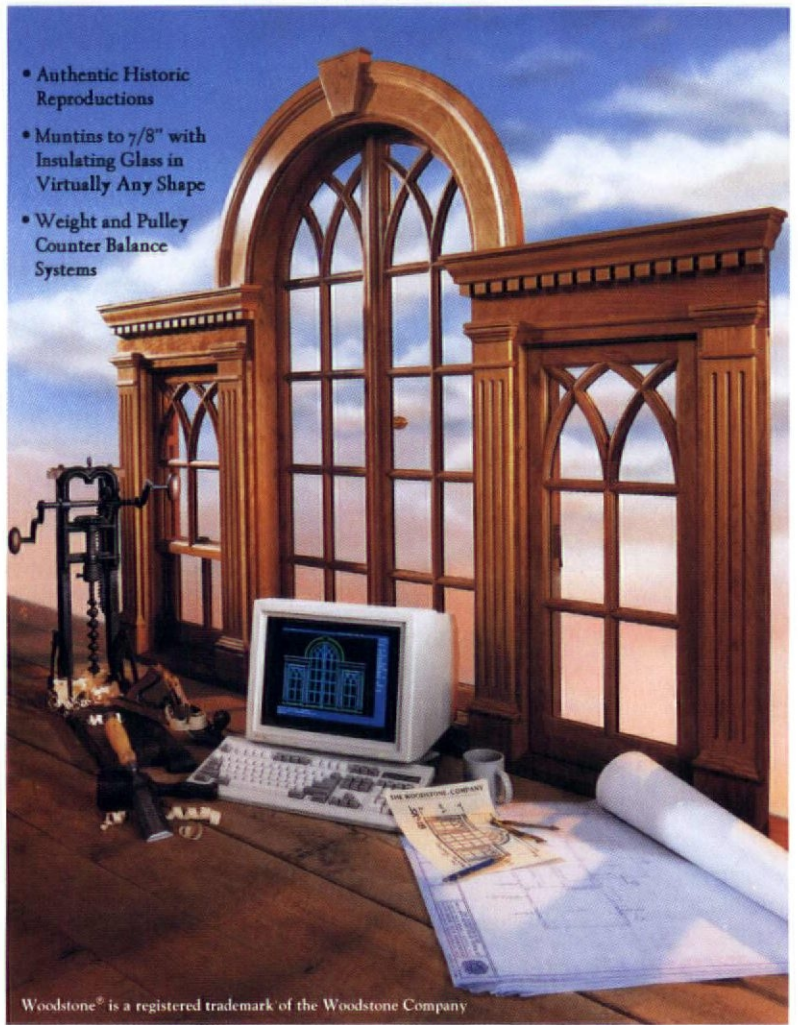
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**ADDISON, NY**—Renovated 1890s Victorian, 1-acre wooded lot in quaint Finger Lakes

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village. 4 bdrms, 1 1/2 baths, 2 staircases, leaded glass windows, formal DR, frpl, hot tub on 2-level deck. \$75,000. Contact Jumpers (607) 359-4221.

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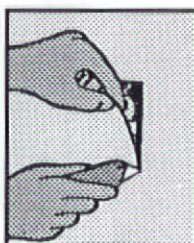
3. Apply fiberglass mat to wet surface.



4. Trim excess mat where wall meets ceiling.



5. Trim mat at baseboard and window.



6. Trim mat at outlets, switches, etc.



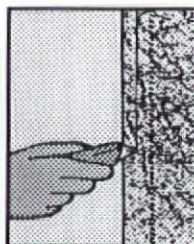
7. Apply second coat of saturant to wet mat.



8. Apply 1st coat of saturant to adjacent area.



9. Apply mat to 2nd area, overlapping by 1".



10. Cut down center of overlap (both layers).



11. Remove mat strips on both sides of cut.



12. Apply 2nd coat of saturant (include seam)

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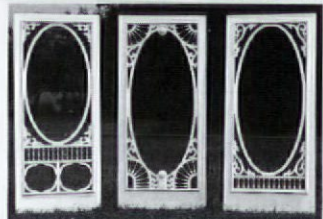
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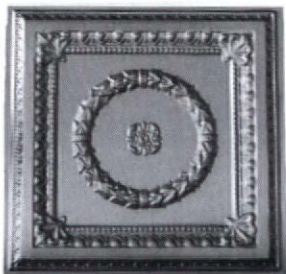


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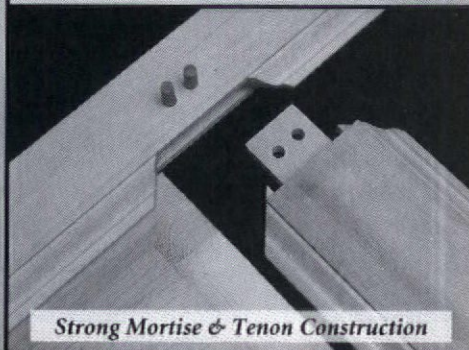
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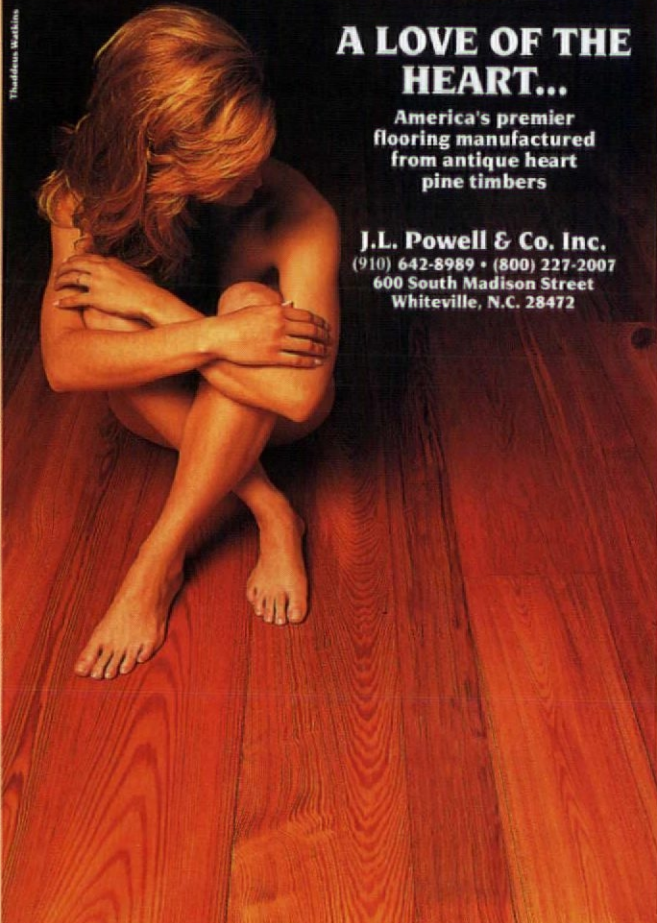
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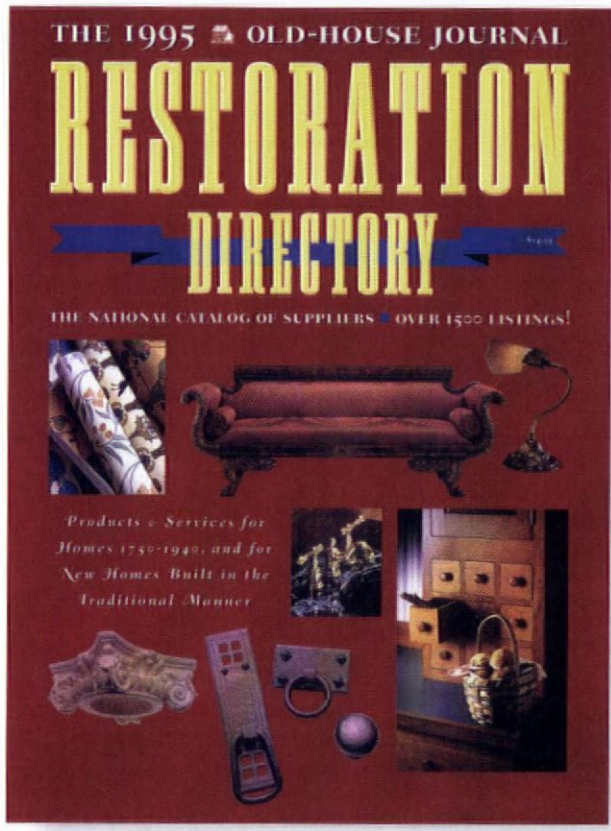


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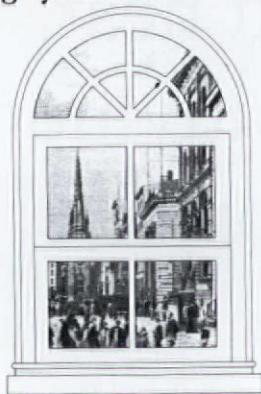
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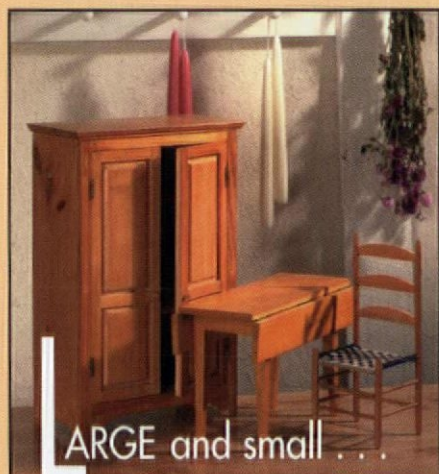
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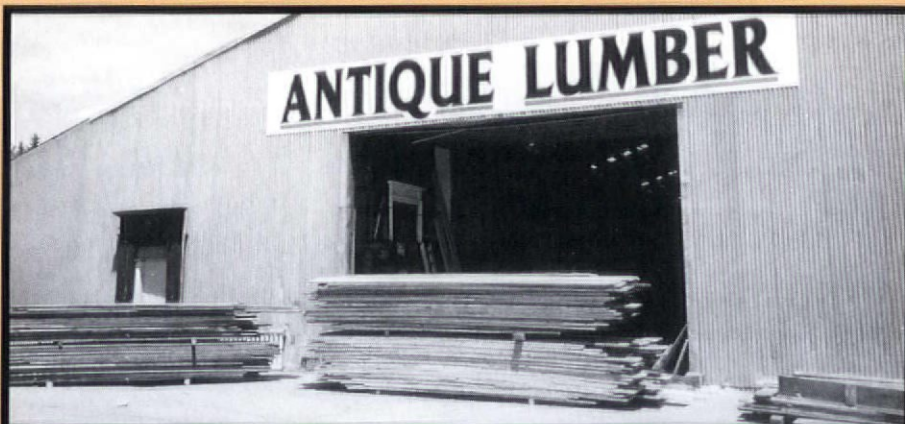
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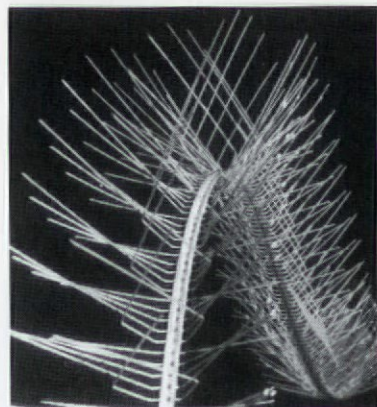
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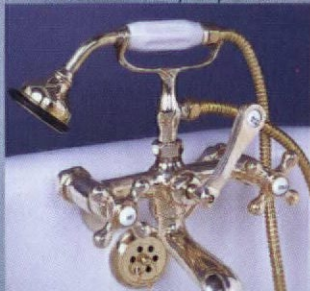


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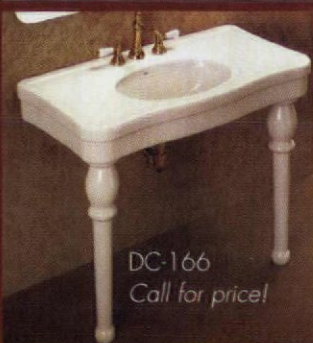
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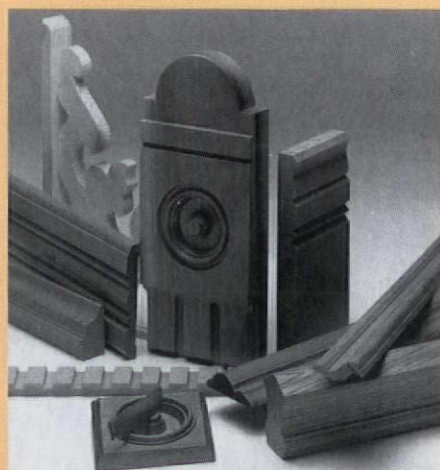
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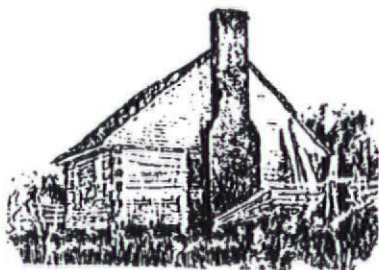
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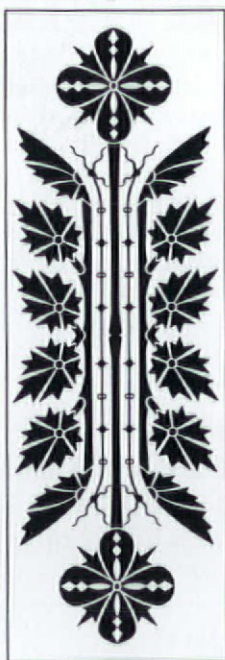
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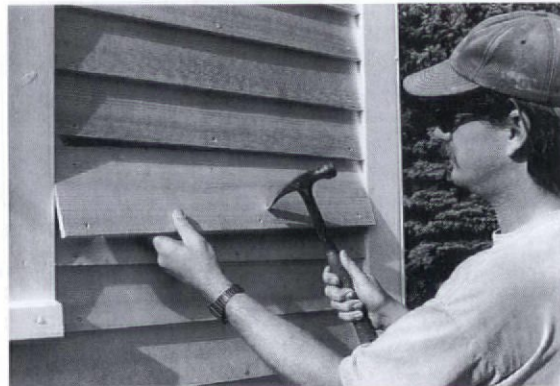
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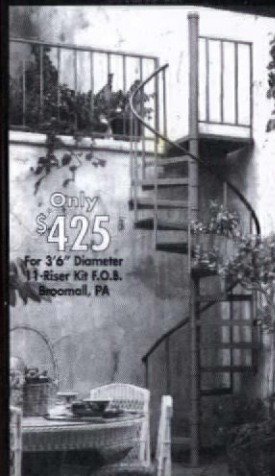
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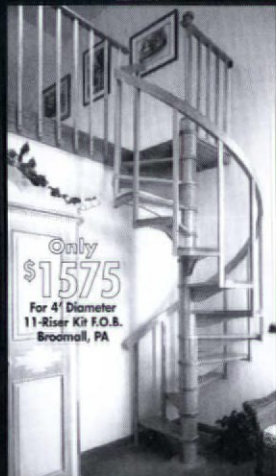
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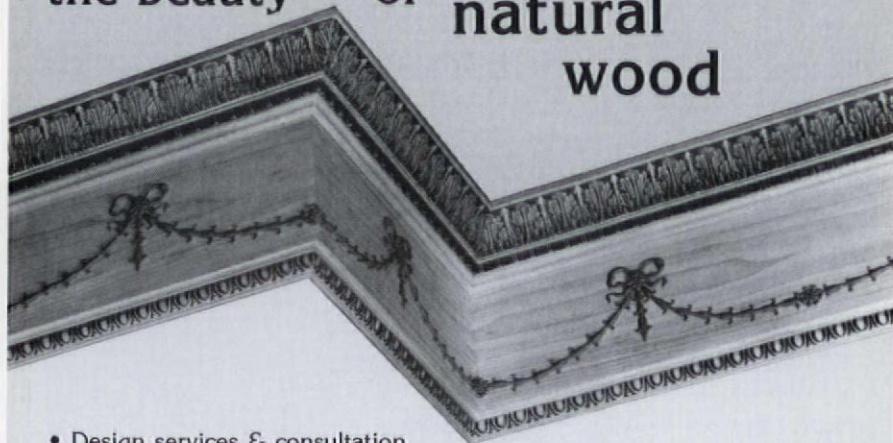
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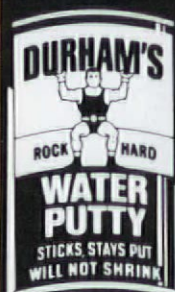


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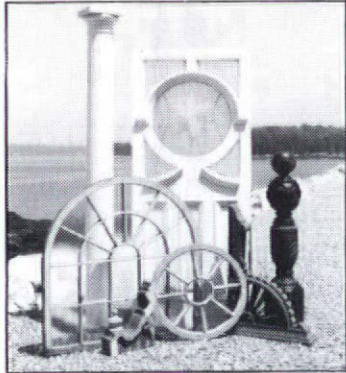
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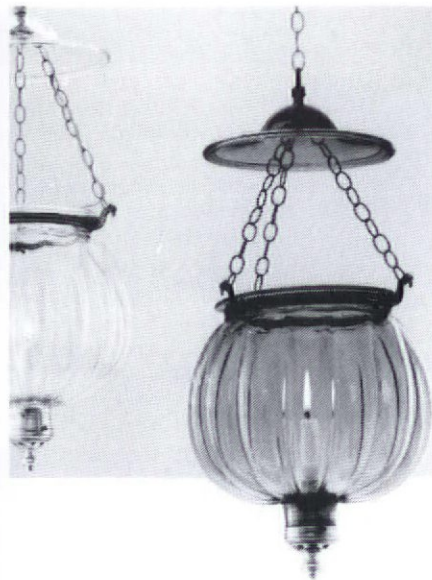
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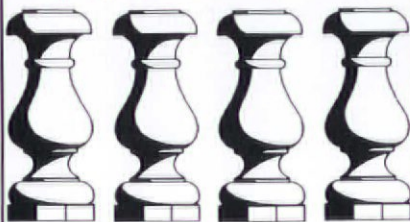
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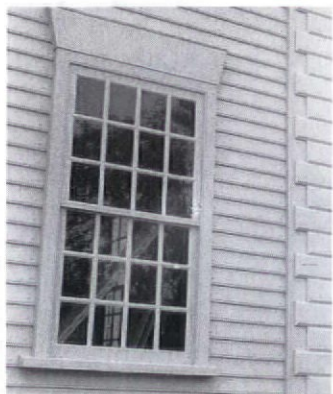
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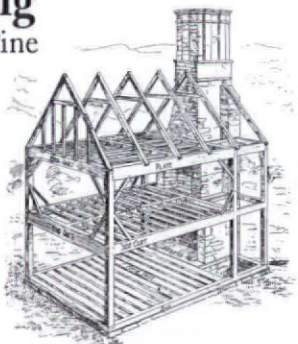
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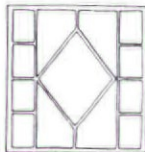
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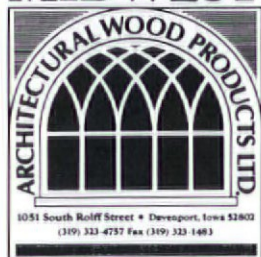
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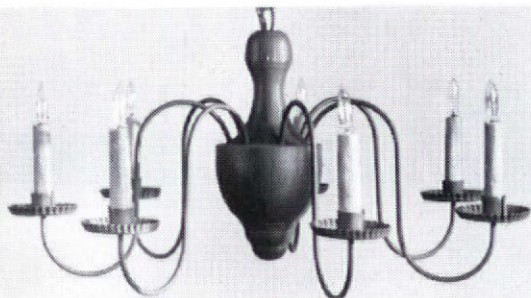
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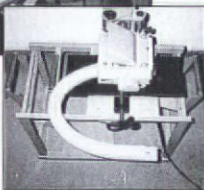
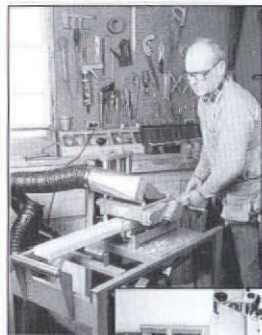
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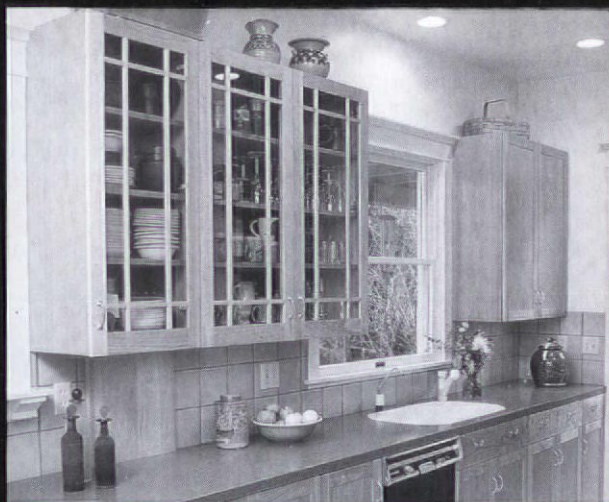
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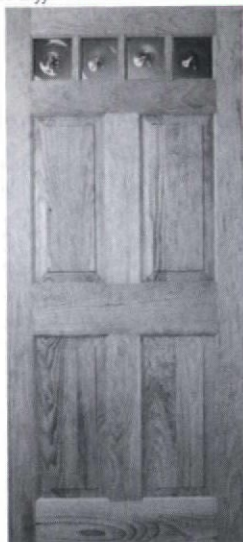
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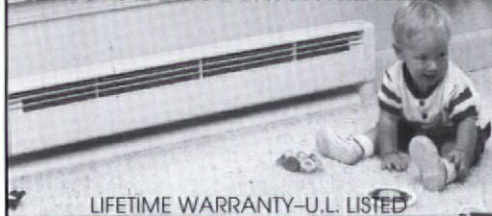
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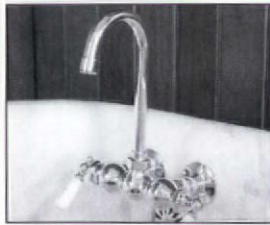
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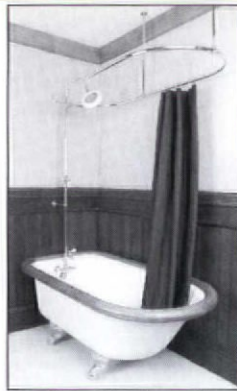
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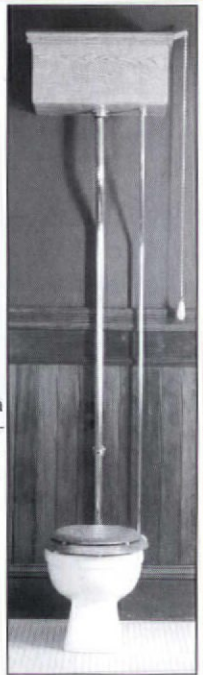
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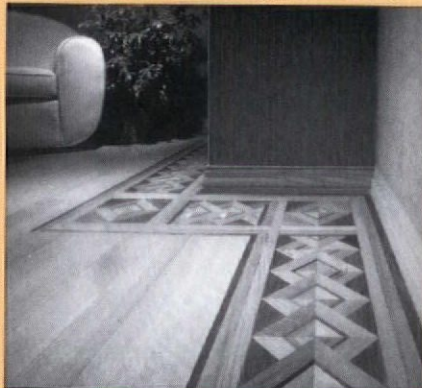
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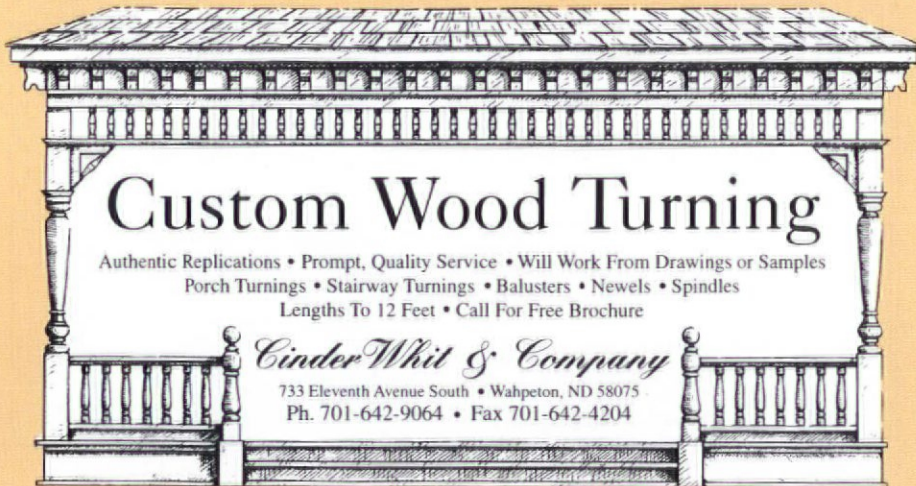
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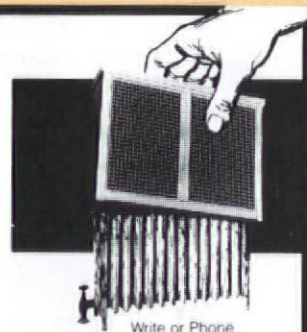
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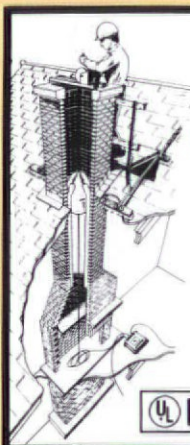
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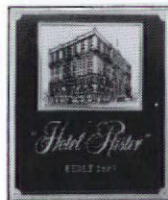


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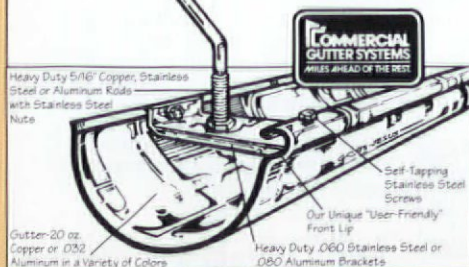
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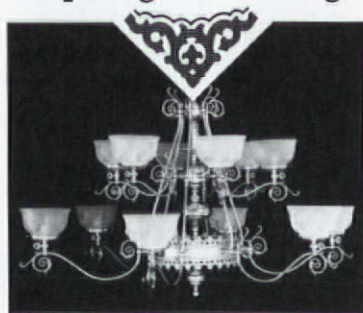
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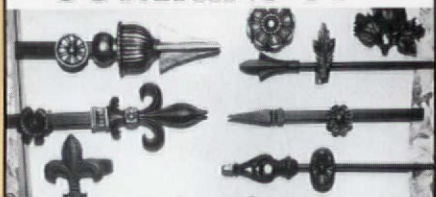
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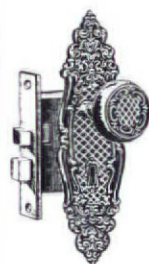
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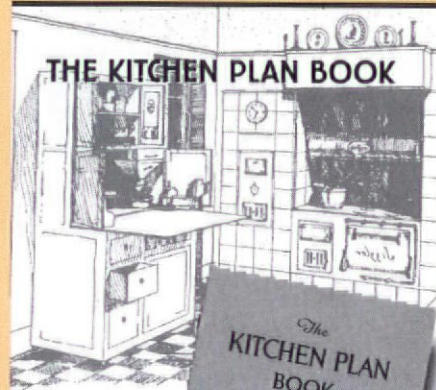
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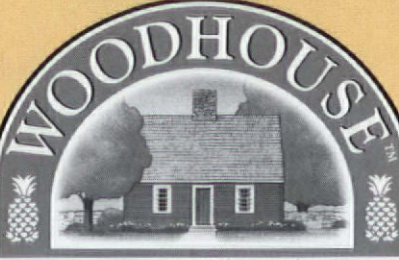
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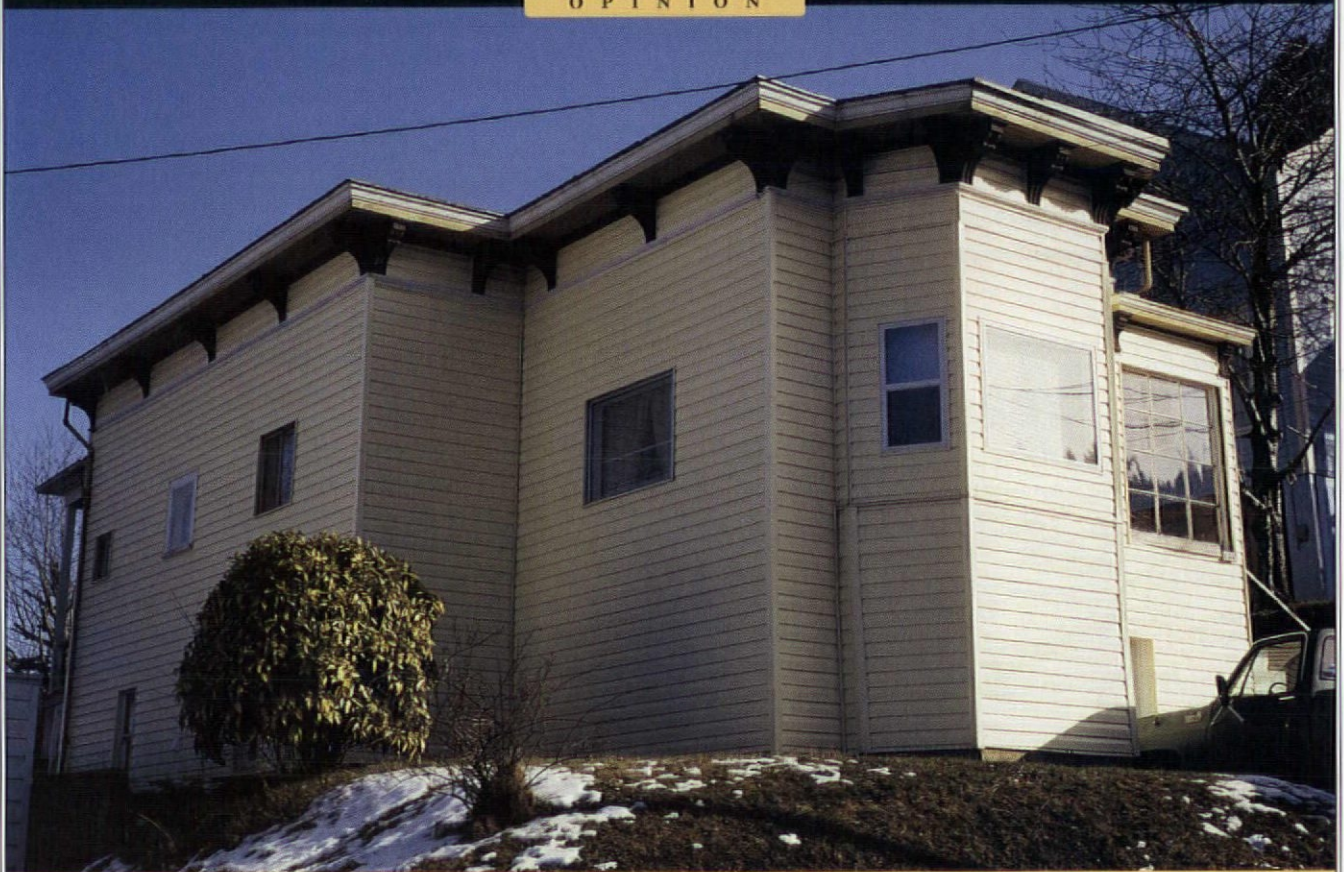
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# REMUDDLING

OPINION



## Return to Sender

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Like kraft paper on a birthday present mailed from far away, the covering conceals almost all clues about what's inside. It's bigger than a bread box. In fact, it looks like a Victorian townhouse. Check out the squarish massing and decorative brackets along the cornice. Surprise! There's an Italianate townhouse inside this carton. Its character was lost to the mailing envelope.

The structure once looked like this handsome house (right), in the same Astoria, Oregon, neighborhood. It proudly displayed similar floor-to-ceiling windows, decorative mouldings and panels. It wore traditional clapboards and turned posts. Perhaps, someday, someone will unwrap this remuddling and reveal the true contents inside.

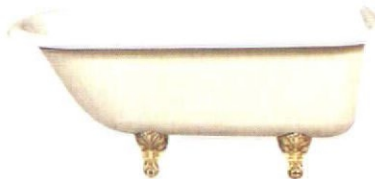


**Top:** The building looks more like fourth class mail than a Victorian townhouse. **Above:** A nearby home indicates how the Oregon structure looked originally. Thanks to Doug Fast, Astoria, Oregon, for sending in the photos.

**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. (Original photography only, please; no clippings.) Remuddling Editor, Old-House Journal, Two Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930.



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## Vernacular HOUSES

Protective parging on tabby houses — such as this c. 1786, Beaufort, South Carolina, example acted as a sacrificial skin for the soft oyster-shell lime concrete.

# TABBY HOUSES OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC SEABOARD

**S**CATTERED FROM CHARLESTON, South Carolina, to St. Augustine, Florida, are examples of an early, incredibly strong, cementitious building material that exploited the resources of the ocean shore. Tabby construction, which thrived in the 18th century, relied on great oyster shell middens — refuse piles left behind by the decimated Native American population.

Spanish settlers introduced tabby (or *tapia*, as they called it) to the region in the 1500s. Equal parts oyster-shell lime, beach sand, whole oyster shells, and water were mixed and poured into pegged wood forms to make walls. After one course hardened, the 10" to 12" tall boards were knocked apart, moved to the top of the wall, then reassembled for pouring a new course. The completed concrete-like wall was very porous, so



One course of tabby on this 1820s house in Sapelo Island, Georgia, has lost its parging, exposing the oyster-shell aggregate.

stucco or whitewash protected tabby from the elements on the outside; plaster finished off interiors. Hand-hewn beams let into pockets in the walls supported the upper floors and roofs, which were typically wood shingles. Standard clay brick was most often used for chimneys.

Tabby construction was used for houses of every social class from the 1730s to the 1860s, and nearly 100 of the estimated 300 original tabby houses still stand. It was a labor-intensive technology, however, and the large, high-style houses were built by slaves. After the Civil War, with the forced labor pool freed, tabby use declined. It came back in the late 19th century when portland cement replaced the lime. This mixture produced harder walls that did not need protective parging, and Victorian tabby houses show the distinctive lines of successive poured courses. There is also a recent tabby revival: modern, poured-concrete houses embedded with shells — not necessarily from oysters — for effect.

— DR. LAUREN SICKELS TAVES  
Northwestern State University of  
Louisiana, Natchitoches

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