Wet Basements

By Jonathan T. Schechtman  Burlington, Vermont

What's all the concern about having a dry basement anyway? It is understood that if the cellar fills like a swimming pool every time it rains, the furnace may turn off or the electric appliances may short out. A damp basement, on the other hand...so what? Maybe you don't want a pool table down there, and it doesn't matter if the old toys stored in a corner get rusty. In reality, however, a chronically damp basement has within its humid environment the potential to nurture degenerative conditions ruinous to the structure of your house.

A damp, humid basement is not a harmless inconvenience over the long term. It is the optimum environment for the propagation of mold, fungus, and wood-boring insects. The control of these infestations mandates removal of moisture from their habitat.

Adverse water conditions may vary from mere basement humidity, to damp walls or floors, to water flowing through fissures in masonry and flooding floors. An inspection of the crawlspace or basement may indicate the presence of actual moisture, or simply reveal telltale conditions which are supported by a chronically damp environment. Look for: dark irregular stains, often edged in white, on sill beams, the base of posts, on window casings or bulkheads; fungal fruiting bodies or punkiness of wooden members; high water marks on walls; puddles on the floor; musty odors or mold on leather, cloth or paper goods; difficulty closing doors or windows to the basement; small piles of fine powdery sawdust, flight holes, or insect casings; masonry which is spalling or discolored by efflorescence; and bowed or cracked walls. Such evidence should be noted on a floor plan of the inspected area, and observations dated by month and year, in order to assist diagnosis, as many of these problems may be seasonal.

Water & Masonry

In each of its physical states, water has a deleterious effect upon interior masonry. As a liquid, water is drawn into brick or stone walls by capillary action, being conducted from moist soil into the masonry: This condition is known as rising damp. The slightly acidic nature of precipitation allows the water to react with the lime in the mortar, causing

(continued on p. 140)
The Bare Brick Mistake

BACK IN NOVEMBER of 1973 I pinpointed a classic renovation error I call "The Bare Brick Mistake." The Mistake is the result of the mania that compels people to rip the plaster off the walls in old buildings to "expose the beauty of the natural brick."

I THOUGHT, eight years ago, that I had advanced truly compelling arguments against this folly. But America wasn't listening. The plaster continued to be stripped from walls in a great dust cloud that stretched from coast to coast. But the times they are a-changin'.

THE ARGUMENTS against the Bare Brick Mistake fall into two categories: Aesthetic and practical.

Aesthetic Problems

THE MAJOR AESTHETIC consideration is that finished plaster was part of the basic design of the house. To expose brickwork in a room that was intended to have the formal look of smooth plaster smacks of "remuddling." Also, brickwork that was meant to be covered with plaster was usually the cheapest quality brick and was laid up in an exceedingly sloppy fashion--because the masons supposed that no one would ever see it.

TO ME, there's something almost degenerate in taking old work that was purposefully crude and sloppy--and venerating it as folk art. The masons who did the work would roar with laughter to hear an earnest young couple reassure each other that their new apartment is really worth an extra $50 per month because it has the "warmth and character" of exposed brick.

Practical Problems

PLASTER HAS SEVERAL practical virtues, too. Brick walls can be surprisingly porous. If you remove the plaster from the inside of an exterior wall, a significant amount of air can infiltrate from the outside. This can make for breezy interiors during the winter.

TO ME, there's something almost degenerate in taking old work that was purposefully crude and sloppy--and venerating it as folk art. The masons who did the work would roar with laughter to hear an earnest young couple reassure each other that their new apartment is really worth an extra $50 per month because it has the "warmth and character" of exposed brick.

PLASTER IS ALSO a good sound insulator. This virtue can be especially important on the brick common walls shared by city row houses. If you take the plaster off the wall on your side...and your neighbor does the same on his side...when you sneeze, you'll hear your neighbor say "God bless you!"

THEN THERE'S the brick and mortar dust that filters down from an exposed brick wall. You can reduce the dust by coating the bricks with a masonry sealer. But this changes the color of the brick--in ways that some brick aficionados find disappointing.

HAPPLY, there's some evidence that the Bare Brick Mistake is being made less frequently. A few renovators who have made the Mistake in the past are actually re-tracing their steps and covering up the bricks again (see photo). Even more compelling, however, is that the bare brick look has gotten to be such a cliche that many people are turning away from it out of sheer boredom.

SO IT LOOKS LIKE we're beginning to see the end of the Bare Brick Mistake. Not because of the persuasive powers of The Old-House Journal --but just because it's been so overdone. No matter. Let's just be done with it--and the sooner the better!

--Clem Labine

AN END TO THE BARE BRICK MISTAKE

Charles Eanet ripped the plaster off the walls in the living room of his Brooklyn brownstone more than 10 years ago. But he's decided it was a mistake—and is now covering the brick again. His reasons: (1) The crude brick doesn't go well with the formal wainscoting; (2) Art looks lousy against bare brick. Charles used sheetrock instead of plaster because it had to be a do-it-yourself job. But he wishes he had left the original plaster in its rightful place on the wall.
A Fine Residence Begun.—According to our ideas of beauty, and we think the public will coincide with us, the new building now being erected by T. Thomas, Esq., of the Sauk Co. Bank, upon the beautiful knoll about two blocks northeast of the Court House, will be far the most elegant residence in the vicinity. As yet, but little idea of its effect can be gained, as it is but just enclosed, but an inspection of the plan has convinced us that the Cashier has shown both excellent taste in the general effect and in its interior arrangement, and a just appreciation of what constitutes a home. Its fine situation, the winding walks and numerous shade trees will add greatly to its effect when completed, which we understand will be about the first of November.

The Above Article Appeared in The Republic of Baraboo, Wisconsin, on August 9, 1860. Terrel Thomas did complete his house that year, and it more than lived up to The Republic’s expectations: The eighteen-room, two-storey, seven-gable structure is recognized today as one of the finest examples of Gothic Victorian architecture in the Midwest.

The First Customer

Bank President Terrel Thomas was the first in the short but distinguished list of owners of Baraboo's Seven Gables. In 1911, the house was sold to Rev. John Durward, a Catholic priest, who renamed the house Burr Oaks and built a private chapel in it. Eight years later, the house’s name was changed back to Seven Gables by its third owner, attorney (and later, judge) Henry Bohn. The judge's addition to the house was an oil mural painted on the four walls of the den. This representation of nostalgic scenes from the judge's childhood in Baraboo Bluffs is one of Seven Gable's most unusual features. Like so much that is unique about the house, it would pose special problems when Ralph and Pamela Krainik began their restorations.

The Departure

For a number of years in the 1960s, Seven Gables was left uninhabited. Paint peeled from the exterior. Vandals had some sport with several panels of the etched cranberry glass that surrounded the front door. In no time at all, the house deteriorated into a decrepit eyesore. But even in such a sad state, it captured the hearts and imaginations of the...
Krainiks: "We had to have it . . . every time we went for a ride, we stopped for another look." Finally, a For Sale sign went up, and they seized their opportunity. Despite the broker's efforts to discourage them, they bought the house—for an amazingly low $14,600 (a figure that struck their bankers as too exorbitant). And for an additional $60, they were able to purchase the house's grand piano and walnut wardrobe.

IN MANY WAYS, THE SEVEN GABLES that first confronted the Krainiks was a classic example of old-house abuse. Respect for good old work is the cardinal rule in maintaining an old house, and this was the first principle to be overlooked before the Krainiks stepped in. The uniquely shaped windows were hidden by striped aluminum awnings. The bookcases that lined the front hall were boarded over with plywood, as was the pine floor in the upstairs hall. One bedroom suffered the crowning indignity of having tile glued onto its pine floor.

RESCUING THAT FLOOR proved to be one of the most difficult jobs in working on Seven Gables. Since the house had more immediately pressing needs, such as fixing the leaky roof and the inadequate plumbing, the pine floor had to wait for a while. As a temporary solution, the Krainiks carpeted over the tiles. When Ralph was finally able to get to the floor, he tried prying up the tile, only to have the pine splinter up with it. They questioned numerous people for a solution to this problem and were repeatedly advised to lay down the carpeting again. Ralph ultimately resorted to a blowtorch, and with this he was able to soften the adhesive enough to pry up the tiles. Once all the tiles were up, hours of sanding and varnishing were required, but the final result was a beautiful wide pine floor.

The Flower Of Eden

ALTHOUGH BURR OAKS HAD BEEN REDUBBED SEVEN GABLES in 1919, Father Durward's trees waited almost fifty years to take their revenge. The tree roots wormed their way into the sewer pipe of the house, causing the Krainiks' sewer to repeatedly back up. Although Ralph acquired genuine proficiency at using a plumber's snake, they eventually had to call in a plumber to ream out the pipe. According to Pamela Krainik, when they first inspected the basement, "there was an old pair of swim fins hanging on the wall. It should have been a warning!"

THE SEWER WAS NOT THE ONLY WATERY PROBLEM they faced. The leaky roof was a chronic problem, forcing them to install a new roof. More unusual, however, was the morning when a gush of water descended from the kitchen ceiling: It seems that the overflow drain in the upstairs bathtub was not connected to anything, and was just emptying out into the wall.
thing more than just a diverting pastime, instead of the passionate love that people all across the country are discovering.

The Daguerreotypist

T'S AN OPEN QUESTION whether the Krainiks worked their magic on Seven Gables, or if the house impressed itself upon its inhabitants. Etched cranberry glass returned to the front of the house. Antique period fixtures replaced the contemporary lighting. Period wallpaper reappeared on the walls, and Victorian antique furniture began to fill the rooms once more. In December of 1978, the house was placed in the National Register of Historic Places.

OF COURSE, THERE IS STILL WORK TO BE DONE on Seven Gables—does one ever finish? The exterior of the house has to be scraped and painted. The metal porch roofs have to be replaced, and the gingerbread trim needs some repairing. The Krainiks will undoubtedly meet these problems with the seemingly endless enthusiasm and energy that they have displayed over the years. Ralph and Pamela Krainik, with their children Andre and Marnie, are pictured right in an informal snapshot. It's reassuring to know that the Victorian atmosphere of Seven Gables has not gone to their heads. Thank goodness there is at least one American family that can still view restoration as no-

Left: The judge's mural, partially stripped of its decades-old shellac. Center: The same section of the mural as it appears today. Right: One of the original panels of etched cranberry glass from the Krainiks' front door.
**Clean It**

**OWN A BRICK HOUSE**, built around 1875, with several magnificent gas fireplaces. Is there a good cleaning and sealing process for the glass tiles around the fireplaces? Is there a way to keep the brass or copper surroundings shiny after they've been cleaned?

--Jerry Marsh Pittsburgh, PA

**Glass tiles can be cleaned** with a non-abrasive cleaner like the old-fashioned Bon-Ami. If you use that thoroughly, you'll probably find that you won't need to seal them. Brass and copper can be cleaned with any of the commercial cleaners. (If you have to get old lacquer off them, use lacquer thinner and 0000 steel wool.) Unfortunately, there's no way to keep them permanently shiny with no maintenance. Spray lacquer, if used properly, will look good, but for only about two years—even less if it's near heat. Then it'll have to be removed and reapplied. You might do better with tung oil; just make sure the brass is absolutely clean before applying it. But the best thing to do is just resign yourself to the job of periodically shining your surroundings.

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**Plaster It**

**Originally, the exterior** of my 1851 house was plastered directly over the stone walls. At a later date, the walls were lathed out and repainted. I would like to strip off this later lath and plaster and replaster directly on the stone again. Are there any special techniques or pitfalls I should be aware of? Does this extra layer of lath and plaster have any particular value, such as for insulation?

--Dick Perkins, Freeport, IL

**An extra layer of plaster**, together with the air space and wood lath behind it, certainly adds insulating value to your home, although the reason for furring out the walls in this way was probably to create a truer surface on which to plaster. If this newer plaster is in good condition, you might want to reconsider the extra work of removing it to retrieve the earlier appearance of the house.

If you decide to replaster onto the stone, there are no special secrets other than making sure that the surface is clean and well dampened (to prevent loss of water from the plaster before it cures). Most stone has a texture that is sufficiently coarse for the plaster to grip to it without the need of lath or bonding agents. But if this is your first experience with stuccoing, you'll probably want to start with a small area first, just to feel your way around.

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**Coat It**

**Sand and pebbles, up to 1/8 of an inch**, were added by the builder to the plaster finish coat on the walls of our 1925 house. This surface is too rough for hanging wallpaper. How can we smooth it out? Can we sand it down?

--Marge Carlyle Morrisville, PA

**Don't bother trying to sand it down**; that really won't have any effect. You'd probably get the best result by having a professional plaster over the wall, or else by applying a skim coat of joint compound (taping cement) yourself. Be sure to size (prime) the new surface with thinned-down wallpaper paste before putting up the wallpaper.

You may want to give some more thought to leaving your walls the way they are. That pebbly surface was a very popular style in the '20s, and is a distinctive feature of your house's particular character. It may not be a common decorating effect today, but who knows? In a few short years, it could be more in demand than ever before!

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**Scrape It**

**Removing all the layers of wallpaper** in my house is proving to be very difficult because there is a top layer of green enamel paint over them. What is the best way to get through this top layer and at the wallpaper?

--Gus LoPresti Ohio City, OH

There are two approaches which you should consider. The first is to scratch the surface thoroughly with very coarse sandpaper, or else slash a grid of cuts into the surface with a knife or razor. Then wet down the surface sufficiently to loosen the wallpaper. It'll take you a while, but you'll get it all off this way.

The other method is to attack the surface with a special wallpaper scraper—the paint won't faze it. Hyde Tools makes a "Wallpaper Shaver" (Hyde Tool #33100); so does Red Devil.

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Do You Have Questions for OHJ?

Send your questions with pictures or drawings, if possible. (We prefer black & white photographs.) We cannot promise to answer all questions personally, although we will try to answer all questions from current subscribers/readers. Questions of general interest will be answered in print.

Write: Questions Editor, Old-House Journal, 69A Seventh Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11217.
Insects That Eat Houses
By Clem Labine

Here's something quite scary about the idea of unseen creatures gnawing away at your house. Most of us are nervous enough about our houses so that it's easy to imagine our four walls collapsing into a pile of splinters because the beams have been riddled by termites.

Fortunately, the reality isn't quite that bad. Although there are insects that—given enough time—can reduce your house to sawdust, they are slow eaters. And there are enough tell-tale signs so that the vigilant homeowner can spot an infestation well before any major damage is done.

It should be noted that wood-inhabiting insects prefer moist wood (probably because it's easier to chew). Thus insect infestation is usually also associated with attack by rot-causing fungi. So we go back to a theme that has been emphasized in previous installments of this Basics Series: Keep wood dry!

There are many types of insects that will attack wood. But this article is going to deal only with the three most common types: Termites, carpenter ants and wood-boring beetles.

Termites

The vast bulk of the damage done to wood houses by insects is caused by subterranean termites. There are actually 13 species of termites in the U.S. that cause damage to houses. These 13 can be sorted into three basic groups: Drywood termites; dampwood termites; and--most omnipresent—the subterranean termites. Although termites tend to shun the colder climates of the northernmost states (e.g., Maine, Montana), for all practical purposes consider that every old house presents a potential meal for one or more species of termite.

Termite colonies spread by swarming; winged adults take to the air from mature colonies to seek greener pastures (so to speak). In most cases, it requires 3 to 4 years for a colony of subterranean termites to grow big enough to throw off swarmers.

The Role Of Moisture

Moisture is vital to the life of a termite. Drywood termites manage to get sufficient water from the wood they inhabit. Dampproof termites require more moisture. They must live in wood that is continually moist—usually wood that is in direct contact with the soil.

Subterranean termites obtain their moisture from the soil...and must maintain contact with the soil to survive. When subterranean termites invade the wood of a house that is separated from the soil by a masonry foundation or other impervious material, they construct shelter tubes over the intervening surface to get to the wood. Periodically they must return to their moist galleries in the soil to replenish the water lost from their bodies while working in the drier air above ground.

Because of their necessity to stay moist, subterranean termites will never expose themselves directly to fresh air. They always stay sheltered in the ground, in the wood, or in the

ANTENNA "ELBOWED"

ANTENNA NOT "ELBOWED"

NO WING STUB

STUBS LEFT WHEN WING DETACHES

MIDDLE PART OF BODY VERY NARROW

MIDDLE PART OF BODY NOT NARROW

WINGS NOT ALIKE IN SIZE, SHAPE, OR PATTERN

WINGS SIMILAR IN SHAPE, SIZE, AND PATTERN

Narrow-waisted swarming ant (above) is readily distinguished from the thick-waisted swarming form of the termite.
Subterranean termites never expose themselves to fresh air. To traverse inhospitable territory—like a brick foundation wall—they build shelter tubes, composed of mud and other termite detritus. These covered termite superhighways are one of the few visible external signs of an infestation.

If you poke a hole in one of their shelter tubes, they will repair the breach immediately.

ENTRY POINTS that subterranean termites will use include: Tunneling into wood that is in direct contact with the soil; building shelter tubes over foundation walls, piers, chimneys, etc.; and by finding cracks or joints in masonry floors and foundations and building shelter tubes through them into wood above the crevices. Any object making contact between the soil and the wood on the house—trees, vines, weeds, plumbing, etc.—can serve as a support for shelter tubes.

SHELTER TUBES that run along exposed foundation walls are an obvious sign of infestation by subterranean termites. But as shown in the diagram, sometimes the entry points are through voids in the foundation—and the shelter tubes are totally hidden.

OFTEN, the first sign of subterranean termites in a house is the presence of swarmers. Swarming season for most of the country is spring and early summer. Most of subterranean termite species swarm during the day. The diagram on the previous page should help you distinguish between termites and harmless swarming ants.

IF THE OCCUPANTS OF THE HOUSE are not present when the swarm occurs, they may find only large numbers of discarded wings—usually on window sills.

Wood Damage

OOD THAT IS visibly damaged may also be encountered. Most often, however, wood will appear to be quite sound from the outside—until it collapses. Externally, in addition to shelter tubes, you might also see soil in cracks and crevices, plus dark or blister-like areas on flooring, trim or framing. Infested wood in advanced stages of attack is easily penetrated with a knife or screwdriver. Internal damage can sometimes be located by probing the surface of the wood with a sharp instrument, or by pounding the surface with a hard object—such as a small hammer—to detect sound differences that indicate hollow spaces.

In cases of extreme damage, you may find that a board has partially collapsed at bearing points. If you poke a hole in one of their shelter tubes, they will repair the breach immediately.

TERMITE TUBES OVER SURFACE AND THROUGH VOIDS IN FOUNDATION WALL

TERMITE TUBES OVER FOUNDATION WALL

CONCRETE ENTRANCE SLAB

WOOD DEBRIS IN DIRT FILL

WOOD DEBRIS IN SOIL

DIRECT ACCESS FROM PORCH FILL TO WOOD

FLOOR FRAMING INFESTED BY TERMITES

TERMITÉ TUBES OVER SURFACE AND THROUGH VOIDS IN FOUNDATION WALL

WOOD DEBRIS IN DIRT FILL

CONCRETE ENTRANCE SLAB

UNSEEN ENTRANCES

Termites can find their way through cracks in the foundation—and many other ways so that their shelter tubes are invisible. Buried wood around the house causes trouble because it attracts termites to the vicinity—and it won’t be long before they find their way into the structure.
CARPENTER ANTS burrow into wood to make
nests, and do not feed upon the wood
in the way termites do. Normally, they
don't cause extensive structural damage
in houses. Most species start their nests in
moist wood that has begun to decay (Keep Wood
Dry!). Most obvious sign of infestation is
the ants themselves: Large reddish-brown to
black ants, ½ to ¾ in. long.

DAMAGE OCCURS in the interior of the wood.
There may be piles or scattered bits of wood
powder (frass) that are very fibrous and saw­
dust like. The frass is expelled from cracks
and crevices, or from slit-like openings made
in the wood by the ants. Most often, carpen­
ter ants will be found in basements, dark clos­
ets, attics, under porches and crawl spaces.
The most effective way to control carpenter
ants is to locate the nest and kill the queen
in the colonies in and near the house with
insecticides.

Wood-Boring Beetles

LYCTID BEETLES--sometimes called Powder­
post beetles--will attack only the sap­
wood of hardwoods with large pores, such
as oak, hickory, ash, walnut, pecan and
many tropical hardwoods. The adult beetles
reinfest the wood with their eggs in a continu­
ing cycle until the wood disintegrates. Lyc­tids
range from 1/8 to 1/4 in. in length and are
reddish brown to black.

THE PRESENCE of small piles of fine flour-like
wood powder (frass) on or under the wood is
the most obvious sign of infestation. Even a
slight jarring of the wood makes the frass sift
from the holes. There are no pellets. Exit
holes from which the adult beetles emerge are
round and vary from 1/32 to 1/16 in. in di­
diameter. Most of the larva tunnels are about
1/16 in. in diameter and loosely packed with
powder.

INFESTATIONS ARE NORMALLY limited to hardwood
panelling, trim, furniture and flooring. Re­

Dampwood – Drywood Termites

AMPWOOD TERMITES build their colonies in
damp, sometimes decaying wood. They do
not require contact with the ground, but
require wood with a high moisture
content. There is little external evidence of
the presence of dampwood termites, other than
swarmers or shed wings. Because dampwood ter­
mites must maintain contact with damp wood,
the primary control measure is simply eliminat­
ing moist wood from the structure.

DRYWOOD TERMITES require no contact with the
soil or other external source of moisture; they
get the water they need from the wood they in­
habit. Drywood termites are most common in
southern California, southern Arizona and southern Florida. The first sign of drywood termite
infestation is usually piles of fecal pellets,
which are hard, less than 1/25 in. in length,
with six flattened or depressed sides. The pel­
etts vary in color from light gray to very dark
brown—depending on the wood being consumed.
The pellets, eliminated from galleries in the
wood through round "kick holes," accumulate on
surfaces or in spider webs below the kick holes.

Finely powdered wood dust streaming from exit holes is the
hallmark of the Anobiid beetle—also referred to as the "Pow­
derpost beetle." The greater the number of exit holes, the
greater the age of the infestation—and the greater the damage
is likely to be.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSECT</th>
<th>TYPICAL CONTROL TREATMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subterranean Termites</td>
<td>Treat soil around foundation and beneath cellar floor with insecticide such as Aldrin, Chlor dane, Dieldrin or Heptachlor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drywood Termites</td>
<td>Isolated infestation: Drill holes in infected wood and flood with insecticide—when environmental safety considerations permit. Extensive infestation: Fumigate entire structure with sulfuryl fluoride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dampwood Termites</td>
<td>Eliminate any source of damp wood. Soil treatment as for subterranean termites can be used as a secondary measure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood-Boring Beetles</td>
<td>Limited infestation: Replace infected wood, or remove wood and fumigate. General infestation: Fumigate entire structure with methyl bromide. In some cases, it is possible to interrupt the infestation cycle by maintaining low-humidity conditions in the infected area. Adult beetles like high-humidity conditions in which to lay their eggs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter Ants</td>
<td>Locate and treat all nests and surrounding areas in and near the house with appropriate insecticide, such as Sevin, Dursban or Baygon. It is also helpful to treat voids in walls with insecticides.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CAUTIONS

1. The insecticides listed above are extremely toxic and should be used only by a qualified professional exterminator.
2. Environmental regulations on the use of insecticides change frequently. Be sure to deal only with a reputable pest control company that is familiar with the latest safety and toxicity data.

Insect Control

UNFORTUNATELY, once wood-inhabiting insects are established in your home, the only effective way to control or eliminate them is with heavy-duty chemicals. For example, among the insecticides used to control termites are Aldrin, Chlordane, Dieldrin and Heptachlor. These chemicals are quite toxic to things other than termites, and thus their sale and use is strictly regulated.

AS A RESULT, insect control is not a do-it-yourself job. You have to call in a qualified professional. The dilemma is: How do you know who's qualified? The quality of an exterminator's work is extremely difficult to judge. With the soil treatment for termites, for example, you have no way of knowing whether the chemicals have reached all the way to the foundation footing—the case is made for thorough inspection of the entire structure, before drastic measures are called for.

When hiring an exterminator, beware of fast-talking salesmen. They may try to convince you that your house is going to collapse overnight if you don't sign a contract with them immediately. Fortunately, the rate at which insects consume wood is quite slow, so you've got plenty of time to select a reputable contractor. Your best bet: Get references of past customers and check them out. Also, get an estimate based on the entire job you need done—not an open-ended contract based on the volume of chemicals used.

As with other aspects of maintenance, your best defense against wood-inhabiting insects is frequent detailed inspections of the entire structure. That way, you can nip any infestations in the bud...before drastic measures are called for.
WINDOW BOXES were tremendously popular in Victorian houses. As decorative elements for both indoors and out, they were fashioned as practical containers, and ornamented to complement furniture, wallpaper and drapery. In order to make them both decorative and functional, they were generally equipped with an interior sheet zinc container that held pots or soil and retained moisture. The liner fit into a wooden, or tile-and-wood, structurally independent box, often comprised of common boards 3/4 to 1 inch thick. Boxes of stoneware or glazed tile, with bold floral bas-reliefs set in walnut frames, were popularized in the latter part of the 19th century. These worked well with Eastlake-inspired ornament; such boxes were commercially available and cost about $15.00 in 1875.

But equally acceptable were homemade decorations that made use of acorns, pine cones, berries, or other vegetable matter. The plant products were halved, glued to the outside of the window box, and shellacked. Sometimes small sticks were nailed on in patterns, or lichens were stuck onto the wet shellac following application of some nuts and fruits. (Shellacked boxes can only be used indoors and would have to be lined.)

A more formal appearance was possible, even on homemade boxes, if a piece of decorative oil cloth was attached and wood mouldings were applied, as shown here.

Vines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant Name</th>
<th>Shade or Sun</th>
<th>Annual or Perennial</th>
<th>Drought Tolerance</th>
<th>Flower Color</th>
<th>Calendar Months of Bloom†</th>
<th>Frangrant?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH IVY</td>
<td>Shade</td>
<td>Perennial</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>B/W/P/Pu</td>
<td>6-frost</td>
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<td>MORNING GLORY</td>
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<td>Annual</td>
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<td>Shade</td>
<td>Perennial</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>P/W</td>
<td>5-frost</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>IVY-LEAFED GERANIUM</td>
<td>Shade</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MADEIRA-VINE</td>
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<td>Good</td>
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<td>9-10</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>WANDERING JEW</td>
<td>Shade</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Y=yellow, R=red, B=blue, Pu=purple, W=white, P=pink  †=January, 2=February, etc.  **Store tubers indoors in winter
box. Favorite bulbs were Hyacinths, Narcissus, Jonquils, Tulips, and Snow Drops.

Plant A Revival

YOU CAN REVIVE the Victorian spirit if you're willing to experiment with exotic and colorful annuals and perennials. The charts on these pages supply information about cultural requirements for different size plants. Generally it is best to plant the tall or upright material in the back of the box, the small or dwarf plants in the middle, and the vines in front so they can trail picturesquely down below. Vines to be trellised would occupy a place in the rear. It's best of course to group plants together which have similar requirements for light, moisture, and protection.

A LOT OF TIME AND EFFORT is involved in preparing and maintaining a window box. If you have a choice of locations, pick a north or east window. Those require far less maintenance than windows facing south or west. North and east locations are cooler, and provide complete or partial shade from the afternoon sun in summer. This helps reduce the frequency of waterings, sparing the plants from dessication if a day or two of watering is missed during hot and windy summer weather.

PRE-PACKAGED SOIL MIXES are preferred today; most provide Vermiculite, peat moss, potting soil, and even fertilizer. But if large quantities of growing medium are needed, you'll find it cheaper to make up your own. A suitable mixture is as follows: 4 parts potting soil, leaf mold, or garden soil; 1 part fine peat moss; 1 part Vermiculite; 1 part builders sand (NOT beach sand); 1 part dehydrated cow manure; 1 part bone meal.

BEFORE FILLING THE BOX with growing medium, put down a one- to two-inch layer of potsherds, broken brick, or coarse bark chips to keep soil from washing through drainage holes (if any, as would be needed outdoors). The porous surfaces of these elements will also retain nutrients washed through the medium.

SOAK THE SOIL MIX before planting seedlings (let the free water drain away first). Cover the soil after planting with a one-inch layer of fine fir bark or pine chips or pea gravel to serve as a mulch, then water again.

### Low Plants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant Name</th>
<th>Shade or Sun</th>
<th>Annual or Perennial</th>
<th>Drought Tolerance</th>
<th>Flower Color*</th>
<th>Calendar Months of Bloom†</th>
<th>Fragrant?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEGONIA</td>
<td>Shade</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>W/P/R</td>
<td>5-frost</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETUNIAS</td>
<td>Sun/Shade</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>W/P/Pu/B/R</td>
<td>5-frost</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CROCUS, HYACINTH</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Perennial</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>W/B/Y</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Hyacinth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNOW DROP</td>
<td>Sun/Shade</td>
<td>Perennial</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEDUM SP.</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Perennial</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>6,7,8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANSY</td>
<td>Shade</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>W/P/Y/Pu/B/R</td>
<td>6,7,8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWEET ALYSSUM</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>W/Pu</td>
<td>5-frost</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERBENA</td>
<td>Shade/Sun</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>W/R/P</td>
<td>6-frost</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Y=Yellow, R=red, B=blue, Pu=purple, W=white, P=pink
†1=January, 2=February, etc.
WINDOW BOX GARDENS need a special extra-rich culture, because you'll be growing a relatively large amount of plant mass in a limited space, and because nutrients are leached out of the soil by watering. So apply an all-purpose liquid fertilizer 4 to 6 weeks after planting, then once a week after that. It is generally advisable to prepare a new growing medium each spring. Spent soil can always be added to a compost pile for use in the outdoor garden.

**Building A Box**

The basic shape of the 19th century box can be used today: 8 inches high, 12 inches wide, and as long as the window permits. Your best bet for the outer box is wood...either rott resistant species like cedar and redwood, or CCA Lumber--which is pressure-treated with non-toxic chemicals. (Check manufacturers' literature on unknown preservative treatments; some may be toxic to plants.) Exterior-grade plywood, if kept painted inside and out, is also acceptable.

A board thickness of one inch or greater is preferred to resist warping while providing excellent insulation for the soil. (A thick-walled box will moderate soil temperature and conserve moisture.) Unless the box is to be used indoors, a zinc or galvanized metal liner is probably not necessary. Outdoors, a perforated box floor provides essential drainage.

Boxes constructed of rot-resistant species need not be varnished or painted, except for decorative purposes. Other woods should be protected with a surface finish. Shellac is traditional for indoor boxes, but exterior-grade varnish or paint has to be used outside. If you decide to paint or varnish the box, apply at least two coats to both the inside and outside. This is to prevent warping.

**Semi-transparent** wood stains may also be applied. Burnt umber and tan tones were often used in the past; they don't compete visually with the plant subjects. If the box will sit outside on the window sill, be sure to pick an exterior finish that resists ultra-violet deterioration.

**Tall Plants**

| Plant Name         | Shade or Sun | Annual or Perennial | Drought Tolerance | Flower Color* | Calendar Months of Bloom† | Fragrant?
|--------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------------------|----------
| TULIP              | Sun          | Perennial           | Fair              | H/Y/W/P       | 4-5                       | Yes      
| JONQUIL, NARCISSUS| Sun          | Perennial           | Fair              | Y/W           | 3-4                       | Yes      
| GERANIUM (VARIEGATED) | Sun/Shade | Annual              | Good              | P/W/R         | 5-frost                   | Yes      
| CARNATION          | Sun          | Annual              | Fair              | P/W/R         | 6,7,8,9                   | No       
| FUCHSIA            | Shade        | Annual              | Poor              | P/W           | 7-8                       | No       
| HELIOTROPE         | Shade        | Perennial           | Fair              | W/Pu          | 6-frost                   | Yes      
| ARBORVITAE         | Sun          | Perennial           | Poor              | —             | —                         | Yes**    
| FEVERFREW          | Sun          | Annual              | Fair              | W/Y           | 7,8,9                     | No       

*Y=yellow, R=red, B=blue, Pu=purple, W=white, P=Pink
†1=January, 2=February, etc.
**Leaves and twigs
Pigeons on the grass alas.
Pigeons on the grass alas.
---Gertrude Stein

If only they'd stay on the grass! But alas, they do not, and the ledges, ridges, eaves, dormers, statuary, fences, and gutters of homes and buildings are the worse for it. (Our health is the worse for it as well, as the box on the next page explains.) What can we do to get them back on the grass?

Scientific Methods

"How come they can land a man on the moon, but they can't stop pigeons from landing on my house?" That cry echoes from coast to coast. But the fact of the matter is that science has contributed its awesome prowess to the task of shooing pigeons, often with a good deal of success. The three most common methods are electrified wires, repellent gels, and ultra-sonic devices.

Electrified Wire is a variation on the electrified fence that farmers use around pastures. A high voltage, low amperage, continuous wire running on small insulators is laid down where the pigeons like to land. A box with an electric tube sends out the pulse: not enough juice to kill the bird—much less a person—but enough to make it go away. (Actually, any person who touches it will get a pretty good jolt, so be careful.) Unfortunately, this method is best for public buildings; it's not really practical for home-owners unless they're prepared to install it themselves (the box alone costs $75).

Repellent Gels, such as Roost-No-More, have had a good deal of success. The gel is a chemical paste which gives the pigeon a "hot foot"; once again, nothing lethal, just something nasty enough to make it want to stay away. But there is a limited lifespan for the chemical's effectiveness: usually about one or two years. The gel is also difficult to remove, and when dirt and pollution get into it, it becomes very unsightly. One way around this problem is to lie duct tape on the area that you want to treat, and then apply the gel to the tape. Then all you'll have to worry about is whatever damage that may occur when you pull up the tape. The gel is relatively inexpensive, about $15 per gallon, but don't smear it on more thickly than 1/8 of an inch: Too much gel will start to run off, especially in hot weather.

Ultra-sonic Devices work by emitting sound waves that are inaudible to most humans, but are unpleasant to pigeons—as well as other birds, and dogs and cats, etc., so don't put one in a place where it can annoy your pets. The sound is emitted in a consistently random pattern which the pigeons can never get used to.

Duds

Let's start with the things that definitely do not work. Rubber snakes and glass owls, although guaranteed to break the ice at parties, are woefully inadequate for terrorizing pigeons. These birds are not that dumb, and they quickly realize that such mannequins are not the genuine article; they observe that the dummies either remain motionless or else move in a constantly repeating pattern. These subterfuges may work at first, but it won't be long before you find the pigeons sitting quite comfortably upon their artificial adversaries.

As might be expected, violence has been offered as a solution. Suggested methods range from organized shoots to such medieval diversions as employing peregrine falcons. The disadvantages of these methods are legion. Even if you know how to use a gun, and local laws will permit an organized shoot, these things can get disorganized fairly quickly. So don't be surprised if the body count rapidly escalates from pigeons to any birds at all to several portions of your house. (In fact, you'd probably do well to bring a medic with you.) And remember, you'll have to have shoots all the time to keep the pigeons away. Besides, shooting pigeons is pretty revolting, isn't it?

Peregrine Falcons will certainly dispatch pigeons. They'll also dispatch all the other birds, as well as small dogs, cats, rabbits, and anything else that impresses them as potentially appetizing. And if you think pigeon excrement is bad, try paper-training a peregrine falcon.

"Don't despair, Chauncey-OHJ will have an answer!"
A device that claims to cover up to 2500 square feet costs about $125, and reportedly does not require much maintenance. The area such a device will actually blanket varies of course with the nature of the space: Sound will start to run off and dissipate in a completely open field. But if pigeons have been roosting in your attic, and you put one of these hummers up there, they'll probably stop visiting you.

(DESpite WHAT YOU MIGHT SUSPECT, all of the above-mentioned products are relatively easy to track down. All you have to do is look in the Yellow Pages under "Bird Barriers, Repellents, & Controls." Repellent gels are an especially popular item, and so almost everyone offers one kind or another. But the following product is a bit more difficult to find, and so I've included ordering information for it.)

And The Winner Is...

O Ne PRODUCT STANDS OUT as combining the greatest effectiveness with the least disadvantages: Nixalite. Nixalite is a metal strip with protruding, needle-sharp points, ten per inch. It has been sanctioned by the Audubon Society because it does no harm to the birds; it simply renders an area uninhabitable for them. As with the other products mentioned, Nixalite's effectiveness is dependent upon how well you install it: If you jam too much of it in a small area, the spines will squash together and give the pigeons something to stand on; if you use it too sparingly, the pigeons will find room to land.

Three different kinds of Nixalite strips

Health Hazards

Below is an update of the March '81 OHJ article on the diseases carried by fungi that live in accumulated pigeon droppings:

1. Healthy people will not always contract histoplasmosis or cryptococcal pneumonia, even when the spores from pathogenic fungi are present in pigeon droppings.

2. Both of the above-mentioned diseases are usually self-limiting: They act like a respiratory infection and then go away. Even if an astute doctor were to correctly diagnose the diseases, there would usually be no special treatment for them.

3. Cryptococcosis can attack the nervous system, becoming cryptococcal meningitis; more serious, but still quite treatable. For reasons still unclear, the disease can go into a latency period of months or even years. But whenever it surfaces, it can be treated in an otherwise healthy person. Blood tests and spinal fluid tests will indicate the presence of the disease only when the patient is manifesting symptoms.

4. The danger is genuine: People with diabetes, blood disease, respiratory disease, or other underlying disease, or who are taking steroids or immuno-suppressant drugs, can die from these diseases.
Repairing Wood Stairs

Balusters & Handrails

By Jonathan Poore & Patricia Poore

A WOBBLY HANDRAIL is a common staircase complaint. It means there are loose joints in the balustrade—the assembly of handrail, and the balusters that hold it up. One common balustrade assembly is pictured on this page. These are open-string stairs: The outer string is cut to reveal the stepping of treads and risers. At the bottom, the balusters are dovetailed into the treads. At the top, they fit into a bored hole in the underside of the rail.

CLOSED-STRING STAIRS, illustrated on the facing page, often have balusters let into grooves in both the handrail and the outer string. Spacers, or pieces of finished wood that cap the groove between balusters, help hold the assembly rigid.

Loose Balusters

IF A DOVETAILED BALUSTER is loose, it's best to remove it so it can be cleanly re-glued and nailed. Carefully pry off the return nosing to expose the dovetails. Take out any nails you see and remove the baluster. Clean all connections of old glue and varnish. If there is no longer a tight fit between baluster and rail, or between baluster and tread, use wood shims rather than driving lots of random nails. After the loose connections are shimmed and glued, one finishing nail driven into each dovetail is quite enough. Toe-nail at the connection between baluster and rail, as shown in the illustration to the right.

WHEN YOU DRIVE a nail into dry old hardwood, there's always a chance of the wood splitting. Where there is the greatest likelihood of splitting, such as at the top of a slender baluster, pre-drill a hole before nailing. Otherwise, nip the end off each nail before driving it. This way, the blunt end will crush rather than split the wood fibers.

IF THE DOVETAIL is broken off or split, fabricate and attach a new one by doweling, as shown here.

NOW REFASTEN the return nosing. Glue at the miter and just adjacent to it, as shown, then nail it in place. Gluing along the full length of the nosing could cause the tread to split. Gluing at the miter only

will keep the miter joint closed, while allowing for expansion and contraction of the tread.

THE ASSEMBLY on the facing page shows a closed-string stair. The balusters are let into grooves top and bottom, and anchored with nails. If these balusters were loose, the solution would be careful toe-nailing.

The Old-House Journal

June 1981
THERE ARE IN FACT several kinds of rail bolts. The most practical and widely used is the one we've discussed. It has wood-screw threads on one end, and machine-screw threads and a star nut on the other end. But there's also a twin-nut rail bolt with machine-screw threads along its entire length; this is less practical because it necessitates two access holes, one for each nut. The third type, a simple double-ended screw, often strips out and should be replaced with a rail bolt if this should happen.

A RAIL BOLT is much like a hanger bolt, but with a point on the machine-screw end. (The point makes it easier to slip the star nut on in a tight place.) Hanger bolts are available at most hardware stores, and a common hex nut can be ground into a star nut configuration. But stair-rail bolts—with pointed ends and star nuts—are still sometimes available at older hardware stores and stair-parts suppliers.

Handrail Trouble

HANDRAILS DON'T very often come apart at the seams. (But if yours has, it should be tackled before you re-glue all the balusters.) Sections of rail are connected by rail bolts, wood dowels, and glue as shown in the cutaway drawing above. It is possible to re-glue and tighten a loose joint in the rail without removing the whole handrail. Disassembly involves unplugging the access hole to get at the special star nut that clamps the two sections together. Loosen the nut by tapping against a screwdriver or nailset that's held against the edge of the nut. Pull the joint apart just far enough to insert a chisel; scrape away old glue and varnish, then re-glue. Work the glue into the dowel joint well, since this is where the strength of the connection really is.

IF THE WOOD-SCREW THREADS work loose on an existing rail bolt, try screwing the rail bolt deeper into the wood. This also remedies stripped-out machine-screw threads on the other end, since now the nut is in a new position.

INSTALLING a new rail bolt where there was a double-ended screw before requires boring an access hole that intersects the bolt hole. You'll need to scrape a flat spot inside the access hole for the washer to rest upon. Don't change the shape of the hole at the surface, or the plug you make for it won't fit neatly.

SPECIAL THANKS to our consultant for this series: Mr. Harry Waldemar, Stairbuilder
FOUNDATION PROBLEMS

These are the tell-tale signs of an overly damp basement or crawlspace. Outside the house: Look at soil type, grading, plantings, gutters and drainage, and the foundation itself. Inside the house: Check for adequate ventilation, signs of decay or insect activity, obvious dampness or ponding... don't forget to note leaky pipes.

deterioration after a number of years. In addition, the water can serve as a vehicle for bringing dissolved mineral salts (as from fertilizer) into the masonry units. When the water reaches its gaseous state through evaporation, the salts remain inside the wall--SUBFLORESCENCE--or are deposited as a whitish stain on the surface--EFFLORESCENCE. The crystalline salts remaining inside the masonry exert mechanical pressure which causes SPALLING, the crumbling or flaking of the masonry face. Finally, water trapped in fissures or pores in stone or brick can cause serious cracking of mortar, masonry units, or sections of wall through expansion as it changes from a liquid into its solid state: ice.

Humidity & Condensation

So much for the subtle but insidious afflictions caused by excessive dampness, which devour structural timbers, crumble wooden panelling, stain plaster, or delapidate masonry walls. Regardless of its source, liquid water in a basement or crawlspace will evaporate and humidify the interior atmosphere. When air saturated with moisture is suddenly cooled by a colder object or air mass, the dew point is reached, and the water vapor condenses out of the air in the form of little water droplets.

In the summer, warm humid air from outdoors enters the cooler foundation cavities and gives up its water. In the winter, exhaust from clothes dryers, or damp air from washing machines or a bathroom, will condense on cold wall or floor surfaces, on sills, or on joists.

There are several approaches to remedy these problems. Moisture can be removed from the air by a dehumidifier. Dryers can be properly vented, and laundry or bathrooms can be equipped with fans. Cold surfaces can be insulated from the humid environment. This might mean covering cold-water pipes with insulated plastic foam sleeves to stop them from "sweating." Or it might mean framing the interior faces of outside walls with studs, placing insulation, a vapor barrier, and panelling or plasterboard over them.
FOR CONDENSATION conditions which arise only during the summer when the subterranean spaces are much cooler than the outside air, providing adequate air circulation is the answer. Screened foundation vents must be placed in the walls or crawlspaces and basements. They should be left open in warm weather, unobstructed by vegetation or banked earth, to allow an easy exchange of air. This circulation must especially reach the corners of crawlspaces where wood sills meeting walls are not too far from damp soil, because it is here that the most destructive conditions are apt to occur. Fans can be used to accelerate this air movement and ensure that the timber in these areas is kept at below 20% moisture content in order to discourage the various infestations.

APPROACHES to correcting the wet basement problem fall broadly into two categories:

1. **The Indoor Solutions**
   - Keeping water from entering
   - Controlling the incoming water

2. **The Outdoor Solutions**
   - Controlling surface water
   - Controlling subterranean water
   - Keeping water from entering

Inside: No Miracles

The common misbelief is that there is a miracle coating that can be applied to the inside face of a sieve-like masonry wall, and it will stop the inflow of water. Many techniques and products are recommended for this very purpose, all with limited effectiveness.

PARGING is a method of retarding leakage by means of the application of a thick layer of cement or mortar to a masonry wall. Two 3/8 inch coats are trowelled to the interior face of the wall, filling voids and surface inequities, creating a smooth finish. Dry, pre-mixed cement-based coatings to which you add water or water and an acrylic bonder are marketed as cure-alls for wet basements. The packaging tells us that these mixes will seal pores, fill voids and stop leaks, and can be applied with a stiff brush to a thickness of 1/8th inch or, with silica sand added, trowelled onto the wall. These products are over-priced and over-rated.

VARIOUS PAINT MANUFACTURERS offer oil-based and latex waterproofing paint containing cement and moisture inhibitors. These thick slurries, brushed on directly from the can, are intended to create an impervious water barrier on the surface of the wall. Their prices seem reasonable, until you consider that one gallon covers only 50 to 100 square feet, and that the limitations on the label put their effectiveness to question.

Like A Hull

The common misbelief is that there is a miracle coating that can be applied to the inside face of a sieve-like masonry wall, and it will stop the inflow of water.

FINALLY, THERE ARE the clear waterproofing sealers which are supposed to be effective on any porous material, including wood, fabric, concrete, and masonry. These solutions of polymerized solids soak into the pores, and
when the solvent evaporates, harden and plug up the tiny water passages. Effective for some uses, they are often sold by ill-informed salespersons as solutions to the wet basement problem. But they will not stop water from flowing in through a masonry wall.

Water As An Adversary

IN SETTING OUT to do battle against incoming water, it is wise to assess the capabilities of the enemy. This will show why the above methods may be defeated after only a brief skirmish.

HYDRAULIC PRESSURE can exert some of the strongest mechanical forces known. Consider the destructive effect of floods, the shattering of dams, or the carving of the Grand Canyon. Water is relentless in its seeking of its own level, and few obstacles can withstand its action. How then can thin coats of cement or paint stop water from intruding into the cellar or crawlspace? It can be likened to the legendary Danish King Canute who stood on the shore and in an attempt to prove his great power, commanded the tides to cease advancing. He failed too.

THE WATER SEEPING through foundation walls by hydrostatic pressure will exert force against any impervious barrier, breaking the adhesion between the masonry and its coating material. Parging and cementitious or latex-and oil-based waterproofing treatments will slough off when moisture accumulates behind it. Any movement of the wall due to settling or heaving will crack these coatings, regardless of their thickness, allowing an entrance for the water. Sealants which stop up pores in masonry can cause water pressure and sub-florescence to build up behind the interior face. Thus, coatings can promote spalling and deterioration-conditions as harmful as the problem they were meant to solve.

Turn Off The Spigot

CRACKS, FISSURES, GAPS, OR VOIDS in the masonry walls act as open spigots, bringing water pouring into the basement. Soil shifts due to compaction, frost heaving, or expansion of water-saturated earth can cause breaching of foundation walls, especially those older ones constructed without footings. Voids can be created by masonry units deteriorating or merely falling out of place due to mortar failure. Rubble walls constituting the foundations of some buildings were often dried-laid, with mortar used only on the interior face to give a finished appearance. Fissures in these walls often lead directly to the outside, and must be stopped up.

VOIDS 1/4 to 1/2 inch can be patched with high-performance sealers, such as butyl or polysulphide caulk or latex masonry filler. These are all available in cartridges for gun injection. The cracks must be brushed clean and be dry for successful results. If the crack exceeds its width in depth, then it must be packed with screening or oakum or plastic filler rods first. Epoxy mortar can also be trowelled into the spaces or, if the crack is wet at the time of repair, then a waterplugging patching mortar can be used. These are formulated with hydraulic cement, which expands in place and cures even when wet.

IT MUST BE STRESSED that these procedures may work permanently—or then again, for only a short time. In addition, the water which would have flowed through the repaired crack may merely have been rerouted, and will enter at another weak spot in the wall.

Pointing Masonry

WHILE BRICK, STONE, AND CONCRETE have the capacity to absorb and conduct moisture, the outright flow of water through a seemingly solid masonry wall occurs at the mortar joints. Constant saturation by ground water can cause dissolution and deterioration of lime mortar. Repair of these joints is accomplished by tuck pointing from the inside.
WHEN A WALL LEAKS due to faulty mortar, it is virtually impossible to determine the defective areas accurately by visual inspection. So it is recommended that all joints adjacent to the trouble spot be pointed. It will save labor and money to be complete and thorough from the start in this process, as too much is better than too little.

PREPARATION for tuck pointing entails removal of the old mortar to a depth of one inch; this assures adequate bonding between the new mortar and existing masonry. In cases where the joints are less than 3/8 inch thick, only a half-inch slot is needed (as long as the mortar beyond that depth is sound). This procedure should be done with hammer and chisel. Power tools are discouraged because they can easily damage the edges of the masonry. This is especially important in the case of old brick: Removal of the hard, high-fired exterior exposes the softer, porous interior which will more easily absorb water and dissolved mineral salts—thus causing spalling. All loose material must be removed, usually with a stiff fiber or wire brush, then hosed with a stream of water or air.

**Mortar Specifications**

NEW MORTAR should be carefully formulated to closely duplicate the proportions of the original mortar. Modern pre-mixed bagged mortars contain too great a percentage of portland cement, thus creating a hard, inflexible high-strength mortar that stresses the masonry. This in turn leads to spalling and even cracking of bricks or stones. High lime mortar is easier to work, more durable, can self-seal small cracks, has the least volume of change due to climate conditions, and is the traditional mortar used in early buildings.

THE MATERIALS making up the mortar used in re-pointing an old masonry wall should have the following specifications:

- **CEMENT**—ASTM C 150 Type I or II Portland Cement. Grey is acceptable for areas not to be seen, but non-staining white will provide better color for visually prominent areas. One 94 lb. bag = 1 cu.ft.

- **LIME**—ASTM C 207 Type S Hydrated Lime for masonry purposes. One 50 lb. bag = 1-1/4 cu.ft.

- **SAND**—ASTM C 144, clean well-graded sand of medium to fine particle size. It should match original sand as closely as possible. One 80 lb. bag = 1 cu.ft.

GENERAL FORMULATIONS for mortar vary, but a local mason can assist in duplicating the original mix. The following specifications have been used by the sources cited for varied situations. They can serve as a starting point, at least, for the concoction of the appropriate mortar for your situation.

ALL INGREDIENTS must be dry-mixed thoroughly, raked and turned over until there is an even, consistent appearance indicating that the cementitious material is evenly distributed throughout the mass. Then the mixture should be pre-hydrated to prevent shrinking upon drying and to increase the workability.

TO PRE-HYDRATE, mix again, adding only enough water to make a damp, stiff mortar which will retain its form when pressed into a ball. Keep it in this damp condition for one or two hours, then remix, adding sufficient water to make up the proper consistency (which is somewhat dryer than conventional mortar for new work).

TO ENSURE A GOOD BOND for the actual tuck pointing, wet the cleaned joints thoroughly before applying the mortar. Allow any freestanding water to soak into the wall, as the joints should not be visibly wet. Begin by packing mortar into the deepest voids. Then fill the back of the entire joint with a 1/4-inch layer of mortar. When it and each successive layer has reached thumb-print hardness, apply another coat of mortar of the same thickness. Several applications will be necessary to fill the joint. When flush with the wall face, tool it to a smooth, slightly concave surface.

MORE INFORMATION on cures for wet basements and crawlspaces will follow in the second part of this article. Still to come: More effective ways of controlling incoming water, including floor drains, dry wells, sump pumps, perimeter drains, and vapor barriers. Then, outdoor solutions from gutters to excavation will be considered, including roof drainage systems, re-grading and the effect of landscaping, parging, and the application of bituminous membranes.

**The Author**

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Worse Than Aluminum Siding

To the Editors:

OUR PROBLEM concerns removing a fake brick type of stucco. This was applied to our 1895 Queen Anne brick and shingle house by a previous owner in a very misguided and expensive attempt to correct loose mortar in several sections of the original brick. The cost of application in 1978 was $8000.00!

THE SURFACE does not in any way resemble the original brick, and architectural features such as recessed panels and window arches were covered over. Although reputed to be "hundreds of times harder than any brick," the surface is developing small cracks. One wall was spared, because the previous owner planned to build on a two-car garage. We have read in THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL of the successful removal of aluminum siding, and have hopes of eventually finding a method to remove the fake brick.

ACCORDING TO the contractor who did the work, it is applied to a galvanized lath nailed to the brick with roofing nails and some cement nails. Next, three coats are applied: (1) A coat of cement, (2) a mortar coat, and (3) a white finish coat which is tooled while wet to give it the appearance of brick and mortar.

INCIDENTALLY, the contractor told me he had worked with "the historical society" in "restoring" several 100-year-old houses, a claim which is patently false. When I protested, he finally was candid, stating, "Well, a few want to fix them, but most don't. I'm just trying to make some money." Perhaps THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL will alert readers to this new menace, which appears to be much harder to reverse than aluminum siding.

--Edie Catrett
Nephi, Utah

IS IT TOO LATE for this house? Cement coatings or stucco applied directly to masonry are virtually impossible to remove without major damage to the masonry. In the case of a cement coating applied over lath, there would seem to be two problems: (1) What do you do about the nail holes? (2) How much cement will remain against the original bricks when the lath is removed? Any suggestions from other readers?

--The Editors

On Transom Lifters

To the Editors:

I AM WRITING with information on the availability of transom operators. They are still manufactured and distributed by:

- The CIPCO Corporation
  22nd and Cole Streets
  St. Louis, MO 63106
  Tel. (314) 436-0011

IN 1919, CIPCO purchased the original firm manufacturing these transom operators. The current model has been adapted in mode of operation only, working on the principle of a worm screw and turn-rod, rather than the original metal pressure clip which would rapidly deteriorate from metal fatigue. Installed, however, they are identical to the originals.

PRICES BEGIN at around $30 for the 36-inch length, and go up from there. They come in lengths of 36, 48, 60, and 72 inches to fit any transom height. To determine the length you need, you measure from the floor to the top of the transom and deduct five feet. Made of steel, the lifters are available in three finishes: Brass plate, bronze plate, and zinc plate.

TO PURCHASE a transom lifter, check first with a local contract hardware distributor. This is the hardware supplier to the building trade. Even if such a supplier does not ordinarily sell transom hardware, the store can order it from the CIPCO catalog. If you are unable to find any supplier of CIPCO-manufactured equipment, you may call or write to Mr. Size at CIPCO for the name of a distributor in your state. The hardware is not available by mail.

I HOPE that this information will benefit OHJ readers and my fellow colleagues in old-house restoration.

--Tom Zelaney
Washington, D.C.
OMNESQUE REVIVAL, Italianate, Mansard, Shingle, and Queen Anne houses abound in this delightful compilation of plates and pages from the late nineteenth-century periodical, Scientific American Architects and Builders Edition. The book includes 22 color plates, each featuring a floor plan. Aesthetic mode interiors from the 1890s, ceiling patterns, Linenfa-Walton wallcovering patterns, ornamental iron gates, and new gadgets are shown. Advice is given on hanging curtains. Wallpaper, paint, and varnish manufacture are illustrated.

IN THE WORDS OF THE INTRODUCTION, this book is the "first step toward understanding the history of construction, design, and decoration of homes in the late nineteenth century."

To order send $19.95 plus $1.00 postage to:
Chronicle Books--Dept. OHJ
870 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 777-7240


THE BOOK ALSO OFFERS an exhaustive checklist for home inspection and reviews of 44 relevant books and magazines. There are a multitude of line drawings and black and white photographs, all of which are in keeping with the tone of the text: clear, informative, witty, and unpretentious.

To order send $10.00 (postage will be paid by the publisher) to:
Mid-Atlantic Solar Energy Association
2233 Gray's Ferry Avenue--Dept. OHJ
Philadelphia, PA 19146

ANYONE WITH A SOUTHERN GREEK REVIVAL HOUSE will be interested in this book. Thanks to Clay Lancaster's careful text and a fine collection of old and new photographs, the book provides an excellent reference to the style. Eutaw is a unique town because it was built for a single purpose--to serve a judiciary function--and the architecture is therefore mostly in the same style. Many types of Greek Revival houses are present, from one-storey houses to elaborate mansions.

THE BOOK GOES THROUGH THE TOWN house by house and describes the changes each house has undergone. Black and white photographs are combined with elevations. Some of the old photographs even offer glimpses of Eutaw's early residents.

To order send $15.00 plus $1.50 postage to:
Greene County Historical Society
P.O. Box 746--Dept. OHJ
Eutaw, AL 35462
LOG HOUSES HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY POPULAR in recent years, and this book offers practical, step-by-step information on how they can be preserved. The authors explain how to cope with such problems as sagging floors, wood decay, leaking ceilings, and insect damage. Line drawings and black and white photographs clarify the detailed textual instructions on log replacement, chinking, straightening buildings, etc. This book is essential for anyone who owns or is considering buying a log structure.

To order send $10.95 (postage will be paid by the author) to:
Philip Parr - Dept. OHJ
3179 McCorkindale Road
Caledonia, NY 14423

Wallpaper in America, From the Seventeenth Century to World War I
Catherine Lynn
1980 (536 pp., generously illustrated) Cloth.

METHODS OF DESIGNING, MANUFACTURING, AND HANGING WALLPAPER from colonial times to 1915 are dealt with extensively and authoritatively in this handsome book. Although its focus is on American wallpaper, the book also deals thoroughly with French and English wallpapers of the eighteenth century. Other topics include bandboxes, scenic wallpapers, repeating patterns, and Oriental wallpapers. The author also discusses wallpaper as it reflected not only fashion and taste, but aesthetic and even moral attitudes over the years. Impressively illustrated with 102 color plates and over 245 black and white photographs, this book is a must for all old-house owners who want their interior decoration to match the style of their home.

To order send $45.00 (postage will be paid by the publisher) to:
W.W. Norton Book Company
SOB Fifth Avenue -- Dept. OHJ
New York, NY 10110
(800) 223-2584

Russell and Erwin Illustrated Catalogue of American Hardware
Compiled by Henry E. Russell, 2d
New introduction by Lee H. Nelson

IN ORDER TO PROVIDE a valuable dating and research source on nineteenth-century tools and hardware, the Association for Preservation Technology has reprinted this unabridged facsimile edition of Russell and Erwin's 1865 catalog. Each entry gives full dimensions and is illustrated with an excellent line drawing. Andirons, cutlery, sleighbells, doorknobs, coffee mills, blacksmiths' tools, brushes, planes, hinges, casters, handles, locks, and bolts are all included.

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From Wallpaper in America: Dining Room Decorated with Rothman, Strome and Co.'s Japanese Leather Papers (1884).
Covering a full century of American architectural styles, with over 100 full-color illustrations, paint charts and special features, Century of Color: Exterior Decoration for American Buildings, 1820-1920 is the most comprehensive, practical guide to authentic, historically-accurate paint colors available.

Century of Color is a unique documentary history of exterior coloration featuring 100 authentic period color illustrations of the houses of the times, plus "Affinity Charts" showing color combinations, a paint chip card from the carefully-researched Sherwin-Williams line, and a guide to the selection and placement of colors.

This delightful house color guide has been researched and compiled by noted architectural historian Roger Moss, executive director of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Featured in this landmark guide are these outstanding visual treats:
- 100 color plates that show "plain" Victorian and vernacular Classic houses, as well as the expected showcase homes. The color combinations emphasize the rich character and detailing of the architects' designs. Moss carefully describes and analyzes each plate, sometimes even incorporating the language of the times. These plates are historic documents drawn from the archives of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- "Affinity Charts," which detail 200 color combinations that are historically accurate . . . and diverse enough to stimulate everyone's aesthetic taste.
- A large color chip card featuring the 40 colors of the new authentic Sherwin-Williams paint line, "Heritage Colors."

In addition to the visual aspects of this book, these editorial sections are included:
- An extensive essay on exterior decoration
- A Victorian architectural glossary
- A microscopic analysis and Munsell color-coding reference guide to 57 colors found on original 19th-century paint chip cards.
- A bibliography of published sources

$10, plus $2 shipping & handling. Softcover.
Allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.

Use Order Form in this issue, or send $12 to:
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Photos of items for sale are also printed free—space permitting. Just submit a clear black & white photograph along with your ad copy.

Examples of types of ads eligible for free insertion: 1) Interesting old houses for sale; 2) Architectural salvage & old house parts for sale; 3) Restoration positions wanted and vacant; 4) Hard-to-find items that you are looking for; 5) Trades and swaps; 6) Restoration and old house services; 7) Meetings and events.

Free ads are limited to a maximum of 50 words. The only payment is your current OHJ mailing label to verify your member/subscriber status.

Deadline will be on the 5th, 2 month before the issue. For example, ads for the December issue are due by October 5th.

Write: Emporium Editor, Old-House Journal, 89A Seventh Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11217.

WANTED

GOTHIC STYLE EXTERIOR LIGHT FIXTURE for 1890 home. Wall mount or hanging. Seven Gables, P.O. Box 294, Baraboo, WI 53913.

YELLOW PINE interior woodwork and trim: Baseboards, base shoe, picture moulding, doors, window frames, sash, etc. Please send description and photo. Ralph Cox, 2602 Washington, Iowa City, IA 52240. (319) 551-6611.

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ARCHITECTURAL SCALE MODELS made of your old house or structure. Details complete! Models made from blueprints or photos (which are returned with finished model). Write to: Terry Warner, 5300 Vernon Ave., No. 108, Edina, MN 55436. Or call: (612) 927-8784.
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- 18 entirely new categories were added to the Product & Service Directory;
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