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Cover: Workman from the C.A. Ohman Ceiling Co. installing a metal cornice moulding.  
(Photo by Bill O'Donnell.)



This muse on the old-house psyche is from Clem Labine, OHJ's founding editor.

# YOU PAID MONEY FOR THIS DUMP?

**W**hy are family and friends invariably horrified by an old house that needs restoration?

We can see the potential; why can't they? Sure, the plaster is stained and falling because the roof leaks. The porch is rotted and collapsing. Every surface needs patching and refinishing. But we can see beyond all that, we know how glorious the house will be.

So we forget that others don't share the dream. All they can see is the decay, the filth, the neglect. This clash of perceptions may create a painful (and occasionally hilarious) scene when the proud owner of an old house shows off his treasure for the first time.

"I worked my whole life to raise you in a decent place, and you move to a wreck in Brooklyn?" was the response our editor provoked when she guided her parents through her unrestored old house. A typical reaction. My own experience with the first encounter came the day my parents drove down from rural Connecticut to inspect the 1883 brownstone Claire and I had just purchased.

In our minds, of course, the house had already been transformed into the Victorian fantasy that it was eventually to become. What we hadn't anticipated was that my parents didn't have The Vision. What they saw was a shabby rooming house, currently a minefield of renovation projects: They took in the broken plaster; stared at the open guts of the house wherever plumbing and electrical work were in mid-project; sidestepped buckets filled with paint-remover sludge. Everywhere were the messy hallmarks of restoration in full swing.

My parents stood in the middle of the parlor floor, paralyzed with horror. Father was speechless, having decided it was better to say nothing than to utter words we would hold against him later. Mother, however, always looks for something cheerful to say. This situation, I could see, was testing her power of positive thinking.

Thirty frantic seconds went by — and her eyes lit up. "Well," she announced, "this place certainly has high ceilings!"

Since that unforgettable moment, I have been fascinated by the way a dilapidated old house is a sort of Rorschach test of character. People project themselves onto the house. Some see what it can become; others see only decrepitude. Some are drawn in by the history and romance and presence of past generations; others are

repelled by the dust and grime — and the obvious work ahead.

Although restoration has become almost a mainstream activity in the 20 years since I bought my old house, stories of parents' and friends' appalled first response remain remarkably unaltered.

The most recent account came my way only a few days ago. Diane, a new subscriber, recently bought a post-Victorian home. She could hardly wait to show the house to her mother, a realtor. (Danger signal: her mother lives in a brand-new house.)

"My mother's face dropped as soon as she came in ... but she didn't say a word. She stomped through each room, shaking her head, slamming doors. After going through the antiquated kitchen, she finally spoke. 'I can't believe you're actually paying money for this place.'"

Concludes Diane, "Now, before anyone comes to the house, I tell them in advance: If you don't like it, keep your mouth shut. I've had all the disapproval I can handle."

Such stories of "the first encounter" dramatize that old-house people are indeed a breed apart. An old-house person combines optimism, a romantic streak, a sense of humor, patience, and a capacity for hard work. Somebody once called us "creative masochists."

So don't be surprised when friends and relatives don't share your vision. It's just different perceptions and values. Nonetheless, if I had to guess whose side the angels are on, I'd paraphrase Professor Henry Higgins: "By and large, we are a marvelous set!"

*Clem Labine*



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## Learning Experience

Dear OHJ:

The last time I wrote to you I received a reply branding me an "elitist" because I don't care for bungalows or other "post-Victorian" styles. ([I say] *anti*-Victorian would be a more appropriate term [than post-Victorian]). Be that as it may, I *do* like the new format. I couldn't care less whether or not you have a color cover, but the ads are really helpful. I have learned a lot from them about the availability of restoration products. Although I was a little taken aback by the plastic lattice in your latest issue, I assume your intention is to accept only ads for quality restoration and old-house products. Such ads greatly enhance the value of your magazine. I hope I won't miss an issue.

— William H. Thorn

## Ad Ethics

People:

I have been a subscriber to The Old-House Journal for the past five years and have quietly sat by as OHJ changed its format from a newsletter to a slick, multi-color magazine. Even though the magazine has become harder to read due to the visual noise (i.e., advertisements), the technical quality of the articles still outweighs the intrusion of the ads. At least it did until your July-August issue.

There, on page 9, was an ad for PVC Lattice ("never needs painting," "long lasting"). Polyvinyl-chloride lattice goes against everything I have read and learned from OHJ over the past five years. What does the next issue hold in store — ads pushing aluminum and vinyl siding for their insulation qualities?

I know OHJ can never go home again, but if I have to see ads in the magazine, at least they should reflect its philosophy. I strongly

urge that you set some guidelines for your advertising sales offices to follow, and at least limit your advertising to products that are sympathetic to restoration.

— John K. Cipolaro  
Lowell, Mass.

*[Your concern shows a high opinion of the magazine's ethics, and I thank you for that respect. We do have advertising guidelines, and we pointedly do not solicit advertising we feel is at odds with our philosophy. We have also rejected advertising; note, too, that we don't sell our back cover because I think the covers belong to the readers.]*

*Many products come down to a judgement call, and virtually all products advertised could be misused. Actually, the PVC lattice was a product that the editors wrote about in the Restoration Products section even before we accepted advertising. I don't feel that it is in the same category with aluminum or vinyl siding, materials that cover up original materials (and potential problems), that don't age well, that alter the proportions, trim, and texture of an entire building.*

*PVC lattice, I think, is more in a category with Corian countertops or substitute roofing. Lattice is pretty simple stuff, and the PVC version is virtually indistinguishable from wood. (We procured samples.) Imagine a crawlspace in back of an old house, damp, with grade higher than it should be.... The owner may have given up on wood lattice, and alternatives like leaving a gaping hole or filling it with concrete block are certainly less attractive than using substitute lattice.*

*No, PVC lattice won't age like wood. Would I use it? Honestly, probably not, because I like peely paint and rotted edges. But I know not everybody is quite so romantic, and in this case I think little harm is done.*

— P. Poore]

## On Balance

Dear Ms. Poore:

We just got back from a weekend at our old house (1908) to find that the usual stack of mail included the new OHJ (Jul./Aug. 1987). It said, "read me first," so I did, starting with the editor's page and all the letters. This particular editor's page exemplifies the best things about OHJ: a balanced viewpoint (as one letter said, this is a code for "suited to my tastes"), based on a very few, very good principles, within these a substantial tolerance for differing opinions and preferences, and a recognition that neither old nor new is inherently good.

The latter point applies to the OHJ layout, too. I thought the old format was fine, but the new one has grown on me — [and] it's the content that matters.

We are facing the kitchen question, and will probably go with a modern approach that, in your words, isn't violently jarring in the context. With OHJ, we have plenty of information about the various alternatives, pros, and cons. In time, I hope to offer you an article on our renovation project.

— F. Arnold Romberg  
Dallas, Texas

## New Kitchen

Dear Ms. Poore:

Thank you for the issue on kitchen rehabs (July/August 1987). After waiting for just such an article, we went ahead and did it ourselves. The week it was done the magazine arrived. It was gratifying to see getting rid of what had been there (metal cabinets, mint-green drainboards, loose green and white floor tiles, etc.) wasn't necessarily wrong. Even though it is probably too modern for a 1910 house, I love my bay window over the sink and having one closet in the house that's a decent size.

— P.K. Thomisson  
Circleville, Ohio



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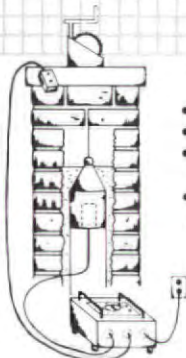
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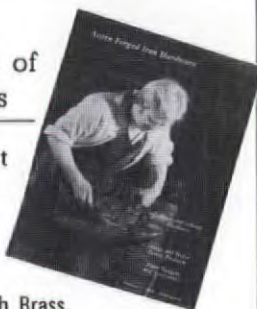


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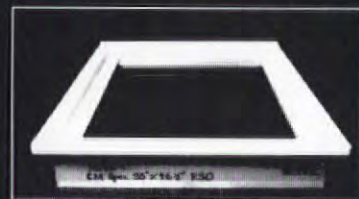
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*A reader's kitchen*

## Our Kitchen

Dear OHJ:

Four years ago we bought a 200-year-old New England farmhouse. Two years ago we started our kitchen project. Our goal was to build a kitchen that was compatible with the house, yet have all the modern conveniences. We tried to accomplish this with the use of quality materials. We have a random-width, pine-board floor nailed with cut nails, and raised-panel cherry cupboard doors with hand-wrought butterfly hinges and wooden doorknobs.

We had decided that this kitchen was no place for a plastic-laminate countertop, but we didn't want wood, as we already had a wooden floor and wooden cabinets. Reviewing our alternatives, we arrived at stone. Marble, we felt, was too formal, soapstone too soft, etc. We finally decided to use black slate and ordered it from a stone mason. We received the slate first for a vanity top in a lavatory and a small bar. After waiting for six months due to difficulties with the mason, we cancelled the remaining order. Thank goodness! The slate has proven difficult to work with and to care for. First, the cabinets must be specially constructed to support its weight. Second, it chips rather easily, and must be handled carefully during installation. Finally, it stains very easily (even with tap water) and must be continually cleaned and oiled to look good.

We re-reviewed our countertop options for the kitchen and decided on black, suede-finish plastic laminate. It looks like slate and is much easier to care for.

We love our new kitchen, and we're very happy with the choices we ultimately made. We owe a lot to a sensitive, talented contractor: Jim Le Blanc — his caring was the most necessary ingredient.

— Sara Jo Marble  
Dover, Mass.



## New "Old" House

Dear OHJ:

Your recent feature on Kraggsyde ["Kraggsyde II," May-June 1987] spurred me to write. Mere words cannot describe the longing I have to restore an old home. Unfortunately, it simply wasn't practical for us. My husband has many wonderful qualities, but he falls far short of being a handyman. (Perhaps "handyman" is a poor term to describe what talented individuals do in restoring old homes.) The bottom line is that he *cannot* fix, repair, or build anything! I, too, am lacking in the knowledge and skill required for such an undertaking. Due to our business, we are restricted as to where we may live,

but we did check into moving an old home that was in relatively good condition. After learning the costs of moving, we found it would be much cheaper for us to build from scratch.

Well, I will have my new "old" home! Granted, this one may not have original transoms, and it won't be the same as restoring an old house, but I will be able to take pride in the little piece of history we have created. I doubt it will be as historically accurate or precise as the Kraggsyde rebuilding, but it will be as close to an original as builder and budget allow.

Thank you, OHJ, for allowing this audience to speak!

— Lisa Buchanan  
Big Spring, Texas



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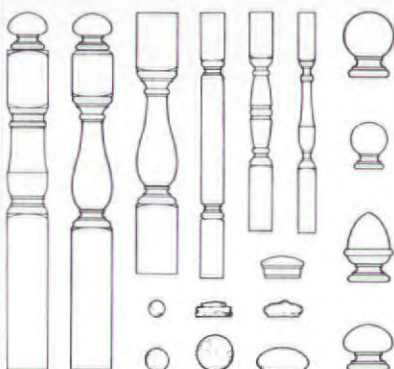
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## Marble Counters

To the Editor:

The article on countertops in the July-August 1987 issue reminded me of friends who were building a home in Portugal.

**Builder:** "What countertops do you want?"

**Homeowner:** "Oh, well, Formica would be fine."

**Builder:** "You would not like marble for the bathroom and kitchen?"

**Homeowner:** "Formica is fine. We can't afford marble."

**Builder:** "You do not understand, señor. I would have to import Formica, and it would be very expensive. We have marble in Portugal and export it to Italy. Here, marble is cheap."

So my friends opted for cheap marble for their countertops.

— Elizabeth Steckman  
Everett, Penn.

## Canvassing Decks

Dear OHJ:

You may recall that several weeks ago I called you about John Leeke's article "Canvassing A Porch Deck" (May/June 1987). The reason for my call was that Petit Paint Company no longer produces the canvas adhesive recommended in the article. You were kind enough to tell me that Petit supposedly had a small amount of the adhesive in their warehouse, and suggested I try again.

I did, and they do, so my recanvassing project can proceed as planned. However, as of mid-August, they had only about 175 quarts left. Any reader contemplating a recanvassing project had better act fast!

It will help readers to mention OHJ when they call Petit. The people there are now well aware

of the article, and will probably be more willing to check the warehouse if it is mentioned.

It may also help readers to know the coverage rates of the products mentioned in the article. These were given to me by a very patient young lady named Terry in Petit's sales department.

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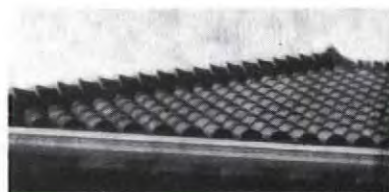
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## LETTERS

cemented and sealed by the above products. Coverage: 400 - 600 square feet per gallon.

With the exception of the #7030 adhesive, all of these products are still in production. According to Mr. Esposito in Petit's laboratory, the adhesive was discontinued for lack of demand. It was intended for use on canvas-covered boat decks, but boats are not made that way anymore.

Over the past several months, I have contacted every marine-coatings dealer in the Baltimore-Annapolis area, and have gotten pretty much the same story from each of them: The manufacturers are all discontinuing their canvas adhesives due to lack of demand. Surely, someone out there is still making canvas adhesive. If not, what do people who restore antique boats use?

The very ancient owner of an even more ancient canvas-supply

company in Baltimore, who claims to have canvassed many porch decks years ago, scoffed at the idea of using adhesive. His method began with overlapping courses of roofing felt laid over the deck boards. The canvas was laid over the felt, and tacked down at the edges and seams with copper tacks. The deck was left unpainted for several weeks to tighten up the canvas, then was coated with ordinary porch and deck enamel. He claims that roofs done this way thirty years ago are still in good condition. I'll have to take his word for that, but it seems to me that canvas held down only at the edges and underlaid with semi-resilient felt would be awfully easy to damage.

The standard method, of course, was to lay the canvas in a thick mixture of white lead and linseed oil, tacking down seams and edges with copper tacks. The canvas

was then wetted down to shrink it, and while still wet, more white lead and linseed oil was worked into it. Once the whole mess dried (which could take weeks), paint was applied. This would still be a suitable method, were it not for the now-recognized health hazard posed by such large quantities of white lead. This was also the standard technique for canvassing a boat deck, which is probably why we now use marine canvas adhesive instead. By the late 1940s, the specialized adhesive was more widely used, judging by books from that period on boat building and home repair.

There are a lot of canvas-covered decks out there in Old-House Land. If marine canvas adhesive disappears, let's hope someone comes up with a suitable alternative.

— Francis E. Old III  
Baltimore, Md.



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## Style Question

**Q** Our house was built in 1910 as the residence for the priest of the church one block away. It was moved to its present location in 1960. The porch was altered in the move. It originally had four columns with a railing. The top of the porch had four posts with a railing between, and a flat, tin roof. Could you tell me what style the house is?

— Dennis M. Slatter  
Menomonee Falls, Wisc.

**A** That's an American Foursquare, despite its not having the hipped roof most commonly seen on this style. Foursquares did occasionally have cross-gabled roofs like yours — see the illustrations on page 28.

The American Foursquare is identified chiefly by its boxlike shape. It often had vaguely classical or colonial-era ornamentation, such as the missing balustrades you describe.

Like the Bungalow and the Homestead House, the Foursquare was a tremendously popular house type of the first quarter of this century.

## On The Move

**Q** How does one go about finding a reputable house mover? I have heard that anything can be moved, but some outfits will chop the building to pieces. We have put heart and soul (not to mention a lot of money) into renovating our turn-of-the-century home. I have been told the style is an "Arts & Crafts Bungalow." It features leaded glass, stained glass, hardwood floors (including some parquet), original oak cupboards, lots of oak woodwork, and everyone's dream: enormous closets! The drawbacks are that our lot is tiny, the taxes are high, and the neighborhood and school district are not the best.

Is moving a home from its original location frowned upon by



preservationists? We have suffered burglaries and some minor vandalism, but the prospect of further problems is frightening, both personally and to the future of this unique and lovely home.

— Jean E. Green  
Auburn, N.Y.

**A** According to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, "Removing or relocating historic buildings... [destroys] the historic relationship between buildings, landscape features, and open space." You should consider carefully whether you really want to uproot the house from its original site. Nevertheless, if you are not planning to list your house in the National Register, you won't have to defend your decision. You know the circumstances best and must judge for yourself. Often, moving

a structure is the only way to save it.

Masonry structures are much more difficult to move than frame houses, which are not as rigid. Hire someone who has been recommended to you by a source you respect; otherwise, make your selection on the basis of the mover's years of experience, character, fees, etc. Your choice may of course be compromised by the number of movers available on your area — look in the Yellow Pages under "House & Building Movers."

The house should be disassembled only as a last resort: The procedure is time-consuming and expensive, and introduces the risk of the component parts being damaged or improperly re-assembled. But moving an intact house over a long distance is totally impractical; if the route stretch-





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es upward of 100 miles, the time and labor costs — plus the multitude of permits required and the increased chance of accident — virtually mandate disassembly. In fact, even if the house is to be moved only a short distance, you may still have to disassemble it at least partially, just to get it over, under, or around various bridges, overpasses, power lines, traffic signals, lamp posts, trees.... (See "Do You Want To Move A House?" in the October 1981 OHJ for more information.)

and the stain came back. Is the plaster still wet?

— John Simmons  
Seattle, Wash.

**A** The stain is water soluble. Rather than switch to an alkyd paint for a room that's already been painted with latex, just seal the stain with a coat of white pigmented shellac. It dries almost instantly. When you recoat with latex, the stain won't come through anymore.

## Aging Metal

## Help for Plaster Stain

**Q** We had an unfortunate roof leak, which left a very unappealing yellow stain on the bedroom ceiling. The plaster in that room is in good shape; even the stained part seems firm. But I've tried repainting with a \$20-a-gallon latex

**Q** How can I give an antique finish to ordinary nails and other hardware? In projects where nail heads show or where I'm using inexpensive hardware, I want the metal to blend in with my old house.

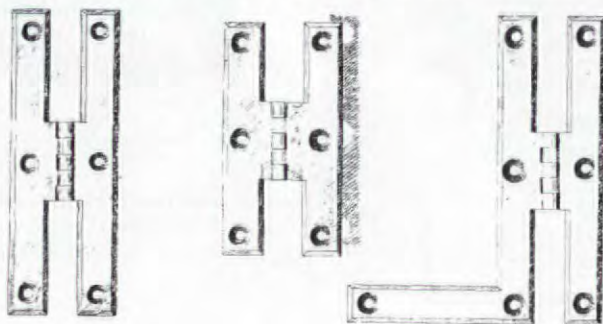
— Sal Mancini  
Schenectady, N.Y.

**A** On larger pieces, gun bluing works well. But bluing nail heads could get tedious. Try this method:

1. Put hardware or nails in an old pie plate or disposable aluminum plate.
2. Heat on a gas stove until they turn a straw color. (Before red hot.)
3. Dump the hot metal into a coffee can of linseed oil. When it cools, drain and dry the metal. By the way, this method also inhibits rust.

General interest questions will be answered in print. The Editors can't promise to respond to all questions personally, but we try. Send your questions with photos or sketches to Questions Editor, The Old-House Journal, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

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## GOOD BOOKS

**Alaska Pioneer Interiors, An Annotated Photographic File,** by Jane G. Haigh, Tanana-Yukon Historical Society, 280 E. Birch Hill Rd., Fairbanks, Alaska 99712. (907) 457-7834. \$18.45 ppd.

"A close look at these photographs, like peeking through windows of an old house, provides a fascinating look at home life in some of Alaska's pioneer towns," says author Jane Haigh. And that's exactly what looking through this book of black and white photographs of Alaskan interiors from 1903 to 1919 is like.

If you're expecting igloos and rustic log cabins, this book will disappoint you. Apart from more than the usual bear and wolfskin rugs and pillows, these homes can compete with the best Victorian and post-Victorian houses back East.

What is particularly special about the book is the candid glimpse of pioneer life seen in these photos —



an apartment shared by two men (the walls covered with Victorian pin-ups), a little girl's sixth birthday party, a wedding reception, a card party. These pictures are a terrific source for historians and preservationists, but they show more than just the wallpaper and furnishings of the period, they show how these people *lived* with their decor.



**New Providence, A Changing Cityscape,** *Conceived by Renata von Tscherner and Ronald Lee Fleming, illustrations by Denis Orloff.* Gulliver Books, To order by mail: Townscape Institute, 2 Hubbard Park, Cambridge, MA 02138. (617) 491-8952. \$13.45 ppd.

This wonderful book is a light-hearted mini-course in the history of urban planning and architecture in this century. Created by a team of historians, architects, and city planners, New Providence is a fictional city made of bits and pieces of real cities all over America.

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pored over time and time again, we watch this small city progress through the years from 1910 to 1987. As the world changes, so does the city — a Victorian bandshell is replaced by a WPA billboard during the Depression, trolley cars disappear, neon is introduced, an air-raid siren replaces fancy grillwork on the Town Hall roof.

In all, six different periods are covered, each illustrated lavishly with a double-page spread, small black and white "details," and described in the short text with humor, insight and lots of interesting facts.



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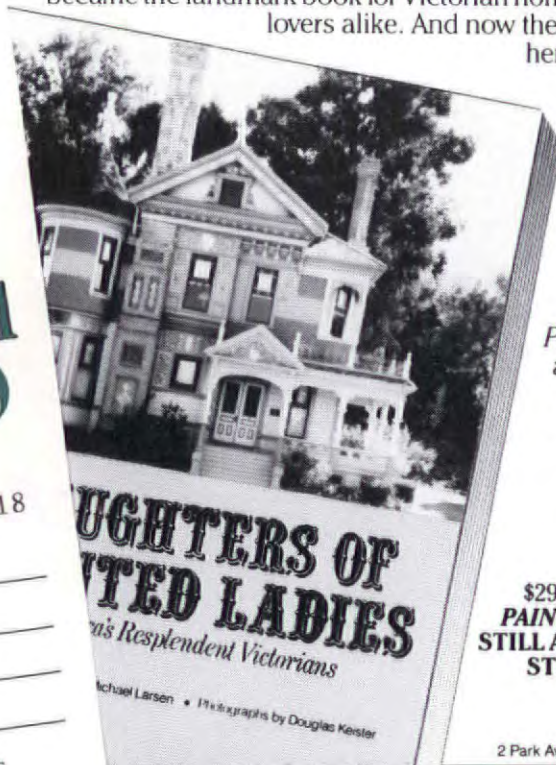
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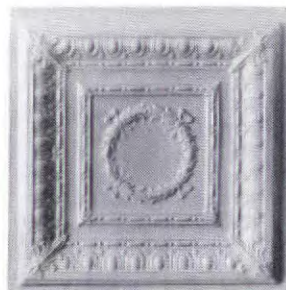
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## Steamy Stripping

We were very neat, tidy, and tentative when we started our (first) restoration three years ago. We've learned since that some jobs require a down-and-dirty attitude to get it done. Take wallpaper stripping, for instance.

I remember our early attempts: kitchen buckets of hot water, a sponge and a putty knife, Playtex gloves. Malarkey! It took *days* instead of hours.

Now, when we have multiple layers of wallpaper to take off, we do it the wholesale way. First, preparation: everything away from the walls; switchplates, etc., removed; plastic taped to the floor. Next: 80-grit sandpaper raked across every square inch of paper to allow water and steam to penetrate it. Finally: a rented wallpaper steamer — which you'll need for only half a day if you do all your prep beforehand. Stiff putty knives of various widths slide right under the paper once you've got it nice and hot and wet.

Be sure to cover your skin, wear gloves and goggles when you do this job. The steam can give you a nasty burn.

Dan & Kathy Roberts  
Los Angeles, Cal.

## Removing Lacquer

I've noticed that some middle-of-the-line brass hardware comes highly polished, with a half-hearted coat of lacquer. The lacquer doesn't really protect the brass from tarnishing for long, but it does interfere with the metal acquiring an even patina. (I prefer that "antique look" to polishing. Life's too short.)

To remove the factory lacquer and let Nature take its course, just soak the pieces in Mr. Clean. Rinse with clear water and dry thoroughly. Lacquer thinner works, too, of course, but it makes me dizzy.

— Mary Beth McNaughton  
Gary, Ind.

## Cleaning Louvres

I've discovered the perfect tool for dusting the louvres of indoor shutters. Those foam pads sold as a replacement for paintbrushes aren't great for applying paint, but the 1-inch size pad is great for dusting shutters and blinds.

When it gets dusty, just rinse in plain water, then dry it by squeezing between folded paper towels and continue. Keep it separate for this use — the dust will make it even less effective for painting.

— Sally Hunter  
Alexandria, Vir.

## Saving Sinks

Your tip in a recent issue about cleaning mantels prompts me to write about marble sinks. I've restored several of them.

I paid ten bucks for the first one, a stained china bowl set in a dirty marble top (counter). I found it in one of those junkyards where there's a clutter of small objects in the shop and a graveyard of plumbing fixtures sitting out back.

One sink bowl was salvageable; for the others, I had to buy a new drop-in bowl. It's quite easy to drill the marble top for new mounting screws when installing the bowl.

My tips are really about restoring the marble top, however. If there's paint on it, it's very easy to strip (with chemicals, not heat), but the marble underneath may be badly stained.

Dirt and simple stains can be removed with Ajax. Deeper stains may need full-strength chlorine bleach, or a weak solution of muriatic acid — rinsed well with clear water to stop the etching action. Learn to live with rust stains, or try a commercial poultice.

Take out scratches and small pits by rubbing with extra-fine, wet-dry sandpaper. You can also take the marble to a stoneyard to have it polished (resurfaced).

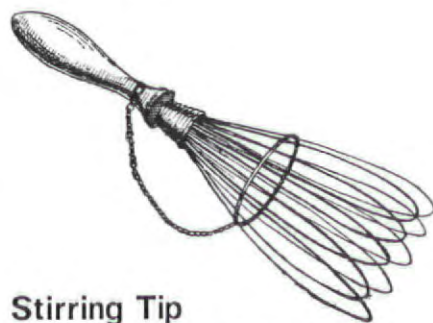
— Gary Bronson  
Springfield, Mass.

## Defeating Dust

One of the problems with living in the house you are restoring is the dreaded drywall dust that creeps everywhere when you sand. My brother (who also has an old house) suggests "sponging" the joint compound after it's dry with a large, coarse sponge and lots of water. It feathers the walls, cleans the corners, and even fills in those tiny air-bubble holes. All without dust!! Maybe we'll finally build that closet in the bedroom....

— Mary Dahlberg  
Dayton, Ohio

*[Absolutely! A sponge or sanding sponge, used damp, is the right tool for smoothing joint compound. You should never have to sand dry. — ed.]*



## Stirring Tip

While staining our pine floors a few years ago, I found that just stirring the stain was tiresome and time-consuming. I thought of using my kitchen wire whisk, and found that my mixing time was more than cut in half.

We now use wire whisks for all staining and painting. I just slip it into a plastic bag between uses, until the job is done. Whisks can be found often at 50¢ each, so it's well worth it!

— Christine O'Connor  
Worcester, Mass.

**TIPS TO SHARE?** Do you have any hints or short cuts that might help other old-house owners? We'll pay \$25 for any how-to items used in this "Restorer's Notebook" column. Write to Notebook Editor, The Old-House Journal, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

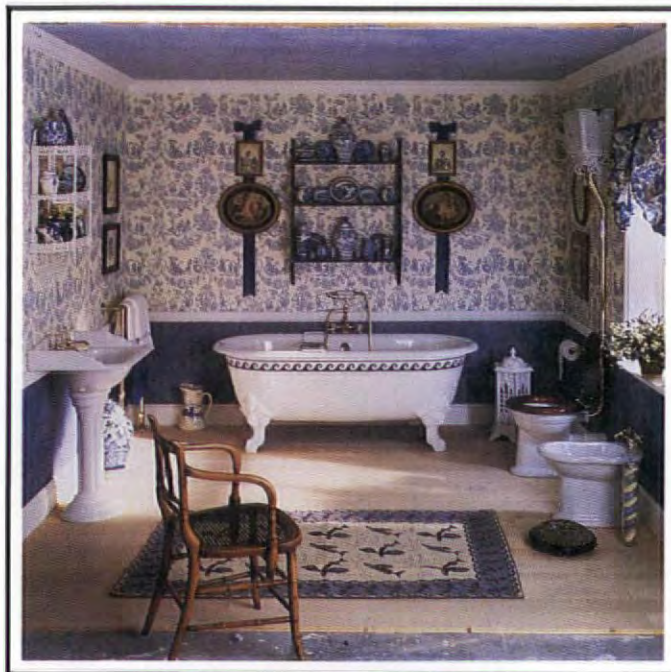


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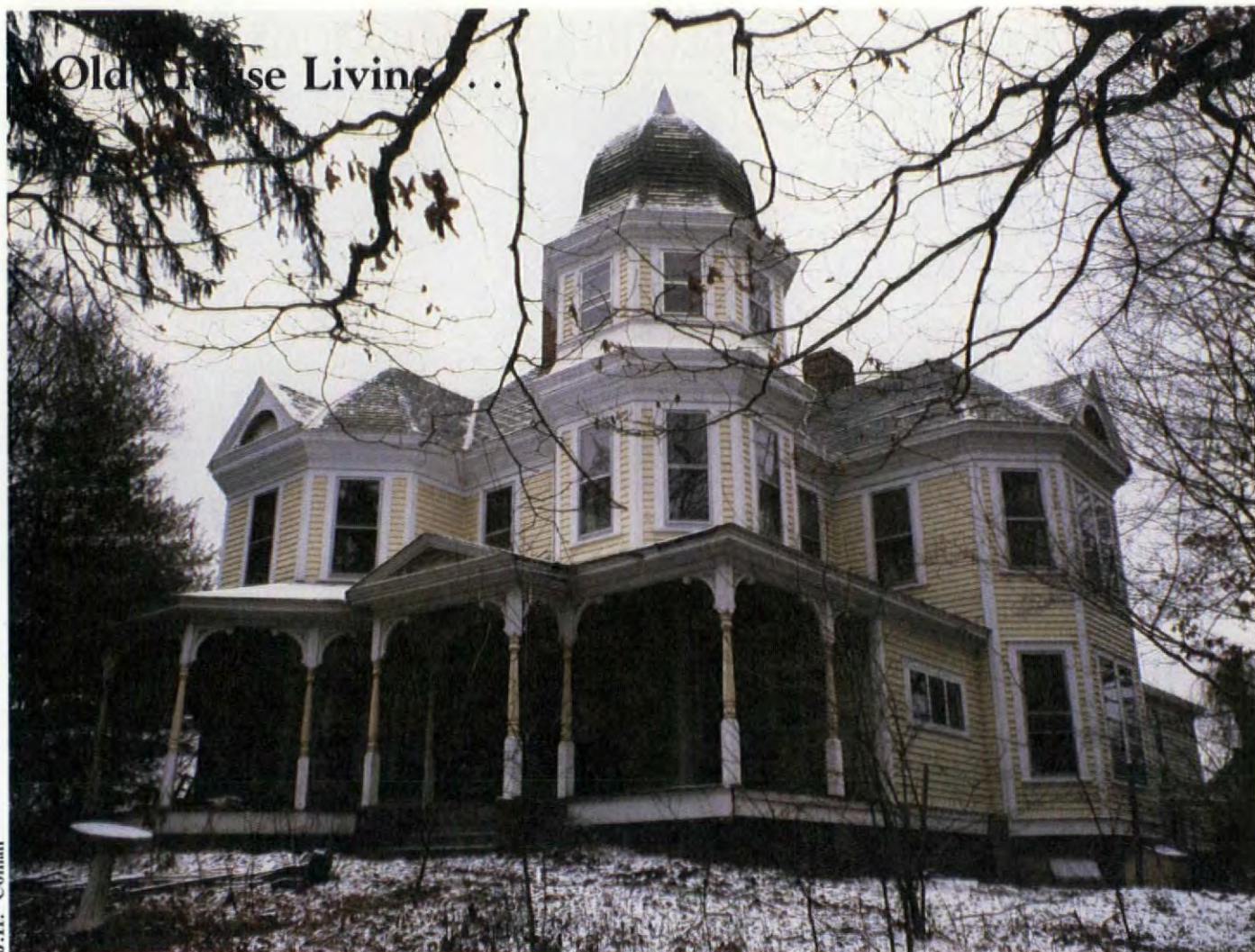


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Old House Living...

J.H. Conan



## THE REED HOUSE

BY MARGE TURCOT

From the first time we saw it, on a dreary December day in 1972, we had been thinking and talking about Reed House. Perched hauntingly on top of a hill, the once-stately Victorian house, built in 1892, was now a weathered grey from many paintless years, with broken windows, rotting steps, poison ivy and kudzu creeping across the porches, and a yard full of junk.

Inside, it had been divided into four apartments, each with a broken stove and mold-covered refrigerator. Even our enchantment with the ten fireplaces turned to chagrin when we realized that there was no central heat.

But we bought Reed House in May 1973, and that was the beginning of our great adventure.

Sitting in our comfortable '60s ranch on Sunset

Mountain, overlooking Asheville, North Carolina, it was hard to anticipate the extent of even the first part of our adventure: just getting the place ready to move in. It had been empty for several years, and so a "certificate of occupancy" was required before utilities could be connected. Local inspectors, used to making one or two suggestions, presented us with ten pages of required repairs and changes, and then informed us that they had already started condemnation proceedings — they felt that the house should be "pushed off Reed Hill" so some nice condos or apartments could be put up there.

We had our own list of Things To Be Done Immediately, and so combined their list with ours. We had to re-wire if electricity was to be turned on; some



plumbing had to be working if we were to have any water. And I insisted that the broken windows on at least the first floor be replaced before we moved in. The building inspectors required screens on all the windows, and as Reed House has 62 windows and eight doors with glass, this was a major undertaking. (It was several years before we learned how to replace sash cords ourselves — now all our windows open and close easily!)

## House Guest

After we finished our "Immediate" list of jobs, the house was ready for us to move in. Our first night, no beds had been set up, so we had to sleep on the dining room floor (the only clear space big enough for two). Dog-tired as we were, we were awakened around midnight by the sound of heavy boots on the back stairs. Any mother with a teenage daughter knows what that means: an unauthorized male visitor. About ten minutes later, I crept upstairs, ready for a family "council," and peeked into her room. She

was asleep ... and alone. So were my sons. Everyone was asleep.

For several years thereafter, every time someone new slept in the house for the first time, we would hear those same boots on the back steps, just about midnight. Our friendly ghost was checking them out.

Early on, he demonstrated his love for a good game of pool. We had converted the original sitting room into a pool room, and sometimes at night we'd hear the balls rolling and hitting each other. When we first heard them, we thought one of the boys had come home early — but it always turned out that we were alone in the house. And every time we heard the balls, the boys would check the pool table the next morning and find it to be perfectly level.

Our friendly ghost has made several appearances over the years we have been at Reed House. There are things which simply can't be explained by my scientifically trained mind (I'm an R.N.): Doors open and close, objects fall, things disappear and later reappear in the most unlikely places. These occurrences



"Our enchantment with the ten fireplaces turned to chagrin when we realized that there was no central heat.





"Each room contains a working fireplace, with a fire laid and extra logs on the hearth."

are most likely to happen after someone scoffs at or disbelieves the ghost stories we tell. But whoever or whatever is responsible for these happenings, it's a friendly being, and we have learned to live at peace with whoever is sharing our space at Reed House.

## Discoveries

Our first few years were busy and full of adventure. One early discovery by our teenage sons and friends made us the envy of the neighborhood. While installing a floor in the tower, they found that someone in the past had nailed crosspieces to an upright in a space between the walls, forming a crude ladder. The youngest (and smallest) was allowed the privilege of being the first to descend into the dark unknown, the bowels of Reed House. First it led straight down, then turned to go under the stairs, and then straight down again to exit in the crawlspace under the house. Then my youngest child bounded up the stairs, exuber-

ant and unharmed. The boys made a clever trapdoor out of floorboards, disguising the entry, and now this marvelous secret passageway is the delight of all our visitors, young and old. (I have never been down it!)

We soon realized that a new roof was more urgently needed than we had thought at the time of purchase: In the dark attic on a sunny day, the roof looked like a star-filled sky. We saved all the paint cans from our first exterior paint job, and positioned each one under a leak in the roof. These weren't enough, however, so we ordered shingles. When the truck unloaded 180 bundles of shingles in our driveway, I shuddered and turned my back. What had we gotten ourselves into?

Most of a spring and summer was spent removing many layers of rotting shingles and underlayment, and attending to the mess made from throwing it all in the yard. We hope the new roof lasts a long, long time.

We considered Reed House to be an important example of Queen Anne architecture. Samuel H. Reed, the builder, was the son of a local landowner, and a significant figure in the history of Asheville. So another of our goals was to get the house listed in the National Register of Historic Places. We

did more research, filled out forms, submitted pictures, and expressed our love for the house to one and all. On November 28, 1979, Reed House was listed in the National Register.

With a roof over our heads and other primary goals accomplished, we went about our normal lives, overlooking the fact that the restoration of our lovely home had just begun. We seldom went upstairs unless someone asked to see it, and we only fixed the things that were broken, such as frozen pipes and falling plaster. But we became very active in the local Preservation Society, and began to read *The Old-House Journal*. We realized that if anything was ever going to get done, we'd have to start now and go at it tooth and nail. So we did: I quit my job to devote myself full time to Reed House. And then the fun began!

## Birth of a B&B

Now that I was without a job, completing the restora-





"Our ghost loves a good game of pool! (Note the walls being prepared for new wallpaper.)"

tion became an absolute necessity — Reed House was going to replace my job as a source of income by becoming a Bed & Breakfast. Wallpaper, lace curtains, old rugs, restored furniture, rocking chairs, working fireplaces, iron beds, new mattresses, and pretty sheets and towels were the ingredients that came together to start a B&B. We took out the doors between rooms, which had been cut in the 1940s to make apartments. We added old wardrobes to serve as closets. We stripped layers of old wallpaper, but somewhere in each room we left an intact area; in case someone in the future strips our wallpaper (Heaven forbid!), he or she will find a remnant of each layer from the past. We also wrote notes and dates for future owners, in pencil, on the walls under the wallpaper.

We put a new bathroom in the laundry room for ourselves; our three guest rooms share the original two baths. We carpeted the stairs, and no longer hear ghostly footsteps at midnight — but if a guest dismisses our ghost stories, we can expect an "occurrence" to make us believe.

Guests are never satisfied to be comfortable. Although our unfinished rooms are kept locked, guests always ask to see them. And many just cannot leave



"My son Mike Turcot is the one with the beard. (He is presently very clean-shaven, short-haired, and in his last year of law school at the University of Texas in Austin.) With Mike are 'helpful friends.' We take all the help we can get, then and now!"





"Me in Victorian dress, on the porch of another wonderful old house in Asheville."



"I had visions of myself swinging lazily in the evening breeze...."

until they pick their way through the attic to see the view from the tower, and peer down into the darkness of the secret passageway. So far, only one guest has succeeded in getting permission to descend the ladder: a very persuasive young man whose name happened to be Reed.

## To Be Continued....

There is more work still to be done at Reed House. We're looking for old pictures so we can have an authentic porch railing made. There will be two more guest rooms, one with a private bath in an alcove that used to be an apartment kitchen. We're in the process of stripping paint from the front hall moulding and wainscoting. Some of the doors and mantels are half-stripped. The original parlor, which is graced with a pocket door, parlor grand piano, and rose-colored

cherubs in the tile around the fireplace, has had nothing done yet — but we did put up lace curtains! We have to work as time and guests permit. And of course, our bedroom is on the very bottom of the list.

In 1973, when we first moved in, I had visions of myself sitting on the totally reconstructed porch in front of the completely restored house, swinging lazily in the evening breeze.... Now I realize that such a scene will never happen; there will always be something that has to be done — no, a *list* of things that will have to be done! But we have learned to live with the constant change, the constant improvement, and the constant challenge which mark the agony and the ecstasy of restoring an old house. And after devoting fourteen years to it, there's no other way to live.

---

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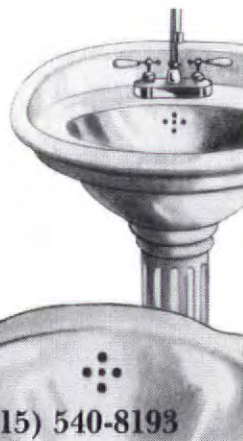
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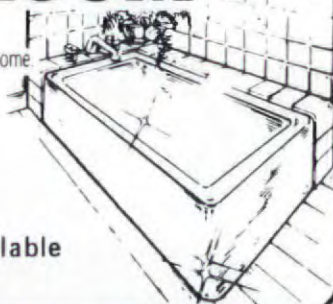
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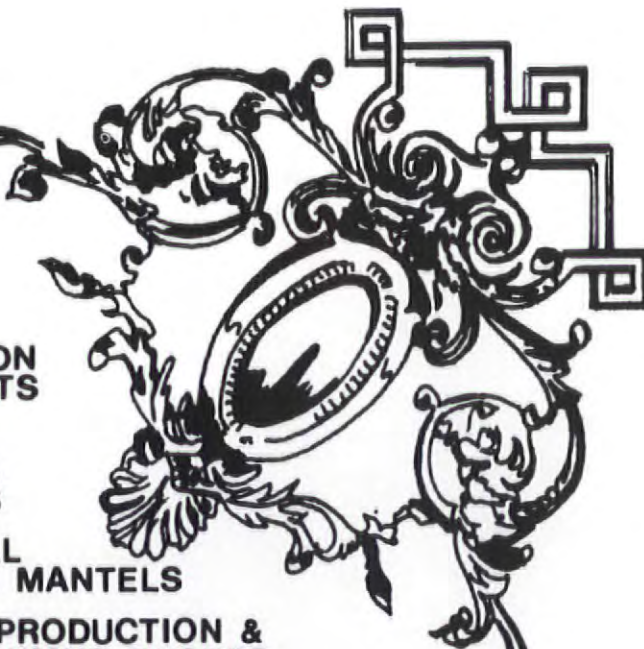
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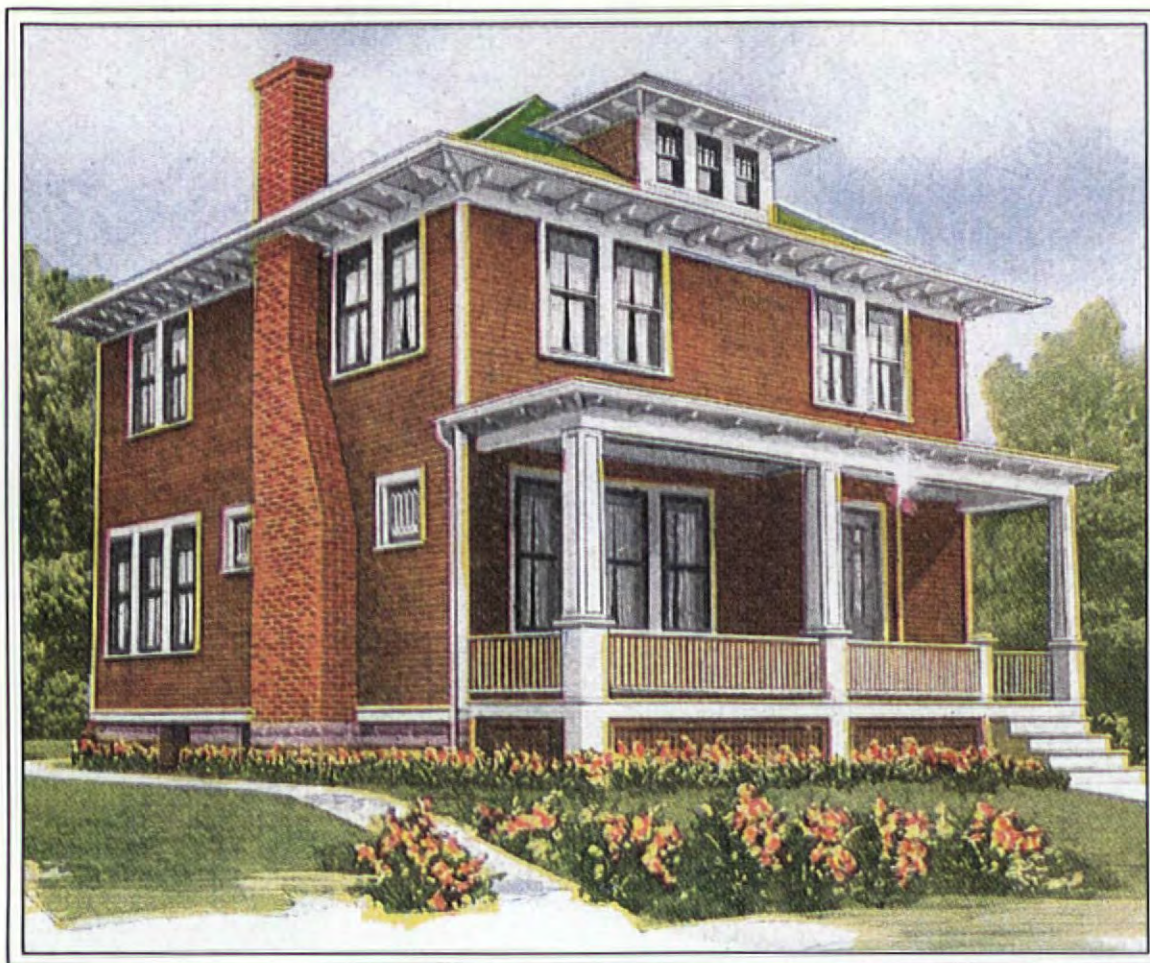
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Above: From the copy in Aladdin's 1920 mail-order houses catalog: "The Rochester ... is truly American — simple, strong & substantial. [It] has the added advantage of being square in shape, which always expresses massiveness and strength. The scrolled rafter ends ... add an artistic touch ..." Grouped windows and plain balustrade, too, show the modern Craftsman/Prairie School influence.

Right: A builder's Four-square, this one is vaguely Prairie Style, with its tinted stucco, doubled windows, and tiled roof.

Opposite: Regardless of exterior finish, the style is defined by its cube shape, square in elevation & plan.





# The American Foursquare

by Patricia Poore

What a tremendous change we've seen in the status of the American Foursquare over the past five years! Before OHJ first distinguished it in our study of post-Victorian house types, it had no name and an uncertain lineage. (See *OHJ*, January 1982.) Today, it's one of the most recognized house styles. The Foursquare is the preeminent post-Victorian type. And it is the epitome of the turn-of-the-century's "comfortable house" ideal.

The standard Foursquare, built over a full basement, has two full storeys and a large attic. (The attic is often livable, owing to the large dormers that commonly break out of the hipped roof.) In direct contrast to the Bungalow, another popular style of the period, there is no interpenetration of outdoor and indoor spaces. This house is more about dignified self-containment. Where the Bungalow is rambling and informal, the Foursquare is balanced and symmetrical.

The porch is an important hallmark of the style. Typically spanning the front, it is not a Victorian verandah; almost never will you find turned posts and gingerbread. Instead, posts are boxed-in and panelled. Or columns are Tuscan, the unfluted version of Doric.

Balusters (spindles) are often plain square sticks; slat railings and a low wall in place of the balustrade are also common.

It is still an ideal family home, comfortable even by modern standards. After all, Foursquares came equipped with large windows, indoor plumbing, closets, a kitchen with built-in features, and central heating.

Foursquare variants appeared in virtually every patternbook between 1900 and 1925, which explains the presence of this style in every town with pre-1930 houses. (It was also a popular farmhouse form.) Some early examples are transitional, clearly spanning eras: The box is broken by a corner turret or a Victorian bay. The box was broken, too, in larger, expensive models, where wings intersected.

Foursquares were built in different models by builders offering options in window styles, porch parts, siding, and interior elements. Radford's designs, for example, often had a truncated pyramidal roof. Sears sold a lot of Foursquares of concrete block. Much of the ornamentation is classically inspired, or reflects the reigning colonial revival. Palladian-type windows, Federal entranceways, and classical cornices







Right: "Massive" was an adjective often used to describe Foursquares – aptly in the case of this gussied-up version, a kind of East-Coast Mission style. The essential square is broken by bays in front and an extended porch.

Below: This is the classic suburban four-square, unornamented except for the colonial allusions of the porch columns and 6/1 windows. Dormers on three sides make the attic quite usable.



are therefore common. But you'll also come across Prairie-style Foursquares, recognizable by their banded windows and stretched-out eaves and tan stucco walls. A Foursquare built with such Craftsman elements as a fieldstone foundation and exposed rafter ends looks a little like a Bungalow-in-a-box.

The interior plan of the American Foursquare varied somewhat depending on the patternbook or builder, but rooms are essentially square. Typically, each floor has a stair hall and four rooms. The stair may be located at the center or side.

The Colonial Revival strongly influenced Foursquare interiors, as it did most interiors of the period. This can be seen in the styling of house parts such as newels and mantels, and also in furnishings. But the Craftsman/Mission/Prairie influence was felt, too, especially in Foursquares built in the Midwest and in those with clearly "modern" design elements. Panelled

the  
Georgian Manor House  
c.1760



Italianate V  
c.18





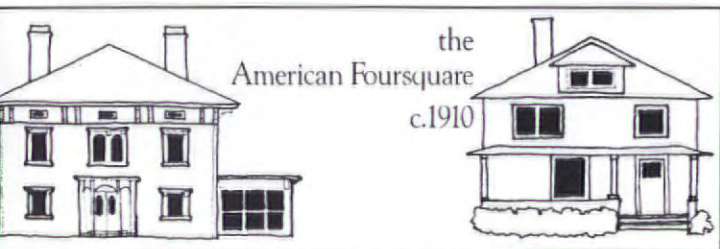
Left: Dormers and bays break up the volume of this higher-styled example.

Below: The basic Foursquare was as economical as it was comfortable: a minimum of land, foundation, and roof yielded the greatest interior volume. Most examples were 30 x 30 or 36 x 36, allowing large rooms downstairs and four or five bedrooms. In denser areas, the square shape was elongated to, say, 30 x 36, to better fit on narrow lots with less frontage.

wainscot in the dining room, massive oak mantels, and plain Craftsman staircases are not uncommon. Floors are most often of strip oak, and sturdy brown leather furniture was favored.

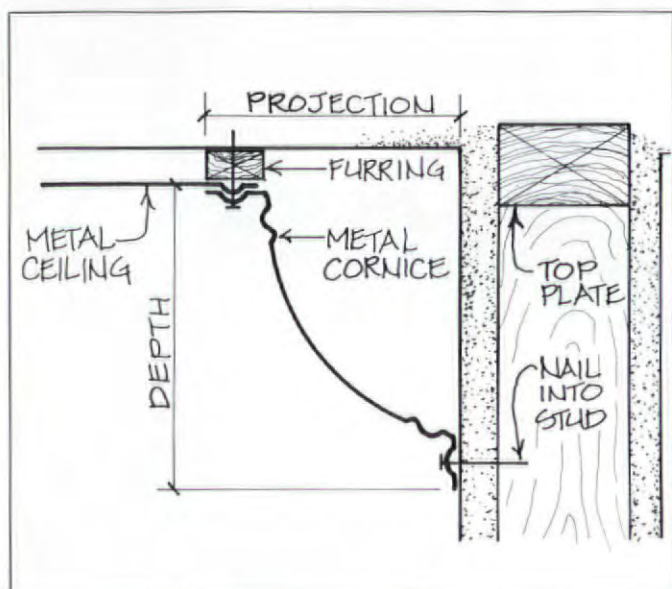
Where did it come from? The style seemed to spring up, apparently without precedent, almost overnight. There were none in 1890. By 1910, thousands of Foursquares had been built.

No question about it, it was a new style, suited to smaller lots, prefabricated parts, and the middle-class housing boom. But as an architectural form, it does have precedent in the Georgian manor house. The comeback of the square shape can be seen partly as a matter of economy (the cube yields the most interior space for the money spent on foundation, framing, and roof). It also marks a return to the symmetry and simplicity of houses that predated the Victorian era. 🏠





# HOW TO INSTALL A TIN CEILING



Metal ceilings have been around since the 1860s. At the peak of their popularity (1895-1915), hundreds of patterns were available from each of the many companies manufacturing them. The reasons for their popularity are still valid today. A tin ceiling is a relatively inexpensive way to add some character to a room. And once it's up, it needs very little maintenance. It's also easier to install a tin ceiling than it is to patch failing plaster or install and finish Sheetrock.

If you're thinking about buying a metal ceiling, you can reduce the cost significantly by installing it yourself. The techniques are simple. If you plan ahead and work patiently, you're sure to have excellent results.

## Furring the ceiling

Most of the work involved in installing a tin ceiling is in furring down from the plaster — actually nailing up the metal is fast and fun by comparison. Three-inch furring is better, but 1x2 furring is adequate.



**Top:** This illustration shows the importance of positioning the first furring strip the distance from the wall that the cornice will project. When you come back to install the cornice, plan your joints so that they will overlap at a wall stud. That way, you'll be assured solid nailing.

**Left:** A room where the owner opted for a tin ceiling rather than expensive plaster repair! The installer snaps a chalkline at the center of the ceiling, perpendicular to joists. Use this first line as a reference point from which to measure for subsequent strips.



# INSTALL LING

Use 3" nails to fasten the furring around the perimeter of the room. Nail the strips as far from the wall as the cornice will project. It may be necessary to add a few nailers between the joists along the walls that run parallel with the joists to enable nailing the strips at the correct position.

As you attach the furring strips, don't drive the nails home. Instead, drive them in about halfway to allow for later shimming and levelling.

Next, find the center of the ceiling and snap a chalkline at a right angle to the joists. Now snap additional chalklines every 12" on center, parallel to the first line. The chalklines mark the centers of the furring strips. Nail up the middle strip (again, drive the nails in only halfway). Now, nail up additional strips on every other chalkline; that is, every 24" on center. Before going back to nail up the intermediate strips, determine where the 8-foot long metal sheets will terminate: Nail furring strips perpendicular to the strips already up at these points. (These strips are the nailers to secure the edges of sheets where they

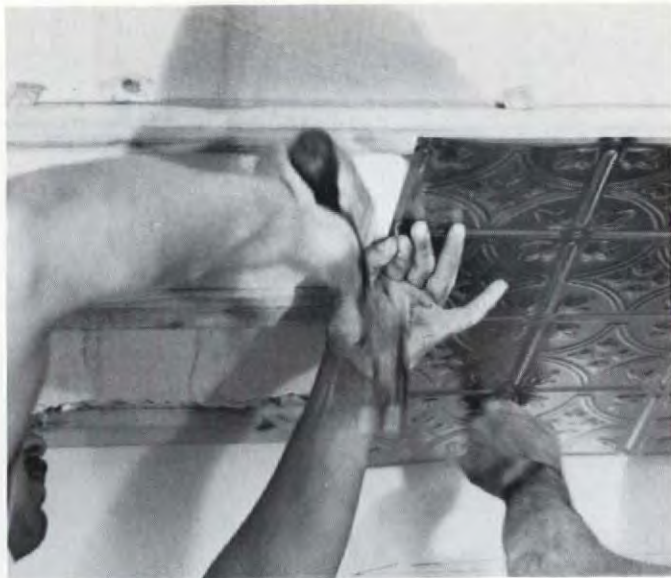


**Top:** Nailing up furring strips prior to installing the metal.

**Middle:** After the strips are all nailed to the ceiling, they must be leveled to ensure a flat ceiling. Here, an installer for A.A. Abbingdon Affiliates uses a straightedge to check that all the strips are in line. Those that are high are pulled down with the claw of a hammer, and shims are installed behind the furring before the nails are driven in.

**Right:** Installing the metal sheets (note shims).





overlap.) If you're using 2" furring, these strips will be 22" long. Finally, nail furring strips on the intermediate chalklines.

Before you drive the nails all the way in, be sure all the furring strips are in the same plane to ensure a flat ceiling. As plaster ceilings are rarely smooth and level, some shimming will be required. It's not as critical that the ceiling be perfectly level as that it be flat. Therefore, you needn't use a carpenter's level to align the strips. Unless you're a real stickler for detail, a good straightedge will do. Move around the room holding the straightedge against the strips. Use the claw of your hammer to pull high strips down into the same plane as the lower strips. Install shims between the furring and the ceiling as required. When all the strips are in line, drive all nails home.

## Installing the metal

The tin sheets are 2 feet wide by 8 feet long. Handle the sheets carefully! Their edges are razor-sharp and can inflict serious injury. Wear heavy gloves to carry and install the metal. Even with gloves, grip the edges of the sheets between your fingers and thumb — do not let them slide across your palm.

If the ceiling is going into a kitchen, bath, or other high-humidity room, it's a good idea to back-prime the sheets before installation. In any case, consider priming the face of the tin before installation. It's easier work than painting overhead once the metal is installed.

Begin installing the sheets at the furthest corner from the entrance to the room; that way the first sheets you install (which will be straightest) will be in the most obvious part of the ceiling. Have a helper hold the sheet flat to the ceiling with a piece of furring. Use one-inch, flat-head nails to secure the sheet to the ceiling. Nail through the decorative buttons (beads) in the center of the sheet first. Along the edges, drive the nails to one side of the bead. To line up the next sheet, overlap the beads with the pre-




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**Top:** The ends of the metal sheets are nailed into short furring strips which were installed perpendicular to the longways furring. Note that the nail is being driven to one side of the decorative bead. A nail will be driven through the bead on the next (overlapping) piece installed.

**Middle:** A short piece of wood furring helps hold the metal flat while it's being nailed.

**Left:** The metal cove moulding (cornice) is installed so that its bottom (wall) edge is straight.



vious sheet (the way a ball and socket fit). Nail directly through the beads on the overlapping sheet. Any sheets that need cutting must have the cut edge to the wall, so it will be concealed by the cove moulding.

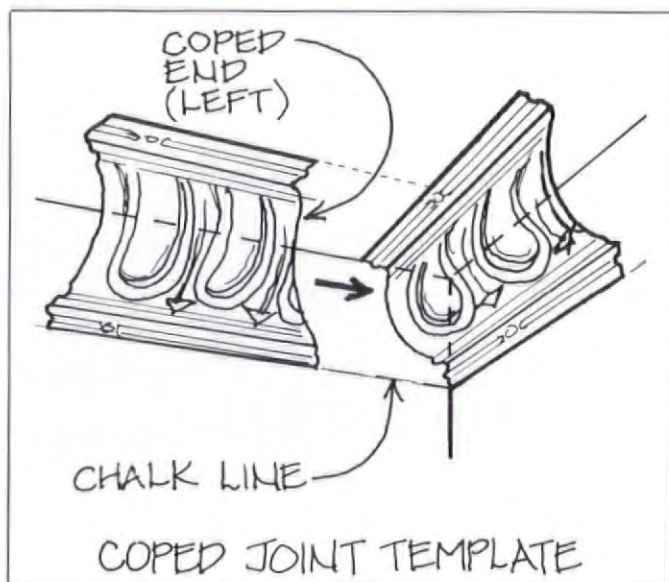
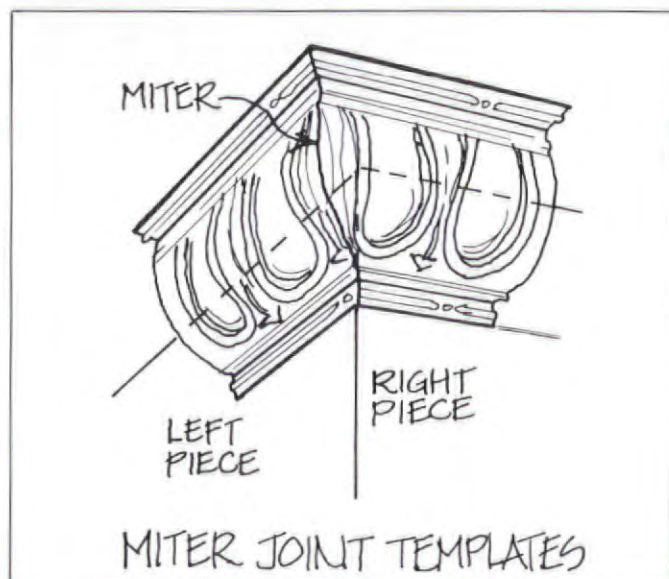
## Installing the cove (cornice)

Cornices come in many sizes and styles. The size is indicated by depth and projection. Measure the depth of the cornice (down from the new ceiling) at several points on the wall, and snap a chalkline along these marks as a guide. Deviations at the wall edge of the cornice will be more noticeable than at the ceiling, so make sure the cornice runs straight along the wall.

Locate and mark all of the studs in the wall before installing the cornice. Unless the cornice is small enough to nail right through the wall into the top plate, nails will have to be driven at the studs. Plan installation so that joints between pieces occur at the studs. Begin installation at an inside (coped) corner and work to the outside (mitered) corners. Drive nails through the cornice's decorative buttons or bumps wherever possible. This is easy at the ceiling, because you're nailing into continuous furring. On the wall, it's not always possible. Don't set any nails until the entire cornice is up. If you can easily remove the nails, you can make minor adjustments without damaging the cornice.

The most difficult part of installing a metal cornice is fitting the inside and outside corners. Inside corners are coped (as with wood trim) and outside corners are mitered. Some manufacturers offer prefabricated pieces for both inside and outside corners. Check with your dealer.

With tinsnips, make a template by freehand cutting and fitting scrap pieces of cornice by trial and error. Once you've successfully made your first mitered and coped joints on templates, you can make subsequent ones simply by using the template as a guide. Make sure the templates are positioned on the chalkline during trial fitting and cutting to ensure an accurate joint.

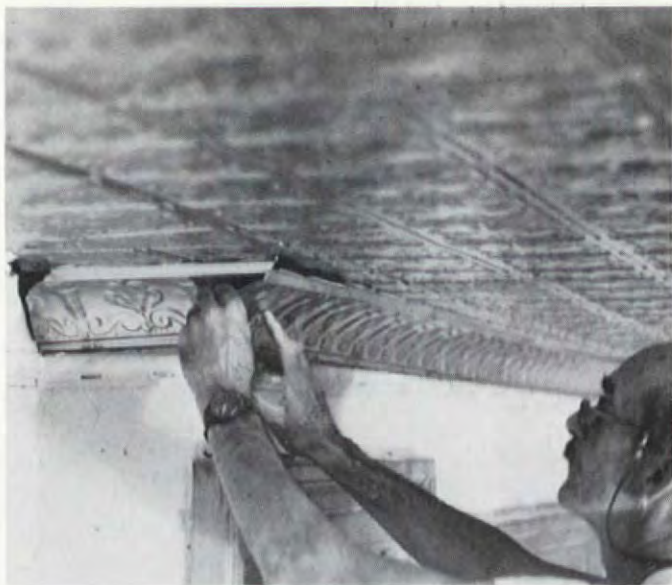


**Top:** After the miter joint has been cut freehand — using a template as a guide — a series of fringe cuts is made along the edge. After the piece is installed, these cuts (approximately  $\frac{1}{8}$ " deep every  $\frac{1}{8}$ " ) make it easier to hammer the edges in or out to achieve a tight joint.

**Middle:** For a neat job, outside joints in the cornice moulding are mitered.

**Right:** Inside joints, however, are coped, as with wood trim.





Special thanks to A.A. Abbingdon Affiliates, Inc. and to C.A. Ohman & Co. for their assistance with this article.

Before fitting the corner pieces, make a series of  $\frac{1}{8}$ " cuts close together on the edge. This makes the piece easier to bend when you tap the joint closed.

## Caulk, prime, paint

Invariably, some open joints will remain in the ceiling. Most can be tapped together by holding the head of a 3-inch nail against the joint and striking the point gently with a hammer. You can then use glazing compound or latex caulk to fill any joints that didn't close completely.

Occasionally, the metal will have an oily substance on the surface when it comes from the factory. If there's any trace of this residue, clean the sheets thoroughly with denatured alcohol or mineral spirits and allow to dry. Prime the metal with a high-quality oil/alkyd primer formulated for metals, and top-coat with two coats of oil-based paint from the same manufacturer.



The following companies supply tin ceilings nationally through mail order:

A.A. Abbingdon Affiliates, Inc.  
2149 Utica Avenue Dept. OHJ  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11234  
(718) 258-8333

Chelsea Decorative Metal Co.  
6115 Cheena Dept. OHJ  
Houston, Texas 77096  
(713) 721-9200

Old Jefferson Tile Co.  
P.O. Box 494 Dept OHJ,  
Jefferson, Texas 75657  
(214) 665-2221

W.F. Norman Corp.  
P.O. Box 323 Dept. OHJ  
Nevada, Mo. 64772  
(800) 641-4038

*Top: Fitting the corners of the cornice moulding requires some trial-and-error. The process is much easier if you take the time to make two templates first: one each of a coped and mitered joint.*

*Left: After all the metal is up, slightly-open joints can be sealed by striking the head of a three-inch nail against mating surfaces. Small voids that remain can be filled with caulk or glazing compound — the latter the choice of many installers. (Incidentally, the gentleman on the cover of this issue is tapping joints closed.)*



# KNOBS & LATCHES

By J. Randall Cotton

Our ancestors invested a striking level of quality in the workmanship, design, and materials for such seemingly mundane objects as doorknobs and latches. From the graceful simplicity of an early, hand-wrought latch to the intricate, machine-made designs embossed in a Victorian doorknob, these oft-overlooked details prove, once again, that old houses provide their owners with numerous "bonuses" not available from today's homes. Opening and closing doors is something we do several times every day, and there's some small pleasure derived from feeling the hefty grasp of a solid-brass knob, and from hearing the satisfying "clunk" of a latch-bar dropping into its place.

The design of knobs and latches reflected the architectural tastes of their time; their materials and fabrication reflected America's evolving building technologies. And because certain types were popular during certain eras, the original doorknobs and latches of an old house can offer important clues for determining its age.

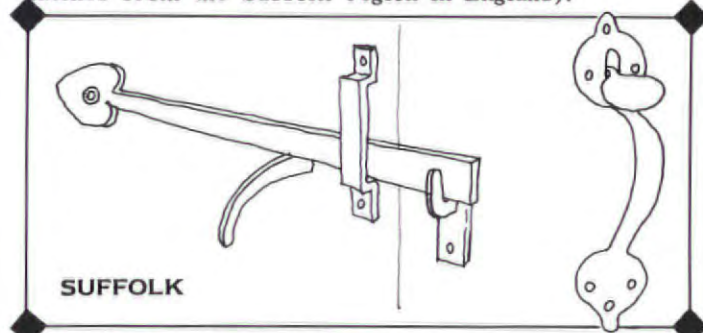
## Early Door Latches

Latches were popular up to this century, because factory-made versions were less expensive and easier to install than doorknobs. But only houses built before 1840 are likely to have door latches, rather than knobs, throughout. Doorknobs eventually became the norm, although latches were still used in less conspicuous places: attic, basement, closets, and screen doors, as well as barns, garages, and other outbuildings.

The first door latches used in this country were probably rudimentary, hand-crafted devices made of wood — the kind that can still be found in many old barns and "hundreds of cabins in the Tennessee mountains," as one writer put it. These, and all subsequent latches, worked on the same simple principle: A latch-bar is attached at its hinged end to the door, and its other end, extending beyond the face of the door, rests in a notched "keeper" (a.k.a. "catch" or "strike"), which attaches to the face of the door jamb. To open the door, you simply raise the latch-bar. In the ear-

liest versions, the latch-bar could be raised on the opposite side of the door by pulling a latch-string that was threaded through a hole in the door and tied to the bar.

Wrought-iron latches were known in Europe and China as early as the 13th century. By the early 1700s, iron latches were common in America; many were imported, primarily from England, but local blacksmiths soon produced well-made examples. These hand-wrought iron latches are known as "Suffolk" latches (now a generic term, but initially it identified latches from the Suffolk region in England).



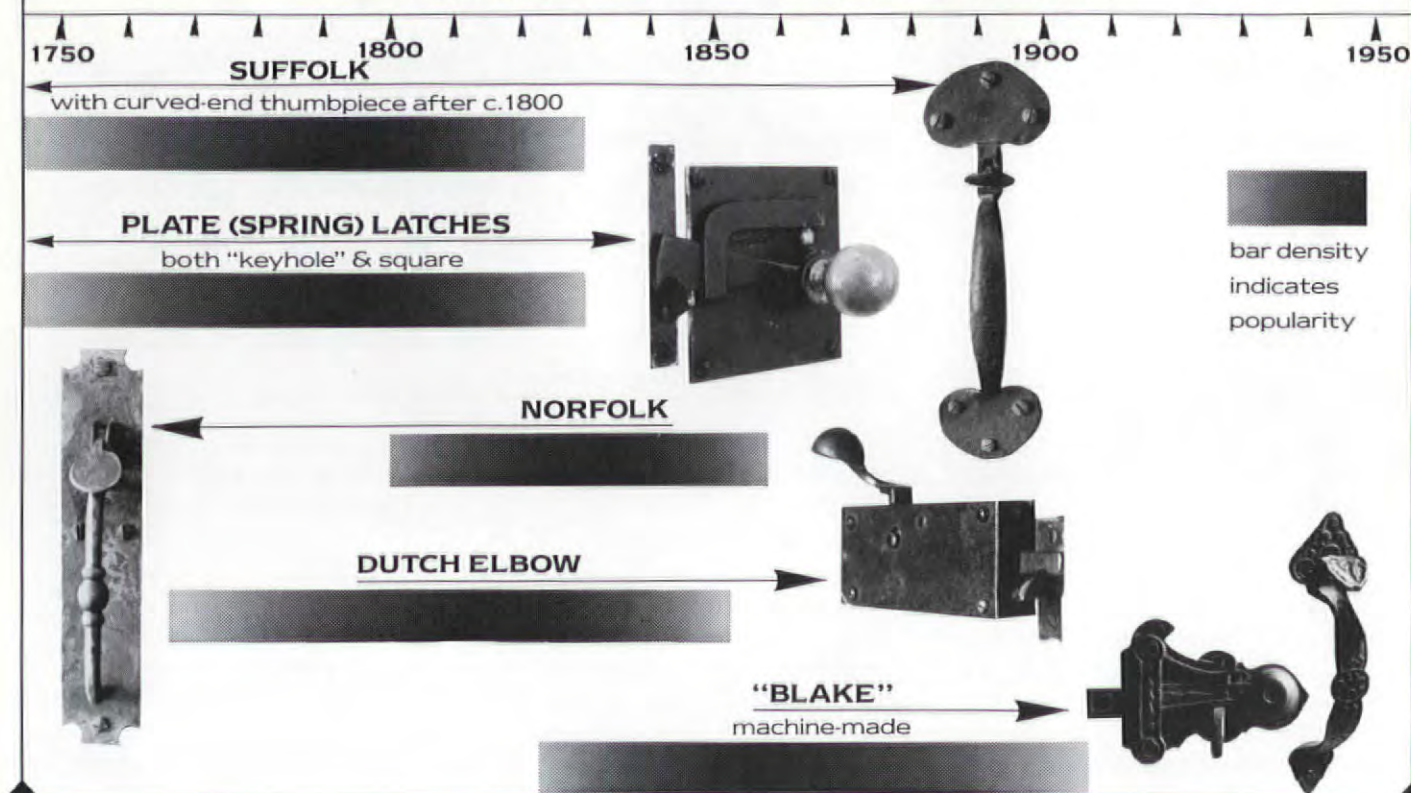
Each part of a Suffolk latch was handcrafted, just like every other element of an 18th-century house. Because they were hand-wrought, Suffolk latches have their inevitable quirks and imperfections. But that's precisely why they're so valued today: They're relics from an age of individual craftsmanship.

The five pieces of a typical Suffolk latch were hammered out by blacksmiths: the curved grasp, the thumb latch (which has a thumb press at one end and protrudes through the door at the other), the latch bar, the keeper, and a staple (or "retainer") which holds the latch bar against the door. The flattened-out ends (called "cusps") of the grasp were often hammered into attractive shapes. By far the most prevalent shape was the "bean," but heart-, spade-, and diamond-shaped cusps were not uncommon.

Fancier latch designs, such as the tulip or pine tree, were rare. The most elaborately designed Suffolk latches seem to have come from Massachusetts, the Connecticut Valley, and southeastern Pennsylvania.



## COMMON LATCH TYPES IN AMERICA

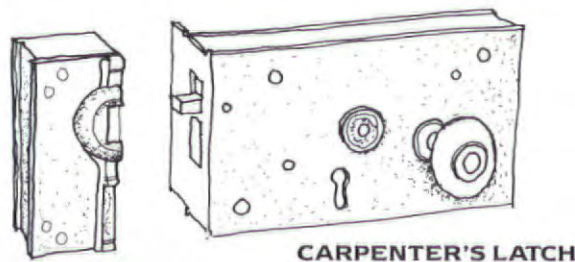


German-immigrant blacksmiths, carrying on a tradition of their homelands, were particularly adept at producing attractive latches. Their prime examples should be considered part of the best folk-art traditions. Out-of-the-way doors, such as on attics, were less likely to have been replaced, and are the most likely places to find surviving Suffolk latches. If you do have any in your old house, treasure them zealously!

In the earliest, 18th-century versions, the thumb latch penetrates through the middle of the upper cusp and has a straight end protruding from the backside of the door. In later examples (after 1800), the thumb latch penetrates the shank of the grasp below the cusp, and the opposite end is often curved down to facilitate lifting the bar. The use of Suffolk latches died out in the early-19th century, but they enjoyed a revival during the Arts & Crafts era of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Arts & Crafts architects appreciated the latches' handcrafted quality and their late-medieval associations. Fine, hand-wrought Revival examples in iron and copper can be found in turn-of-the-century homes in the Tudor, Norman, and Craftsman styles. Never ones to let an opportunity go by, early-20th-century hardware manufacturers such as Stanley, Yale, and Sargent picked up on the fad and mass-produced machine-made "Suffolk" latches. These versions can be found on countless 1920s and '30s homes, and were advertised as being equally appropriate for English, Colonial, or Spanish Revival houses.

### Spring Latches

Spring latches, although not nearly as common as Suffolk latches, were also popular in 18th- and early-19th-century homes. They're also called plate latches, because the lifting mechanism is fixed to a plate of iron, which in turn is attached to the door face. Two shapes are common for these plates: square and keyhole. Most spring latches have a small brass knob attached to a cam which, when turned, lifts the latch bar. A hefty spring normally holds the latch down unless the knob is turned. Apparently, most spring latches were imported from England.

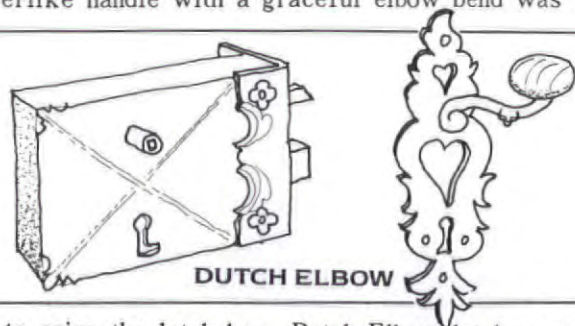


During the 1830s and '40s, a similar type of latch was popular: the Carpenter lock (a name derived from the lock's inventor). Like earlier spring latches, Carpenter locks had small brass knobs that raised a latch bar. However, many of the parts in a Carpenter lock were machine-made and often enclosed in an iron case,



like a rim (or box) lock.

Another similar latching device, popular during the 1750-to-1850 period, was the "Dutch Elbow" lock. Again, the mechanism is encased in a surface-mounted iron box, but instead of a brass knob or thumb latch, a leverlike handle with a graceful elbow bend was



used to raise the latch bar. Dutch Elbow latches were most prevalent in German-settled areas. ("Dutch" is a mispronunciation of "Deutsch," meaning German.)

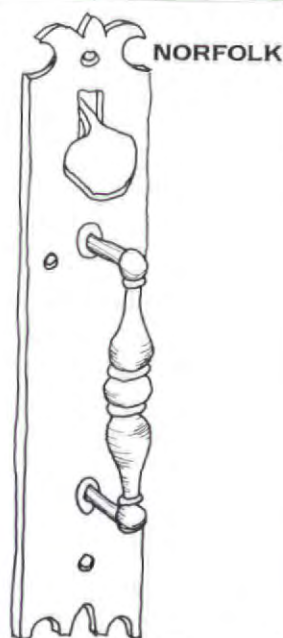
Dutch Elbow, Carpenter, and spring latches were often signed or stamped with the name of their makers. Like well-designed Suffolk latches, all these early devices are highly prized by collectors, and they are a definite plus to any old house where they have survived.

## Norfolk Latches

Norfolk latches mark a transition from handcrafted hardware to machine-made hardware. These latches were nearly identical in their operation to Suffolk latches, but the major parts were no longer hand-wrought. The grasp of a Norfolk latch often was of cast iron, and attached to a backplate made of machine-rolled sheet iron.

Although they lacked the individual craftsmanship and artistic designs of the earlier latches, Norfolk latches were cheaper to make and more readily available to the average homeowner. They also had several minor design improvements over earlier types: The keeper was often mortised into the side of the door jamb instead of surface-mounted on its face; the lift bar commonly had a small knob which made it easier to lift; and an integral locking lever was sometimes added to affix the lift bar for security. (Earlier latches used wedges or pins to immobilize the bar for locking purposes.)

Norfolk latches still survive in great numbers

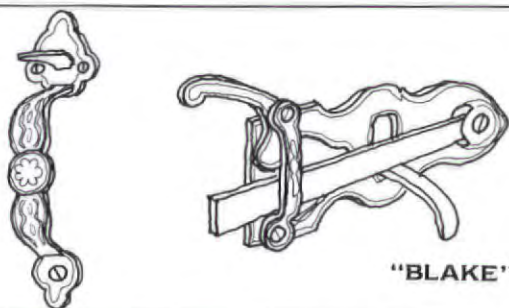


because their era of popularity, although relatively short (circa 1800-1840), coincided with a period of great population growth and house building. Norfolk latches of fairly standardized designs can be found in old houses from the East Coast to the Midwest and deep South.

## "Blake" & Victorian Latches

Latches made entirely of cast iron appeared in the 1840s and remained popular into this century. Thomas Blake took some of the earliest patents for these devices, so they've come to be known as Blake latches, although other manufacturers also made them.

Victorian-era latches, because they were cast, often had low-relief ornament over every available surface. The outline shapes of the backplates, grasps, etc., took on lively curvilinear forms. Earlier latches would have up to seven separate pieces to be assembled and attached; "Blake" latches came pre-assembled in three pieces: the grasp/thumb piece, the lift/backplate assembly, and the keeper.



Victorian latches were mass-produced by the tens of thousands and sold through catalogs and hardware dealers. They superseded the Suffolk and Norfolk latches, and even maintained a market for use on out-of-the-way doors, long after doorknobs and mortise locks became the norm.

## Doorknobs

Doorknobs were used in some colonial houses throughout the 1700s, usually in conjunction with rim locks or spring latches; doorknobs used with mortise locks were occasionally found in the best Georgian houses. (Some early Moravian-settlement dwellings had unusual knobs shaped like a clenched fist.) But until the early 1800s, latches were the norm for most doors in the average house. Two developments changed this: the ability to mass-produce cast-iron mortise locks, and the widespread use of factory-made panelled doors thick enough to accommodate mortise locks. (See the June '86 & December '86 OHJ for more about the evolution of locks.) The Greek Revival houses of the 1840s and '50s were the first to incorporate the widespread use of doorknobs.

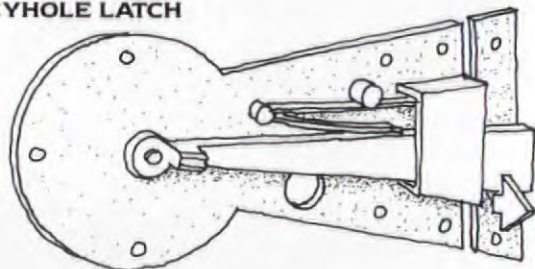
Doorknobs were made from many materials, expensive (silver, ivory, marble) and inexpensive (wood, glass, ceramic, cast iron). The typical house might



have higher-quality knobs in important spaces, such as the first-floor parlors or entries; elsewhere, knobs would be from the middle-of-the-line stock of hardware companies.

The following were the most common kinds of knobs, listed more or less in chronological order:

#### KEYHOLE LATCH



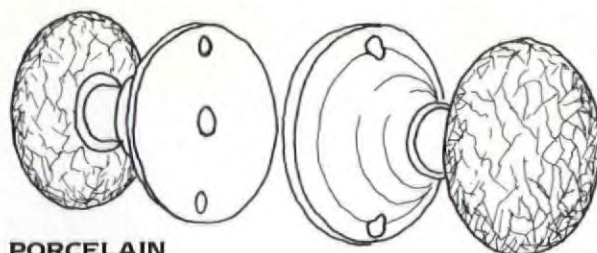
**Brass** — Seen from the 1700s on, brass knobs have always been a "benchmark" of quality. Early examples were relatively small in size, and round or oval in shape. The best were solid cast. True brass is an alloy of copper and zinc, and has a yellowish or golden tone. So-called "India" brass (which has a lower proportion of copper) is whiter. Pre-Victorian examples were plain and unadorned.

Brass knobs have never completely fallen from favor, although at times they were less common due to their relative expense. During the early-20th century, brass knobs with simple molded or beaded rims became very popular again.

**Porcelain** — Plain or decorated, fine white china knobs were popular in France and England, and were imported to this country in limited numbers in the 1700s. The popularity of the sturdy, all-American version began around 1840, when American pottery companies started mass-producing them. These white porcelain knobs remained in demand into this century, and were used in every style of house, but they are perhaps most associated with Greek Revival, Italianate, and other early Victorian styles.

Porcelain is a fine, white, hard earthenware with a transparent glaze. Like other types of earthenware knobs, porcelain knobs were first molded, kiln-fired, glazed, then re-fired. The completed body was then affixed to a cast-iron or brass shank.

Many old porcelain knobs have a network of hair-line cracks, called "crazing," which was acquired either intentionally or unintentionally during their man-



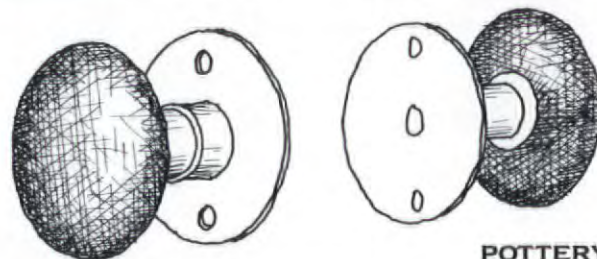
PORCELAIN

ufacture. If you have crazed porcelain knobs, don't worry about them — they're structurally sound, and the crazing adds an attractive patina. White porcelain knobs were often paired with black rim locks, a classic and pleasing combination which was popular into this century throughout the country.

**Black Knobs** — These are sort of a black "ebony" counterpart to white porcelain knobs, made from red pottery clay with a baked-on black glaze, called "jet." They were popular from around 1860 to the 1930s, and were used in all styles of houses, primarily as a middle-of-the-line product.

**Brown Mineral** — These multi-toned, brown pottery knobs were commonly known as "mineral" knobs. Potteries in Bennington, Vermont, were early but short-lived makers of these knobs, so they're usually referred to as "Bennington" knobs, although most of them were made by other hardware companies.

Many brown-mineral knobs have a distinctive two-toned finish that imitates marble. This effect was achieved by swirling together two colors of clay, or by sponging, spattering, or dipping on a second slip color which gave them attractive highlights.



POTTERY

Not surprisingly, brown-mineral knobs became popular in the Greek Revival era, when many of the decorative-arts practices for homes were inexpensive, yet attractive, attempts at falsifying more expensive materials (such as false wood-grained paint finishes, wall stencilling, veneers, and marbleizing).

**Glass** — Early cut-glass and crystal knobs can be found in some very high-styled 18th-century houses. By 1834, Boston newspapers were advertising glass knobs of many kinds, but most glass knobs date from the 1850s and on. Most were pressed or molded, evolving from the "Sandwich glass" tradition. The majority of glass knobs were made at the Pierpont Glass Company, but were mounted and sold through the many es-



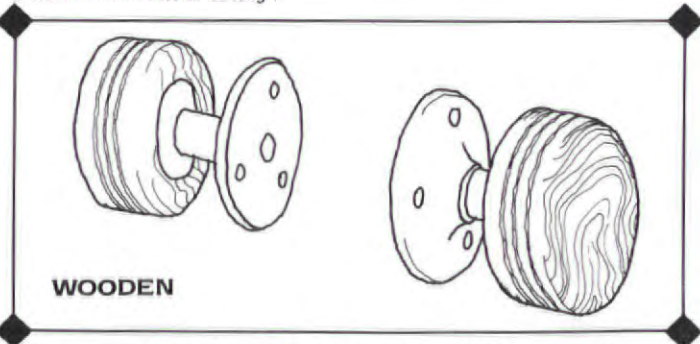
established hardware companies. Besides the round and oval shapes of the 1800s, octagon and other faceted shapes became popular in the early-20th century.

Overlays of color, such as ruby or blue, were sometimes applied to so-called "art-glass" knobs, which were particularly popular down South.

Glass knobs are associated with early-Victorian Italianate houses. They were still used during later Victorian times, but were less popular than other kinds of knobs. During the first half of this century, they enjoyed a revival, and could be found in virtually any kind of post-Victorian house, particularly Colonial Revivals and such utilitarian types as Foursquares.

A fairly uncommon variation of the glass knob is a "silvered" or mirrored knob, which was produced by coating the blown inside cavity with a silvery substance. These were mostly reserved for high-styled homes of the mid- to late-19th century.

**Wooden Knobs** — Their heyday was the mid-1800s. Most were made in New England mills; rosewood, ironwood, and other exotic species were used. Wooden knobs were usually plain but sometimes had incised lines or a beaded edge around the rim; occasionally, designs were pressed or stamped in. Because they were less durable and often replaced, old wooden knobs are rare today.



**Ornamental Victorian Knobs** — Highly ornate designs executed in bronze or brass were the epitome of the High-Victorian doorknob. Manufacture of these knobs was pioneered in the 1870s by the Russell & Erwin Company in Connecticut; by the early 1880s, many hardware manufacturers were producing them.

Most better-than-average Victorian houses had some ornamental bronze knobs. (Bronze is an alloy of copper, tin, and zinc, which is more reddish in color than brass.) Even the common or "spec-built" Victorian

house could have wrought or cast ornamental knobs in a few selected patterns, from such mail-order houses as Wards or Sears.

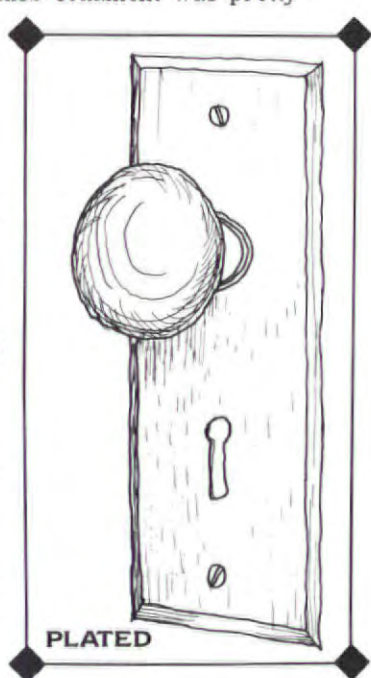
Early ornamental metal knobs (circa 1860-70) were embellished with the naturalistic forms favored by the then-popular Rococo Revival decorative style. Not only the face of the knob, but also the accompanying backplates (common by this time) were covered with designs in ivy, intertwining vines, fleurs-de-lis, and even dog, lion, and human forms. Many of the shapes and motifs were the same as those on the furniture and ornamental plasterwork of the day.

The best hardware manufacturers had their own artists who created designs inspired by a host of Greek, Gothic, French, Renaissance, and other exotic sources, all contributing to the typical Victorian hodgepodge.

During the late 1880s and into the '90s, the Eastlake influence — angular geometric forms, stylized sunflower and tulip shapes, zigzag and incised lines — was heavily felt, not only on knobs but also on backplates, hinges, strikes, mail-slots, and other door hardware.

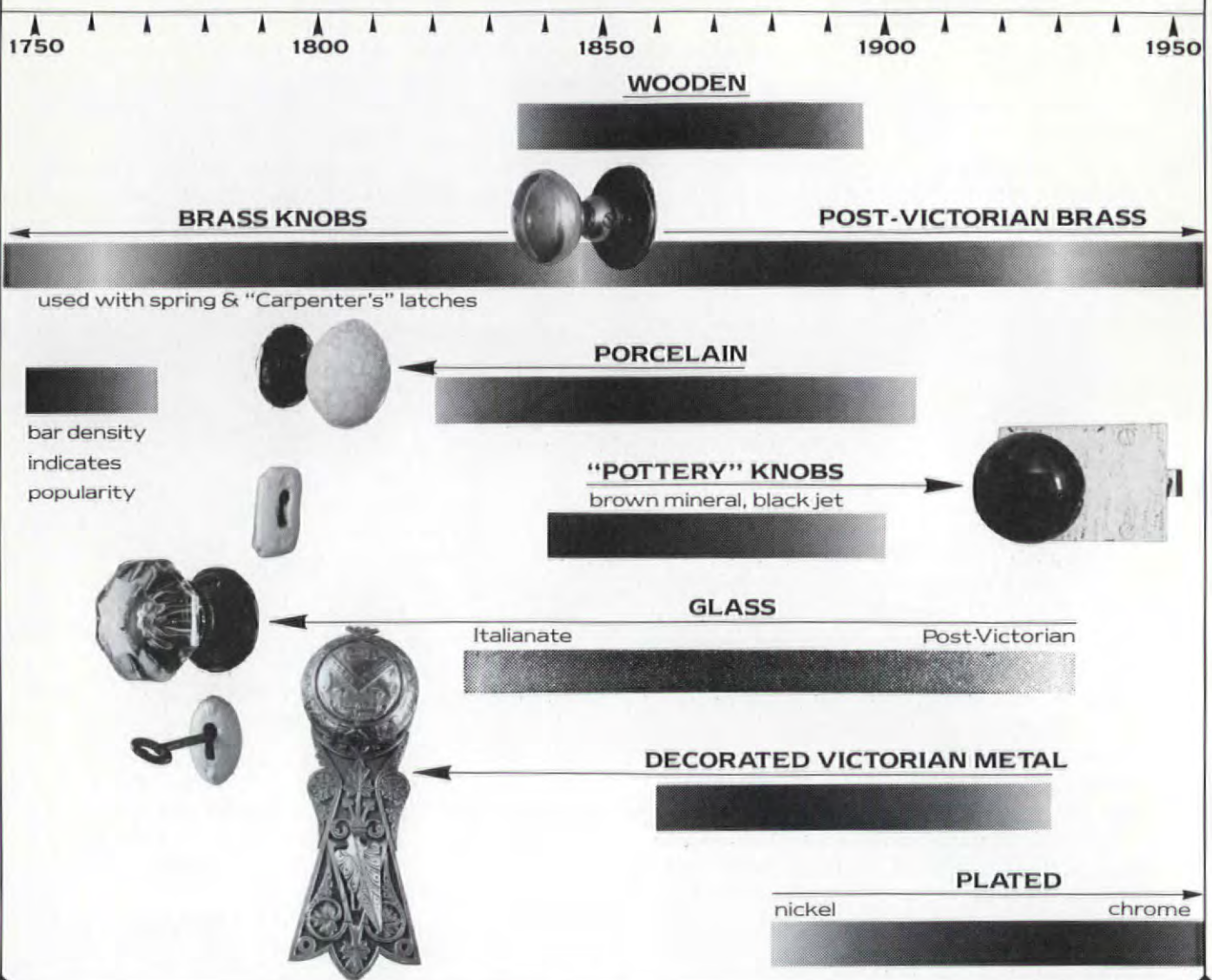
Turn-of-the-century Nouveau doorknob designs, popular in Europe, found only occasional use in America. Instead, we gradually returned to the less-fussy motifs of the Colonial Revival. During the teens, '20s, and '30s, "in-style" doorknob ornament was pretty much limited to rim beading or edge-mouldings of rope, egg-and-dart, or fluted designs. Backplates were often simple oval shapes.

**Plated Knobs** — Many Victorian and post-Victorian knobs were plated. Nickel-plate was most common, although it didn't hold up all that well. The base metal could be cast-iron, zinc, brass, or bronze. Plating over cast iron helped to stop rusting problems; nickel plating eliminated the need for the frequent polishing required by brass or bronze knobs.





# COMMON DOORKNOB TYPES IN AMERICA



Many Victorian-era ornamental knobs had a two-toned effect. For example, the background of the cast-iron base metal could be japanned black, and the raised highlights electroplated with a polished bronze. This common effect was sometimes called "Geneva Bronzed." Knobs were also plated with anodized copper, which was available in a bright, dark, or "antique" finish. Chrome-plate appeared in the 1930s, and was popular for bathroom and kitchen doors.

**"Plastic" Knobs** — Man-made "plastic" knobs have been around since the early 1800s — a composition-wood material was used for Victorian knobs and could be cast with ornamental designs. The early 1900s brought Bakelite, Celluloid, and Lucite knobs, all part of the streamlined "modern" movement. Houses of the 1930s-1950s era often had Deco-inspired knobs, particularly for kitchen or bathroom doors. Although the knobs themselves were generally plain, the correspond-

ing metal backplates had stylized zigzags, stepped or chevron designs, or low-relief fluting.

## Replacing Latches & Knobs

Fortunately, many old houses retain much of their original door hardware — it was well made and worked well. But occasionally there will be missing knobs. More often, original hardware will have been replaced by "modern" knobs. In either case, you might want to install appropriate antique or reproduction knobs or latches.

This article gives you direction regarding the appropriate hardware for the period and style of your house. But consider too the quality level of the house's details: only high-styled, expensive homes would have top-of-the-line doorknobs. The majority of homes utilized the commonly available, moderately priced knobs and latches of the day. This range includes *sim-*



ple Suffolk latches, Norfolk latches, Blake latches, porcelain, "mineral," pressed-glass, nickel-plated, cast-iron, and relatively simple ornamental brass knobs. Secondary doors (on upper floors, closets, etc.) had even simpler hardware.

Resist the urge to "early up" when replacing door hardware. Handmade Suffolk latches have a great aesthetic and romantic appeal for many people, but they would be inappropriate in a Victorian house. Also, don't fret if all the knobs or latches in a house don't match; most old houses had a mix of them.

Old doors can provide clues to what missing latches or knobs were like. Check for "shadow" or paint lines that indicate the outlines of removed pieces. Old screw holes, mortises, and spindle holes will at least reveal the relative size and location of the original hardware. One of the best ways to determine the nature of missing pieces is to study surviving original hinges, strike plates, backplates, and escutcheons. Wrought-iron strap hinges on a door probably indicate that there were originally Suffolk latches too. Early cast-iron butt hinges went with Norfolk latches, ceramic knobs, etc. Ornamental bronze knobs were often accompanied by decorative bronze hinges and strike plates.

Before buying replacement parts, check the door's thickness, rail size, and swing (some hardware is specific to inward-, outward-, left-, or right-swinging doors). Traditionally, both knobs and latches were located on the horizontal center line of the door's center rail — be sure there's enough space at this location to accommodate the replacement hardware.

## Salvage & Reproductions

One easy solution to missing hardware is to "salvage" or relocate knobs and latches from elsewhere in the house. Prime candidates for this are the little-seen knobs from the backsides of closet, attic, or cellar doors. Antique knobs and latches can also be obtained from building-salvage dealers. Most will have door hardware, but getting exactly what you want may be a hit-or-miss proposition. Some antique shops and mail-order specialty outfits also sell old hardware (see list of sources, p. 44).

If you're paying a premium for authentic "antique" hardware, beware of fakes. A dealer's reputation is always your best assurance. Uneven wear, patina, worn edges, and "play" in the mechanisms are signs of age. Evenly-spaced hammer marks on "wrought" iron should raise suspicions!

Try to buy old latches that have all their pieces: thumb latch, lift bar, keeper, retainer, etc. The various pieces of doorknob sets are less critical; spindle sizes were standardized and will fit a variety of knobs. However, obtaining the matching strike plates, rosettes, or backplates is always a plus.

Many companies are now reproducing accurate ver-

sions of old latches and knobs. Almost all the common types and materials are available. We've listed some of these sources, but there are many more. Reproductions can run the gamut from cheap imitations to very expensive custom-made hardware. Re-creations of actual designs, using traditional materials and methods, are best.

## Rehabilitating Knobs & Latches

Not so much can go wrong with old knobs and latches. The most common problem is loose doorknobs. This is usually fixed by loosening the set screw at the base of the knob, pushing the knob snug (not too tight!) against the rosette, and retightening the screw. Most old spindles had several screw holes or machine-threaded sides; the set screw should be tightened into these, not the flat side of the spindle.

Broken wrought-iron pieces can be repaired by local blacksmiths. (They're still around in most areas.) Cast iron is much more problematic; it is brittle and very hard to repair. If a cast-iron piece is unusable, a replacement is probably the easiest solution. Foundries that do custom work can recast pieces using an original "twin" piece as a model.

You can strip paint from knobs and latches with conventional chemical strippers. (Of course, it's easier if the hardware is removed first.) Try a test patch and see if there's an adverse effect on the underlying material. Over the years, OHJ readers have successfully removed paint from metal knobs with numerous homemade concoctions, including solutions of baking soda, ash, and vinegar and salt. A toothbrush is good for removing loosened paint from ornamental knobs.

Be careful when cleaning plated knobs. (Use a magnet to determine if iron or steel is beneath what you suspect is a plated knob.) Harsh abrasives, cleaners, or strippers may erode the plating. Replating can normally be done only by professionals — check under "Plating" or "Metal Finishers" in the Yellow Pages. Their prices may vary greatly, so shop around.

Glass, porcelain, mineral, nickel-plated, or chrome-plated knobs normally don't need anything more than an occasional simple cleaning with mild soap and water to keep them looking good. Wrought and cast iron can be painted with black enamel or stove black, if needed, to reduce rusting.

Brass, bronze, and copper are problems, however. These metals will inevitably oxidize to a darkened patina. Many people can live with this "antique" look, but if you're committed to a bright finish, all but the most stubborn tarnish can be removed with the numerous commercial cleaners made for these metals. Keeping them polished is mostly a matter of regular, frequent cleaning. A protective lacquer coat can retard tarnishing, but won't cure it. (See "Keeping Brass Beautiful," April 1984 OHJ.)





## SOURCES

### Acorn Manufacturing Company

457 School St., PO Box 31, Dept. OJC  
Mansfield, MA 02048  
(617) 339-4500

*Many thumb-latch designs, mostly in early-20th-century "revival" tradition.*

### Anglo-American Brass Company

PO Box 9487, Dept. OHJ  
San Jose, CA 95157  
(408) 246-0203

*Very ornate brass doorknob sets, including rococo, Nouveau, and classical.*

### Baldwin Hardware Manufacturing Corporation

841 Wyomissing Blvd., Box 82, Dept. OHJ  
Reading, PA 19603  
(215) 777-7811

*Many ornamental doorknob sets in brass and bronze; glass and porcelain knobs; brass thumb latches and rim locks.*

### Ball & Ball

463 W. Lincoln Hwy., Dept. OHJ  
Exton, PA 19341  
(215) 363-7330

*Large selection, including Suffolk, Blake, and spring latches; rim locks; ceramic, brass, and ornamental knobs.*

### Cirecast, Inc.

380 7th Street, Dept. OHJ  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415) 863-8319

*Top-of-the-line, authentic, Victorian-era doorknob sets in non-ferrous, lost-wax castings; includes interesting Eastlake designs.*

### Crawford's Old House Store

301 McCall St., Room 86  
Waukesha, WI 53186  
(414) 542-0685

*Numerous high-style ornamental Victorian brass door-knob sets, copied from authentic prototypes.*

### Gainsborough Hardware Industry

PO Box 569, Dept. OHJ  
Chesterfield, MO 63017  
(314) 532-8466

*Numerous knobs, including hard-to-find wooden, brown mineral, bone, and crystal.*

### Horton Brasses

PO Box 120, Nooks Hill Road, Dept. OJ  
Cromwell, CT 06416  
(203) 635-4400

*Mostly furniture hardware, but includes some hand-forged Suffolk latches.*

### Kayne & Son Custom-Forged Hardware

76 Daniel Rde Road, Dept. OHJ  
Candler, NC 28715  
(704) 667-8868

*Numerous Suffolk and Norfolk thumbblatch designs, all handcrafted; also will do custom work to your specification in wrought iron/steel or cast brass/bronze.*

### Lee Valley Tools, Ltd.

2680 Queensview Drive, Dept. OHJ  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K2B 8H6  
(613) 596-0350

*Salvaged and rehabilitated doorknob sets, mostly early-20th century, including Deco.*

### Brian Leo

7520 Stevens Avenue South, Dept. OHJ  
Richfield, MN 55423  
(612) 861-1473

*Knobs, roses, backplates, etc., cast in various metals. Lots of Victorian designs, including Eastlake, Nouveau, rococo, Greek.*

### H. Pfansteil Hardware Company

Route 52, Dept. OHJ  
Jeffersonville, NY 12748  
(914) 482-4445

*Many ornamental brass knobs, also European-style louvers.*

### The Renovator's Supply

Renovators Old Mill 6119, Dept. OHJ  
Millers Falls, MA 01349  
(413) 659-2211

*Glass, ceramic knobs; many ornamental brass knobs and backplates; classic black rimlock with white porcelain knob set.*

### Restoration Works, Inc.

PO Box 486, 810 Main St., Dept. OHJ  
Buffalo, NY 14205  
(716) 856-8000

*Brass, chrome, porcelain, jet, "Bennington," ornamental knobs.*

### Williamsburg Blacksmiths, Inc.

1 Buttonshop Road, Dept. OHJ  
Williamsburg, MA 01096  
(413) 268-7341

*Hand-wrought and authentic Suffolk and Norfolk latches, numerous designs.*



*Thanks to W. Whitman Ball and Maudie Eastwood for contributing information to this article.*  
*For those interested in further information, check out The Antique Doorknob & Antique Builder's Hardware, available from Maudie Eastwood, 3900 Latimer Road, Tillamook, OR 97141. Or contact the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America, Box 126, Eola, IL 60519.*



# 22 TIPS TO A BETTER PAINT JOB

By James L. Jansen



**A**chieving a superior interior paint job isn't difficult. We all know what it takes: time and patience. But how many of us have spent hours roaming the aisles of our local hardware store searching for that modern miracle that will let us paint an entire living room in one afternoon while wearing a dinner jacket?

Painting does not have to be messy. The miracle solution to most painting woes is:

## TIP #1 — Keep It Neat

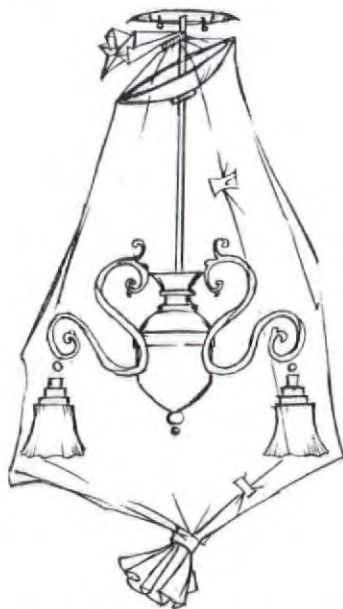
Keep the work area neat. Keep your tools neat. Keep yourself neat. It sounds rather simple, but I can't stress it enough.

The most valuable tools you have are your hands. Keep them clean. When using latex, wash your hands in soap and water frequently as you go along. Carry not one but two rags on your belt. When using "oil-based" (alkyd) paints, clean your hands frequently in DL Hand Cleaner (or a similar product); then use soap and water.

Just as hands won't work well under messy conditions, neither will you. The work area should be tidied up at the end of each work day.

## Disassembly

Remove as much from the room as physically possible. This means *everything*: all furniture, decoration, drapes, rugs, curtain rods, window and door hardware. Roll piano and couch to the center of the room and cover them with disposable plastic drop-cloths. The floor should be covered with real canvas drop-cloths — plastic is slippery and won't absorb drips.



## TIP #2 — Bag Your Fixtures

With a ceiling fixture, unscrew the cover plate, slip the screws back into their holes, and enclose the entire piece in a plastic laundry garment bag. (Look in your closet — you'll find dozens.) Secure with tape. Tape the

corresponding light switch into the off position.

## TIP #3 — Sandwich Bags

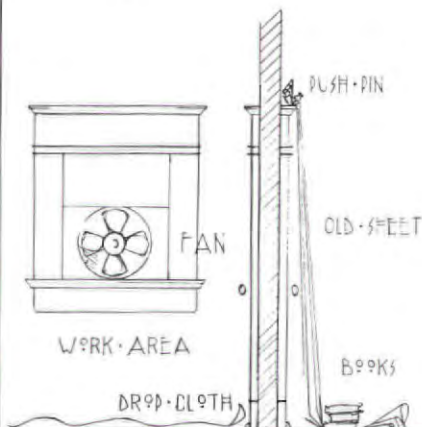
When removing a piece of hardware, place it individually (along with its screws) in a baggie, label it, and tie it up with a twist tie. Whenever you take something apart, draw on your labels how it goes back together.

## TIP #4 — Organize Screws

When removing switch plates and outlet covers, keep the screws in their original holes. Like nothing else, these screws seem to disappear.

## TIP #5 — Protect Switches

Place a thumbnail-sized piece of tape on every light switch. Nothing looks worse than a light switch splattered with paint.



## Preparation

### TIP #6 — Wind Tunnel

The more sanding you do, the smoother a surface you'll end up with — and the more sanding dust you'll create. Close all doors. Behind every door and open doorway, take an old bedsheet or spare dropcloth and tack one end of it to the door casing with push pins; use books to weigh it to the floor. Place an exhaust fan in one window and open another.

### TIP #7 — Caulk Neatly

When using acrylic latex caulk, have a small pail of soapy water and a small cloth handy. Keep your fingers clean; don't let caulk build up. As you work the caulk and before it sets up, wipe it smooth with the wet cloth.



### **TIP #8 — Read Directions**

There is a wealth of information on every container's label, so always read it thoroughly. And don't just read the directions; follow them.

## **Clean Up**

After all the sanding and other prep work is completed, clean the room. Sweep and then vacuum. Gather up all dropcloths, go outside, and shake them out into a trashcan. Reinstall the clean dropcloths and wash down the entire room. Remember, interior-paint failure is all too often the result of applying paint to a dirty surface.

## **Prime**

With the proper primer, touch up places in need of primer (bare wood, spackling, plaster, etc.). It's always safest to paint like over like: latex over latex, oil over oil. If there's a strong desire to change bases, it is advisable to prime completely.

## **Painting**

### **TIP #9 — Top To Bottom**

Paint has an uncanny knack for obeying gravity, so don't paint above any finished surface.

### **TIP #10 — Invest In Tools**

You can usually identify them by their higher prices. Use China bristles for alkyd, nylon for latex. In either case, look for a thick, resilient brush, with bristles that have split ends ("flagged" bristles). With roller covers, again go the high-quality, "professional" route — there's nothing so aggravating as a nap that sheds. Use a roller handle that looks substantial, rolls easily, and has a smooth, contoured grip. Spending an extra 30 bucks for excellent tools will save you untold hours of work.

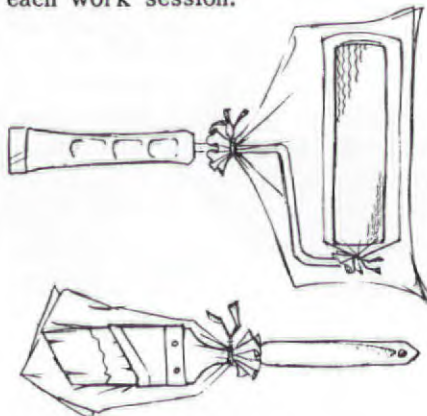
### **TIP #11 — Use Plastic Cylinder**

When temporarily through with a roller, open its plastic cover and carefully slip it (while still on the handle) back inside. Close with a twist tie. For double pro-

tection, slip it inside a large food storage bag and tie shut.

### **TIP #12 — Brushes In Baggies**

When temporarily through with your oil brush, slip it into a sandwich-sized baggie and close around the handle. Latex brushes should be cleaned thoroughly with soap and water at the end of each work session.



### **TIP #13 — Store Brushes**

After your tools are enclosed in baggies, store oil brushes and rollers in the freezer and latex rollers in the refrigerator. This applies whether you're stopping work for two hours or two days. Oil brushes should be completely cleaned weekly.

### **TIP #14 — Get Up Early**

Natural daylight is the best light to paint by — you can see much better. Working at night usually leads to missed spots.

### **TIP #15 — Save Paint Cans**

More often than not, you will first use a gallon of latex paint for the ceiling. Save the empty can and fill it with water. To prevent a fire hazard, dispose of your oily rags by submerging them in the can.

### **TIP #16 — The One-Coat Myth**

If you read paint instructions carefully, you will find that the only single coat that covers is the second coat. Always plan on two top coats.

### **TIP #17 — Painting Is Peaceful**

You can actually enjoy painting if you don't think of it as work. Think of it as rest and relaxation, peace and quiet. Don't answer the phone. No visitors, no TV, no radio; just the blissful hum of the window fan.... Take your time, and you'll be sur-

prised at the rejuvenated room — and your rejuvenated self.

### **TIP #18 — Check Your Work**

Step back frequently and inspect your work. Move from side to side to see it in different lights. You need to catch sags and runs soon after they occur.

### **TIP #19 — Check Your Shoes**

Before leaving the work area, check the soles of your shoes. You never know what you're about to track through the house.

## **Reassembly**

Putting the room back together should be easy, because you've labeled everything. Rely on your directions, not your memory.


### **TIP #20 — Recycle Thinner**

The paint in "dirty" thinner will settle out. Use two jugs, one dirty, one clean. After cleaning a brush, pour dirty thinner into the designated jug. When that one is full, let it sit for a day or two. Then switch cans and begin filling the empty jug with used thinner. You can go back and forth for a long time before you'll need more thinner.

### **TIP #21 — Save The Covers**

Every good brush comes in a protective cover on which the cleaning instructions are written. First wipe out excess paint. Oil brushes will need several rinses in thinner. Shake out vigorously between each rinse. A final wash in soap and cool water will keep bristles soft and pliable. Replace the brush in its cover to retain its shape, and hang it in a safe place.

### **TIP #22 — Save Rollers**

Cleaning out rollers is rarely worth the effort. But don't throw them out. Place them in a large baggie, and grip and pull off the roller handle. Tie shut and store in refrigerator or freezer. Now, if the wall should get scraped when you move the furniture, there's a roller loaded with paint ready for touch-ups. You will amaze your family members with your foresight. Keep rollers until all work is done. Then throw them, neatly sequestered in their bag, out. 



# Saving Irreplaceable Plaster

By John Leeke

**W**e've covered plaster repair many times in previous issues. From taping minor cracks (March 1979 OHJ) to fixing a sagging plaster ceiling (Jan./Feb. 1983); to making dry-wall patches in plaster (December 1983), to three-coat patchwork (July/August 1986), we've dealt with the subject enough that most of our long-time readers understand the methods and materials required for successful plaster restoration.

This article focuses on one especially difficult problem: bulging plaster beneath decorative surfaces. Keys often break — especially on ceilings when the original work was poorly done. If the wood lath strips were placed too close together, or the lath was nailed directly over planks, the keys do not form properly, and the plaster may eventually sag away from the lath.

When broken keys cause plaster to come loose from the lath, the typical solution is to tear down the loose plaster, and patch the resulting hole. This simple technique has major disadvantages when there's an irreplaceable finish on the plaster. If the wall is covered with historic wallpaper, or a hard-to-replace,

hand-painted frieze, you sure don't want to tear down anything. And even if the plaster doesn't have a decorative finish, it may be less expensive to resecure the loose plaster than to remove and replace it.

For the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), experts have developed some fairly technical procedures for dealing with this problem in museum-quality jobs. Developed and refined over a period of 12 years, the techniques represent the state of the science in injected adhesive bonding — but they require materials that are hard to procure and very expensive.

John Leeke has adapted the techniques and materials for resecuring loose plaster so that the technology can be "brought home," and attempted by the more casual restorer. Although the adhesives he uses aren't as time-tested as those specified by SPNEA, John reports satisfactory results in dealing with this difficult plaster restoration problem. The editors of OHJ are intrigued by John's techniques, and we look forward to trying them in our own restorations.

—Bill O'Donnell



**L**oose or bowed plaster that has lost its key with the lath but is still in place can be re-attached, making the plaster sound again. "Injected adhesive bonding," a method to re-attach loose plaster, was developed by Morgan Phillips and Andrew Ladygo for SPNEA. They inject specially mixed acrylic adhesives into the space between lath and plaster through holes drilled in the face of the plaster (or through the lath from behind, when accessible). The plaster is then pressed back into place, usually with a sheet of plywood, until the adhesive sets. After the plywood is removed, injection holes are filled.

When executed properly, this method allows a continuous bond between lath and plaster. Such a bond limits the stress on any given area of the plaster, and is stronger than the bond with the original mechanical keys. It's an especially valuable method with heavy ceiling plaster. Because the stress is spread over the maximum surface area, the relative flexibility of the adhesives isn't a problem; in fact, it may be a benefit, as it allows for the differential expansion and contraction of the substrate, plaster, and adhesive.

The special adhesives used by SPNEA solve many of the difficult problems for this unique application. The adhesives themselves are expensive, and they must be mixed with fillers and modifiers such as fluid coke, lime, Microballoons™ (tiny, hollow glass spheres), and other thickeners.

It is difficult and expensive to get started with this method because distribution of the adhesive materials is limited by their maker. I have scaled down the SPNEA method for more common work by using readily available adhesives. (See "Materials" box.)

## Procedures

The first order of business is to find the areas of loose plaster and mark them out with chalk. Press the surface gently with the palm of your hand or with a T-brace made from 2x4s. If the plaster seems to move in relation to the studs and lath beneath, then the keys are broken. Be careful not to punch a hole in the loose plaster. With greater pressure you may find a similar movement, indicating that the plaster is well keyed to the lath, but the lath is loose from the studs. (This condition requires further investigation for decay and structural damage.) Thumping with your finger makes a solid, snappy sound on good plaster; a hollow and dull sound on loose plaster.

Treat a whole loose area all at once, so the stress on the plaster is minimized when it is pressed back into place. On ceilings with access from above, begin by vacuuming up debris. Leave loose and broken keys in place to channel the adhesive later. Then drill ¼" injection holes through the lath. Use a drill stop on your bit to keep from drilling into the plaster. If there is no access to the back (as on most walls), you must drill directly through the face of the plaster,



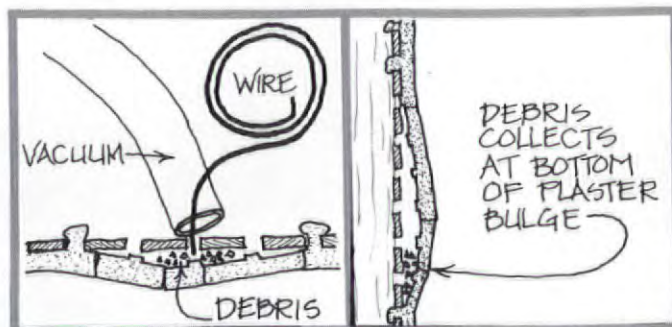
**Use a drill stop on your bit to keep from drilling through the face of the plaster.**

and fill the holes after the plywood is removed. Of course, walls don't need as many holes as do ceilings. Position the holes three to six inches apart and at the center of the lath.

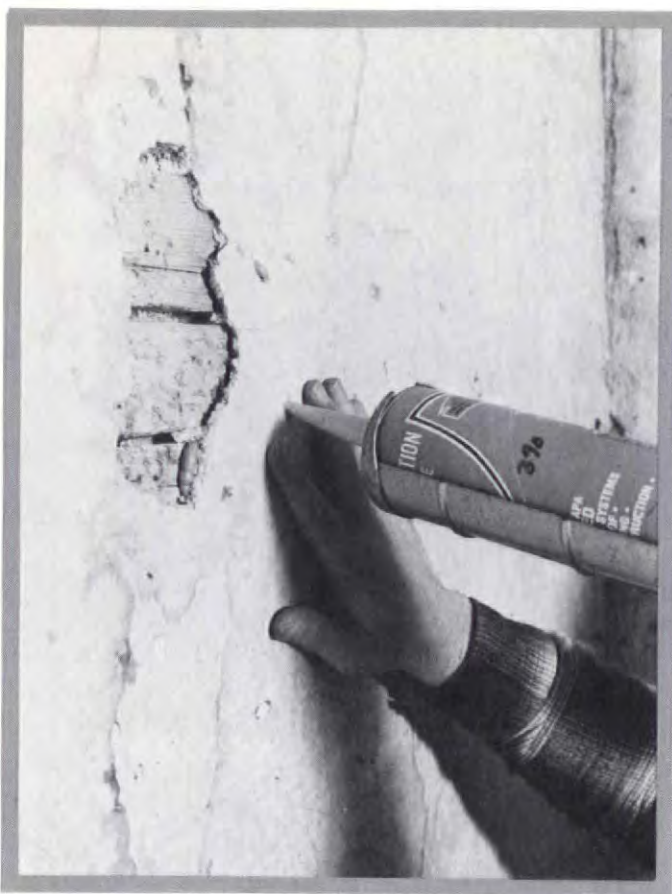
## Cleaning, Consolidating & Priming

Cleaning the space between the lath and plaster is the key to success with this technique. I use a bent wire tool and a vacuum to loosen and suck dust out through the injection holes. On walls there may be chunks of broken keys at the bottom of the loose area. These will prevent the loose plaster from moving back into place. Break the plaster open at these areas to clean out the debris.

To prepare for gluing the plaster back in place,







**Injecting the construction adhesive through the face of the plaster.**

have ½" plywood as big as the patch area and enough 1x2 wood braces on hand.

Next, prepare the adhesive. The adhesives I use most come in standard caulking-gun cartridges. Trim the tip so it just fits in the wood-lath holes. When injecting through plaster, trim the tip just slightly larger to make a tighter seal with the plaster.

Some adhesives have a liquid primer that can be squirted into the holes with an oven baster. This pre-wets the dry lath and porous plaster, and results in a better bond. If the adhesive is water-based and has no primer, it's a good idea to pre-wet both the plaster surface and the substrate with adhesive thinned way down with water and a little denatured alcohol added as a wetting agent.

Adhesives won't stick to crumbly, water-damaged plaster. In most cases, the best solution is to remove the water-damaged areas, and patch with new plaster. But if the plaster has an irreplaceable finish that must be saved, there is a preliminary step you can take before injecting adhesives. I've had success stabilizing crumbly plaster with a product called Acryloyd B-67™, manufactured by Rohm & Haas. It's an acrylic resin that comes in dry beads. Dissolve the beads in mineral spirits to a 20% solution and brush or spray it onto the water-damaged areas. As the solvent evaporates, the resin hardens, consolidating the plaster.

## Alternative Adhesives

I agree with Mr. Leeke that the formulations we describe may not be easily accessible to the average consumer. While our formulations are designed for optimum performance, there is much room for compromise within this system. However, understanding the *principles* is a necessary prerequisite to attempts to formulate adhesives by using more readily-available materials<sup>1</sup>. Although such home-made formulations will sacrifice performance, with reasonable care, an acceptable product can be formulated.

The Rhoplex™ emulsions we use cannot be purchased outright by consumers. But they are the basis for both masonry bonding agents and adhesive caulks. Acryl-60 by Thoroseal<sup>2</sup> is one product that is an acceptable substitute, and it's available at most masonry supply houses. As for adjusting viscosity, remember that it is better to fill a thin material than to dilute a thick one. By reducing filler, the product becomes more expensive (more adhesive), and less apt to fill voids. Using an unfilled version of the adhesive with Cab-O-Sil<sup>3</sup> to adjust viscosity would often provide adequate adhesion. If the plaster can be pushed up to mate with the lath, the filler becomes less critical to the adhesive's function.

In adapting our procedures, success would be more likely with an aqueous-emulsion adhesive than with a solvent-based system. I'm certain that many other proprietary acrylic or PVA products used in a similar fashion, with a variety of bulking agents, could perform under most circumstances. But I cannot recommend any one product which, by itself, meets all of the necessary criteria.

Andrew Ladygo  
Architectural Conservator  
Society for the Preservation  
of New England Antiquities

1. For a full technical discussion of the principles, see The Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology, Vol. XII, No. 2. A photostat of the article will be provided by SPNEA to those interested. Write to Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 141 Cambridge Street, Dept. OHJ, Boston, Mass. 02114.

2. Thoro System Products, 7800 N.W. 38th Street, Dept. OHJ, Miami, Fla. 33166.

3. Cabot Stains, 1 Union Street, Dept. OHJ, Boston, Mass. 02108.

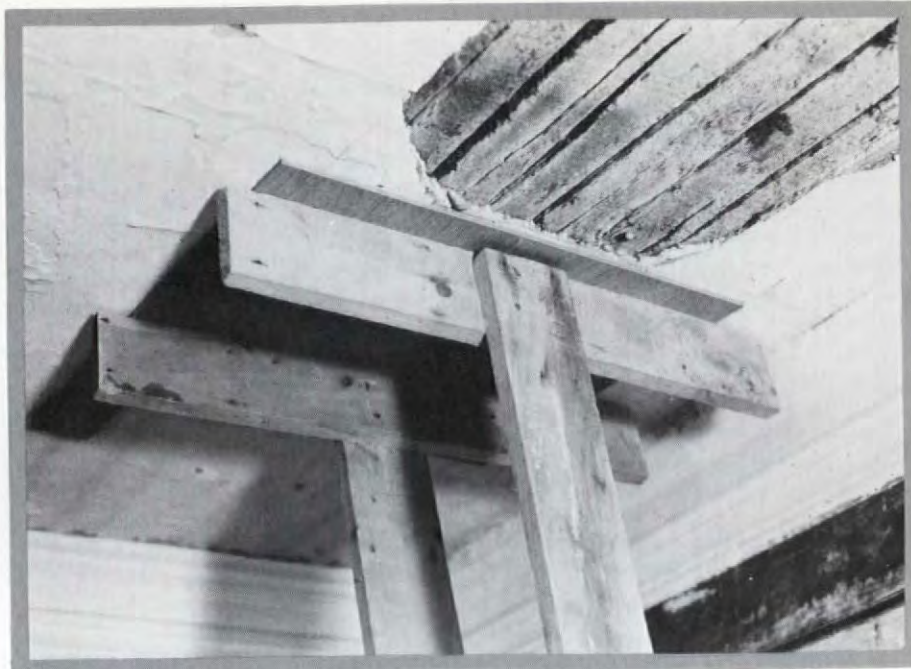
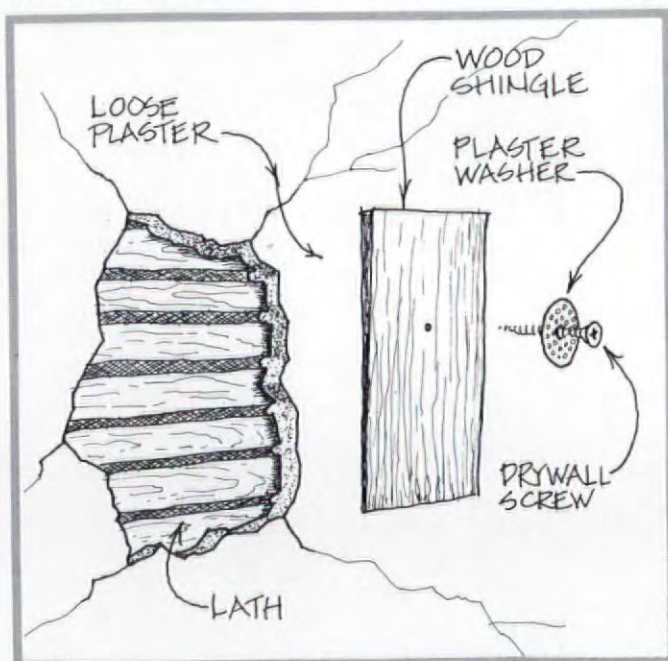


## Injecting Adhesives

Because you'll be gunning the adhesive "blind" into each hole, it's difficult to gauge the the flow of adhesive when injecting. Judge the amount that comes out with each squeeze of the handle by testing beforehand. While injecting, give the adhesive enough time to flow into the space between plaster and lath, but move quickly between holes. Stop applying adhesive if you feel back pressure on the trigger of the caulking gun — excessive adhesive will make it difficult to press the plaster back into place, and may over-stress the plaster.

Next, set the plywood in place. Thick plaster that will not move back into place completely will need to have the force of the ply spread out with a layer of  $\frac{1}{2}$ " foam carpet pad between the ply and the plaster. Protect the ply or pad with wax paper and hold it in place against the patch area initially with a T-brace. Spring additional braces into place to press the plaster back against the lath. If braces are impractical, draw the plaster against the lath with screws driven through washers and wood shingles.

As the plaster is pressed back into place, excess adhesive will squeeze out through the injection holes and between the laths, thereby binding to an even greater surface area. When the adhesive has set, remove the ply. If the ply is stuck to the plaster, twist it sideways (in the same plane as the plaster surface) to break the bond.



**T-braces are wedged against the plaster to press it into place. Note the excess adhesive squeezing out.**



**Additional braces are required to apply pressure to a large area of loose plaster.**





# Materials

## Construction Adhesives:

### Water-based

You can tell if the adhesive is water-based because the label will almost always mention water cleanup. The label will also tell you they are made of "acrylic," "latex," or "polymer emulsion."

I use a water-based adhesive like "Big Stick" Construction Adhesive (by DAP) because it can be thinned down to make a primer for itself that is sure to be compatible. The primer formula I use is as follows:

Four parts (by volume) tap water  
Two parts denatured ethyl alcohol  
One part water-based adhesive

Mix the adhesive with one of the four parts of water first, then mix in the rest. The alcohol acts as a wetting agent, making the primer spread out and soak into the dry, dusty wood lath and plaster surfaces better than water alone.

I squirt primer into the injection holes and let it soak in and begin to set for about an hour or until it starts to get tacky. This consolidates and seals the dry, dusty surfaces, so the adhesive will stick better.

### Solvent-based

I have tried several of these readily-available, solvent-based adhesives for re-attaching loose or bowed plaster. They may not work well with porous plaster or when the space between lath and plaster is extremely dirty (experiment to see if they will work in your situation). Pre-wetting the surfaces would help, but compatible solvents are too hazardous. They do work with clean, hard plasters that can be moved back into place against the lath. The best types for this use have a thin consistency and long "skin-over" or open time and are "gap filling."

Supplier of adhesives used by SPNEA:

Conservation Materials, Ltd.  
att: Doug Adams  
P.O. Box 2884  
Sparks, Nevada 89432  
(702) 331-0582

Acryloyd B-67™ and Rhoplex™ resins are special SPNEA adhesives supplied by Rohm & Haas.

But to order these products from Conservation Materials, you must first be a member of:

American Institute for  
Conservation  
3545 Williamsburg Lane, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20008  
(202) 364-1036  
There is a \$55 membership fee.

## For More Information

Morgan W. Phillips  
SPNEA  
141 Cambridge Street  
Boston, Mass. 02114

The following societies sponsor plaster workshops:

The Preservation Institute for  
the Building Crafts  
Main Street P.O. Box 1777  
Windsor, Vermont 05089  
(802) 674-6752

Greater Portland Landmarks  
165 State Street  
Portland, Maine 04101  
(207) 774-5561

Campbell Center for Historic  
Preservation Studies  
P.O. Box 66  
Mount Carroll, Illinois 61053  
(815) 244-1173

Eastfield Village  
Box 145 R.D.  
East Nassau, N.Y. 12062  
(518) 766-2422

Association for Preservation  
Technology  
Box 2487, Stn. D  
Ottawa, Ont., Canada K1P5W6  
(613) 238-1972

A.P.T. offers training courses at their annual meeting, and by region throughout the year; call for current schedule.

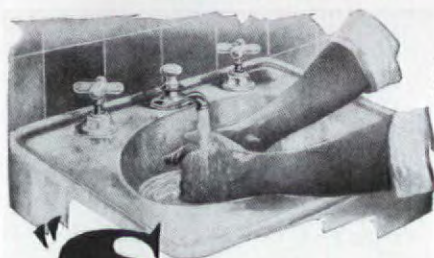
*Although John Leeke's methods were adapted from those used by SPNEA, his choice of materials is not necessarily endorsed by them. Thanks to Andrew Ladygo of SPNEA for his help.*



# POST-VICTORIAN

## • I • N • T • E • R • I • O • R • S •

# Bathrooms



**S**ince we are told that cleanliness comes next to godliness ... Evidently we are nearer to sal-

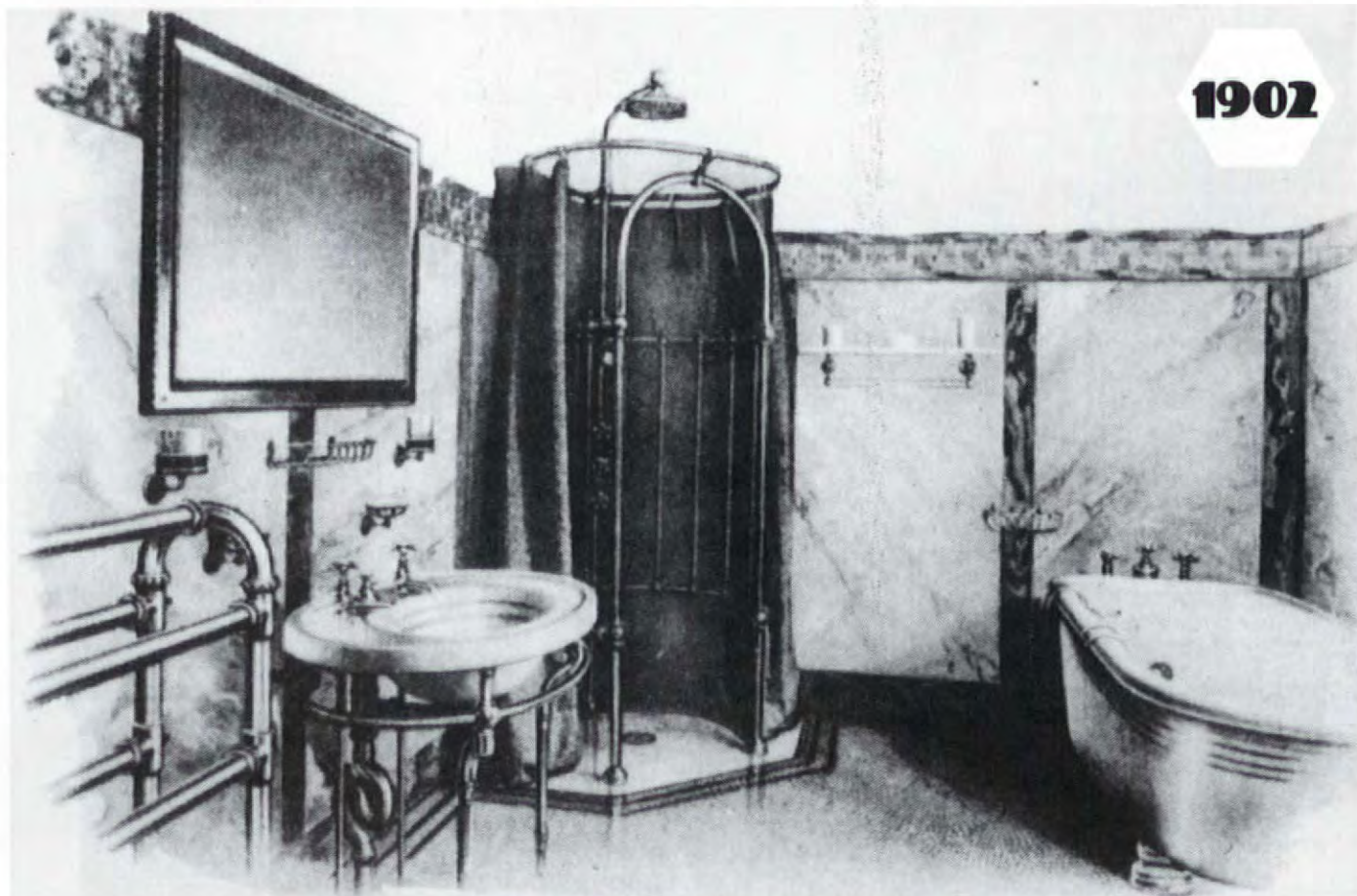
vation, for nowadays the bathroom can really be said to be ubiquitous." Such was Darcy Braddell's decree in the 1939 *Book of the Modern House*, and we must be not much nearer salvation, as the modern American bathroom hasn't changed much since then.

The modern bathroom was invented in this post-Victorian era. In its time, it was the focal point and manifestation of the emerging

concern with germs and their whereabouts. This is truly an American room, without ties to a feudal past. Unprecedented conveniences were being designed, installed in new houses, and lived with for the first time.

Bedrooms and the ends of hallways were converted to bathrooms as soon as the fixtures became available. So don't feel bad about bringing to your 1843 Gothic

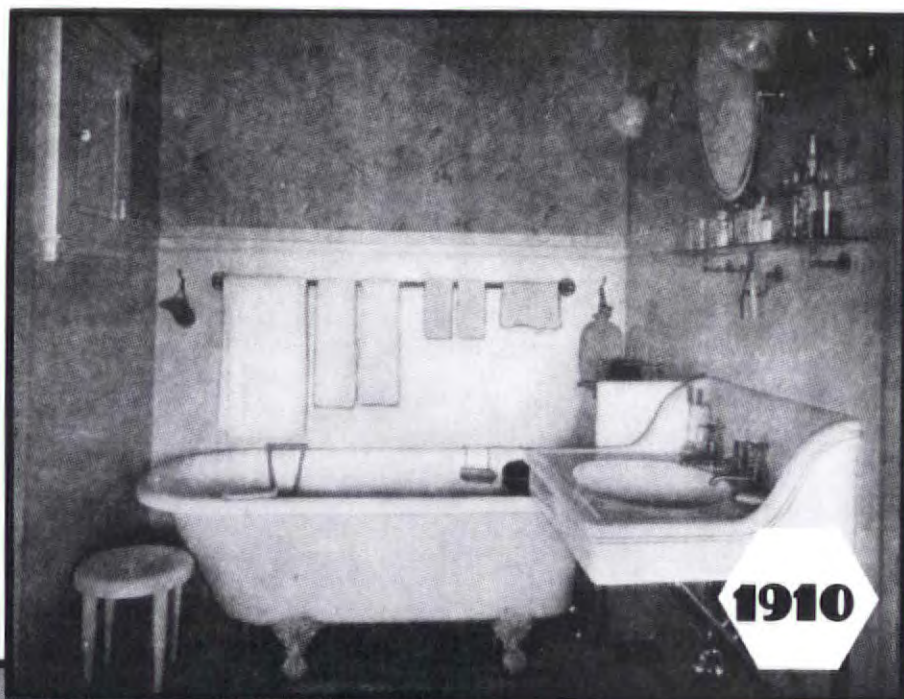
**1902**





Revival the bathroom it would have sported in 1923. No sensible person would wish a Victorian bathroom on a friend.

The 1930 jurors of an awards competition for better bathroom design advised, "It is not extravagant or wasteful, it is in fact an economic essential to provide every home with such sanitation conveniences and luxuries as circumstances will justify. Sanitation provision in the home constitutes a constant, direct, daily guidance toward the preservation of health and happiness — than which there are no greater needs or blessings." Indeed.



materials newly used in this room: cast iron, marble, and ceramic tile.

With the range of materials thus narrowed and the basic forms of the three essential fixtures yet to explore, fixtures in the first quarter of this century remained utilitarian in design.

**T**he illustration at left shows the transition from the excessive ornamentation popular in the Victorian era to the simpler, more utilitarian style of the post-Victorian bath. Note the separately housed water closet; the porcelain-enamelled iron tub on legs; the simple baluster-type sink legs; the tiled floor and walls. The stained-glass window is a Victorian decorative holdover, but one that fits in with the post-Victorian utilitarian ideal — it combines good lighting with privacy.

By 1900, one-piece basins in whiteware or glazed fireclay were being produced. Complete with flat tops and recesses for soap, these units were left exposed for easier cleaning. "The pedestal washbasin, already available in cast iron ('nicely bronzed or japanned') came out in fireclay: neat in appearance and easy to clean, though the latter advantage was often lost by over ornamentation," writes bathroom

## FIXTURE HISTORY

The advancement from water closets and washbasins to flush toilets and bathroom sinks tells of the evolution of the bathroom to its unique status as industrial art. The history of plumbing manufacture is apparent in the changes in the three major fixtures: water closet or toilet, lavatory or basin or sink, and the bathtub or tub/shower

combination.

Even though, by the turn of the century, the washstand and tub were in a fixed position (because they were plumbed), they were still treated as furniture, and subject to similar ornamentation. In the physical transition and social adjustment to indoor plumbing, the fixtures got more "built in" and compact. What really changed the look of the bathroom were the ma-

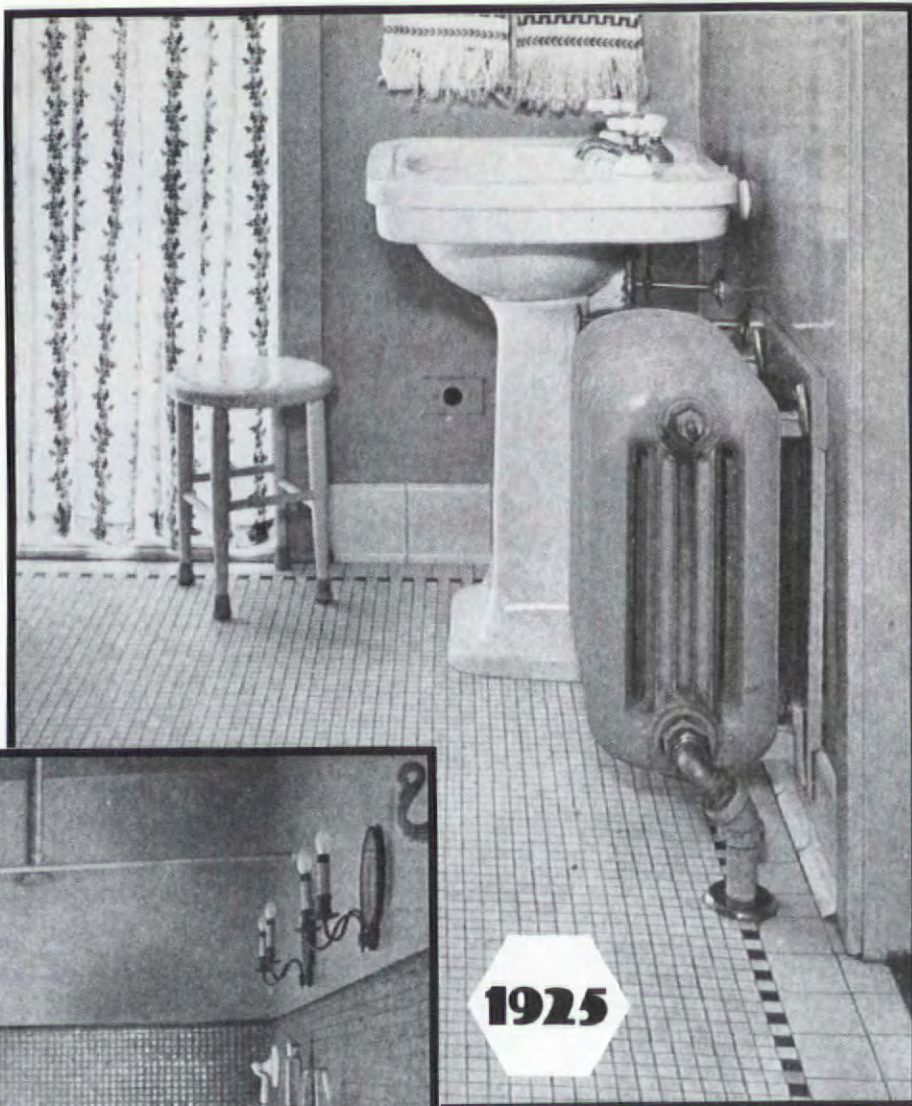


historian Lawrence Wright.<sup>1</sup>

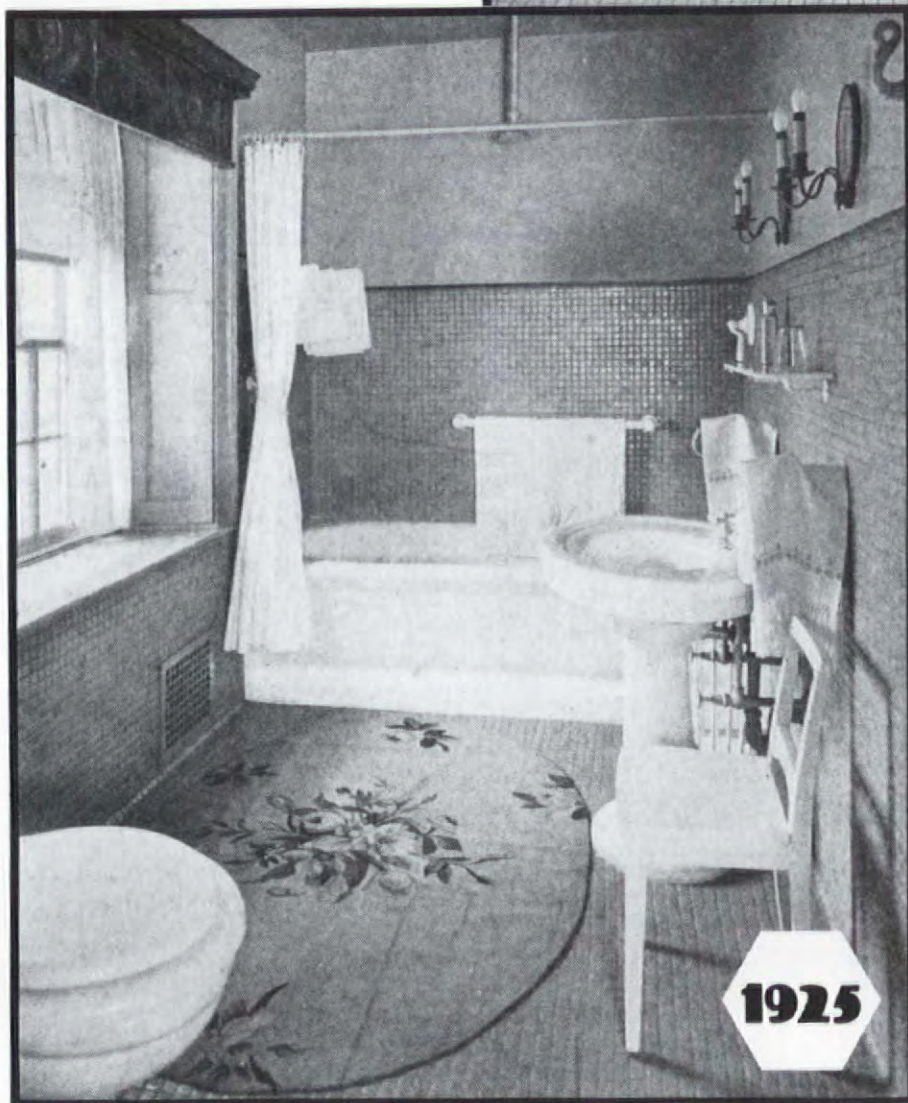
A variety of basins became available, distinguished by their details. A knob in the basin slab, used to operate the waste drain, was preferred over the plug-on-a-chain method. Attention was paid to taps and faucets: from some 1927 ad copy: "Washing under two faucets is hardly modern."

Planned in tandem with the lavatory was the medicine cabinet, and a sometimes impressive array of accessories: glass shelves, towel rails, toothbrush and mug holders, sponge and soap bowls.

One improvement, which proved to be much quieter than the overhead tank, was the syphon jet closet. It was during this period that water closets were first incorporated into the washroom. In the Victorian era, a water closet was



**1925**



**1925**

just that — it was in a separate chamber away from the washroom. The illustration on page 57 shows the introduction of the toilet to the modern bathroom. It still stands alone in a closet, but the closet is located in the washroom.

The first hot running water ran into a simple tub made of sheet metal. In 1855, the bathroom was simple and functional, not a place fit for ornamental display ... the *plumbing* was too frankly displayed! By 1880 there was some interest in bathroom decoration, and by then, new houses, especially in cities, were being designed with bathrooms. These '80s washrooms contained the elaborate woodwork of the period, and equally ornate plumbing fittings.

Eventually, however, the claw-and-ball-foot tub gave way to the



built-in bath because the latter was easier to keep clean. Soon the tub was devoid of superfluous detailing, and more streamlined. By 1910, the cast-iron single-shell bath, enameled on the inside only, and either painted outside or cased in, was in quantity production at a price the middle class could afford.

The problem of perfecting the finish was solved with porcelain enamels. These are neither porcelain nor enamel, but a mixture of sand, lime, and sodium carbonate. Advertising copy of the period



(The washbasin in this illustration is supported by tubular legs with polished nickel plating. Next to it is a large heated towel rack.)

The 1927 ad copy from the Speakman Showers and Fixtures Company reads, "With the shower you use the water only once. While cleansing each pore, the fresh, sparkling sprays are also massaging muscles, quieting jaded nerves and relieving fatigue."

## ARCHITECTURE OF THE ROOM

The bathroom is architectural in character — fixtures are an integral part of the room, rather than stand-alone furnishings. The bathtub, lavatory, and water closet had to be connected to water supply and drain pipes. More attention was paid to the planning of bathrooms, as any defect in the plan would be costly to correct. Of course, the post-Victorian fondness for built-ins can also be found in space-saving linen closets, medicine cabinets, and so on.

The post-Victorian bathroom is a practical room, with an architectur-

proclaimed that, "Porcelain enameled sanitary ware possesses qualifications which makes it the logical ware to install not only from a sanitary standpoint, but from an economical one as well, as it is made in a variety of patterns, styles, sizes, etc., to suit any and all requirements." (1913)

The only serious competitor of the cast-iron tub was the fireclay bath, which was first built on a mould by hand. After 1906, some casting advancements made it possible to produce mass quantities of fireclay baths. But by 1916, the double-shell, cast-iron bath,

porcelain-enamelled inside and out, was by far the more popular model. After the First World War, "enamelled sanitary fixtures," mainly baths and washbasins, were in 4,800,000 homes.

The showerbath has been around since before the turn of the century. The combination bath and shower was proposed to be an entirely new departure in the development of modern sanitary comfort. Bathtubs could be outfitted with a ring carrying a waterproof curtain, fixed over a bath. In the illustration on page 56, the shower has its own shallow trough and waste.





al nod to durability, cleanliness, and functional beauty. Woodwork and curtains disappeared in favor of white enamel, grouted tiles, and marble tops.

More attention was given to heating: A far cry from the freezing outhouse or the tin tub before a fire, it was suggested that the bathroom be kept five degrees warmer than the rest of the house to protect the enjoyment of the morning plunge.

Tile proved to be not only a good solution to the sanitary concerns of the day, but also a valuable "home improvement." In *Hints on Bath and Kitchens*, from 1927, a successful builder explained the

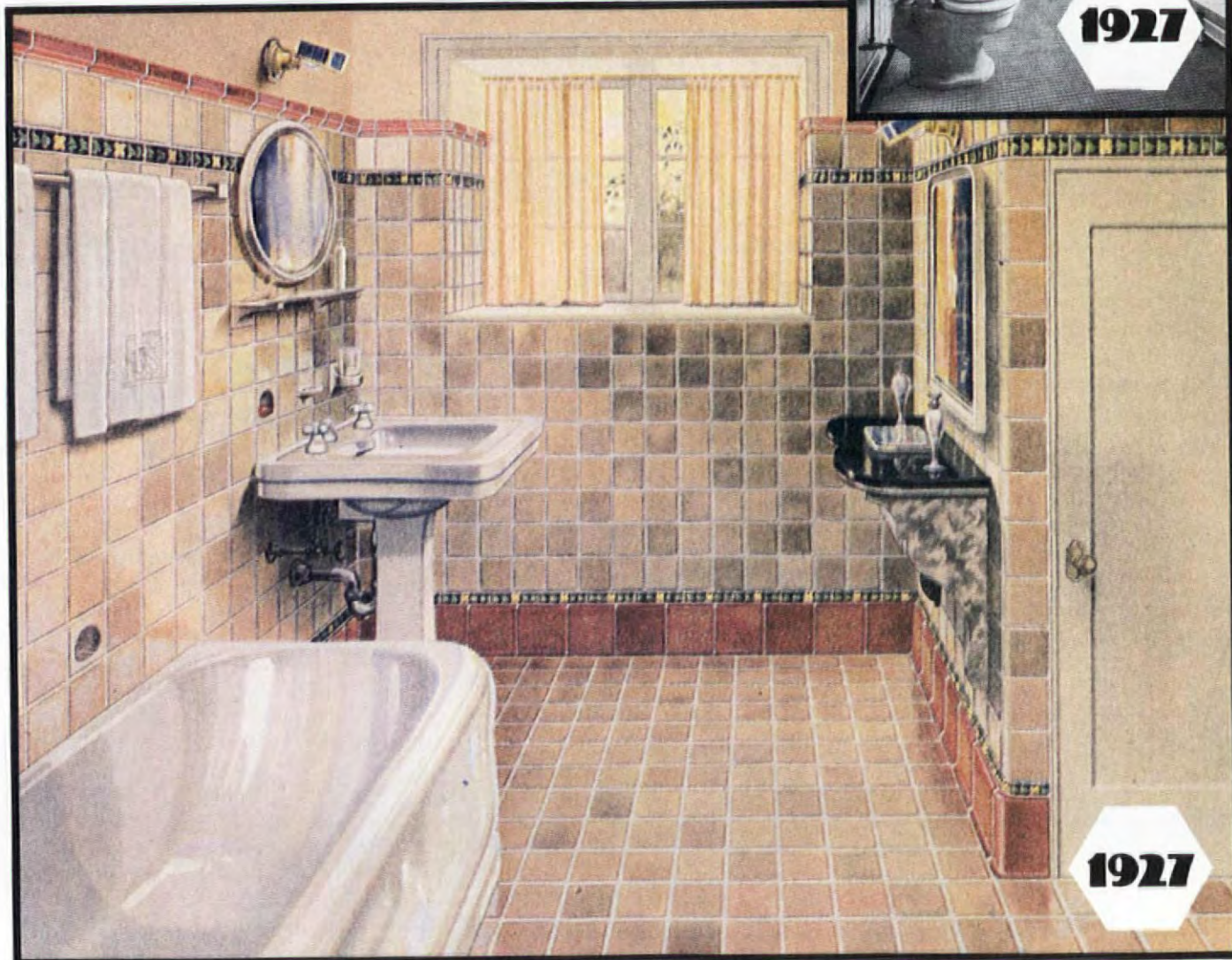
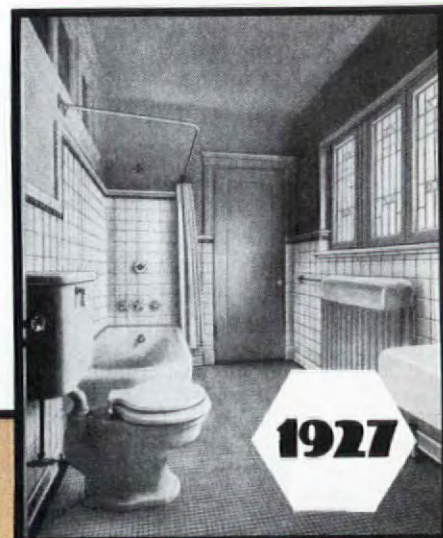
investment value of a tiled bath: "It was far easier to dispose of a house even in the middle of a block if it had a tiled bath, than to sell the corner house with ordinary painted bathrooms."

## Floors & Walls

Wood floors were common in early bathrooms. It was suggested that such a floor be heavily varnished and that one or more small scatter rugs be used as bathmats. By the 'teens, tiled floors were the most common, with white hexes most popular. Fancier homes would have unglazed tile in the center of the floor, with a glazed border of contrasting color. In the 'twenties, bathroom tile got more colorful, with two or more different colored field tiles and elaborate, contrasting borders. This whimsey was short-lived, however, as the less-

expensive white hexes were more often used because of their economy. Linoleum saw some use as a bathroom floor in the 'thirties — but it never really competed with ceramic tile.

Extensive fields of wallpaper, as in the 1910 illustration on page 57 fell out of favor with the popularity of the tile bathroom. The more tile the better: on floors, and on





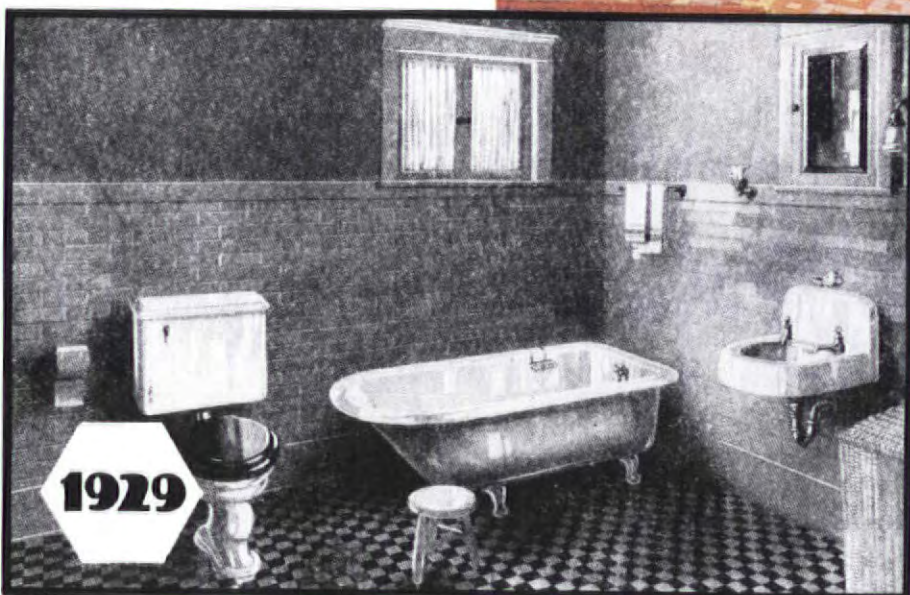


the walls up to the suggested height of 4½ feet. According to the 1923 edition of *The Home*, the ideal bathroom is "one entire-

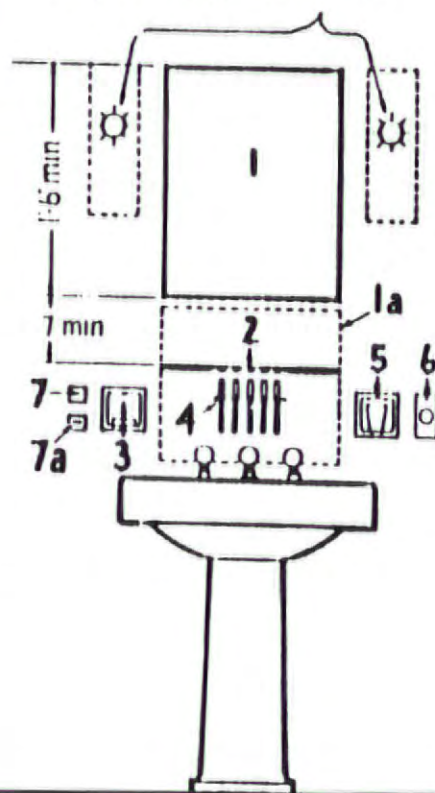
ly devoid of cracks or crevices in which dirt can lodge." The bathroom pictured on the lower half of p. 58 is just such an example. Floor, curved bases, and dado are slightly rounded, and the grout joints are kept narrow.

## Light & Color

Although the sanitary bathroom replaced heavy ornamentation with simple, functional design, there was still room for individuality. Color and lighting became decorative elements. Colored globes



If side lights use pair preferably with large area diffusers



softened the stark black and white tiles that were most common. Pastels were most popular — blues and greens especially, reminders of water. Untiled walls were usually painted with soft pastels as well, with an occasional flash of red or other primary color on trim to catch your attention. Lighting was designed to serve a purpose, of course. Balanced light around the sink and medicine cabinet was of great concern. It was suggested that a window be to one side of

the sink; if two lights were used by the mirror, then one on each side; if one, it should go directly over the mirror.

1. For more information, get hold of a copy of *Clean & Decent: The Fascinating History of the Bathroom and The Water Closet and of Sundry Habits, Fashions, and Accessories of the Toilet Principally in Great Britain, France and America*, by Lawrence Wright, M.A., B. Arch., A.R.I.B.A.

— Bekka Lindstrom



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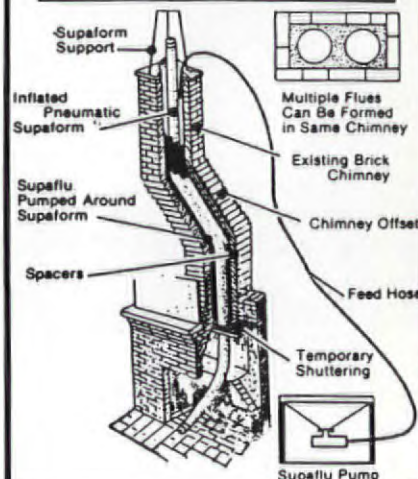


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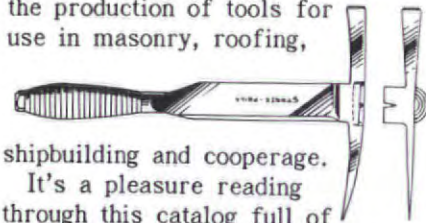


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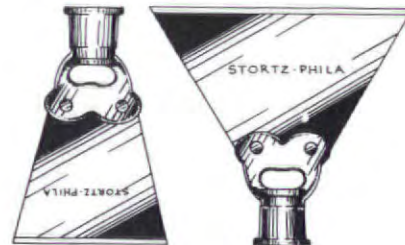
It's a pleasure reading through this catalog full of old style tools for hand use. There are steel slickers and sledrunners, star drills and highway edgers, an



asparagus knife and a ham hook, paint scrapers of many shapes and sizes and a large selection of roofing tools, including slater's tools. They also carry ship-building tools, a gaff hook, and two kinds of oyster knives.

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according to use. Check your local tool house for specific tools, or for information on distributors call (215) 627-3855. For a catalog send \$2 to John Stortz & Son, Inc., 210 Vine St., Philadelphia, PA 19106.



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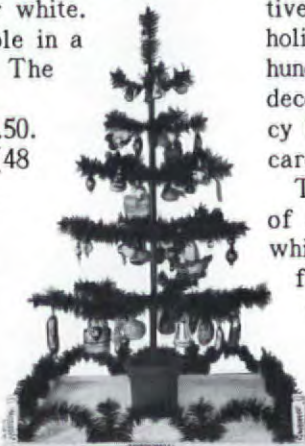
small hanging cupboard, \$60. The catalog also includes books, lanterns and sconces, miniatures, toys, sampler kits and more. Send \$1 for a catalog to Shaker Workshops, Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 1028, Concord, MA 01742.

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For information, call (215) 965-9181. For a catalog, send \$2 for each catalog ordered to Gerlachs of Lecha, Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 213, Emmaus, PA 18049. Specify which catalog you want: Christmas 1987 or Nostalgic Crafts.



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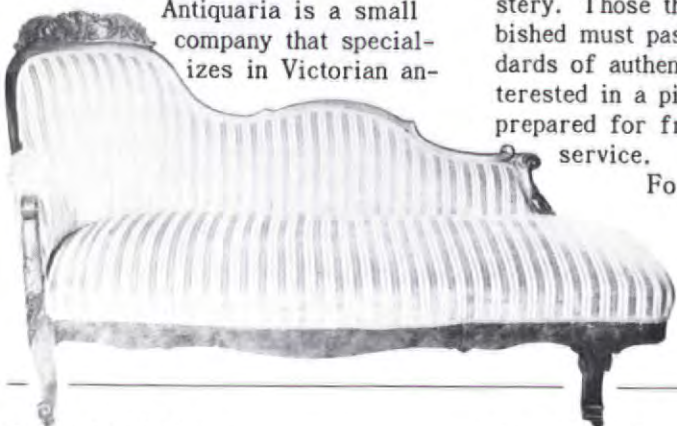
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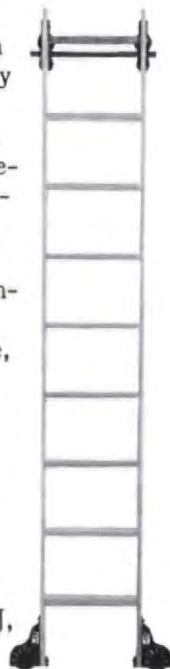
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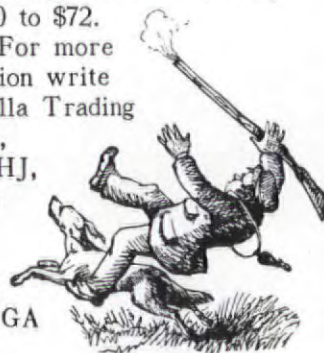
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## Oops!

In the September/October issue the prices given for Paintability Stencils were wholesale prices. Retail prices for the stencil kits range from \$40 to \$72.

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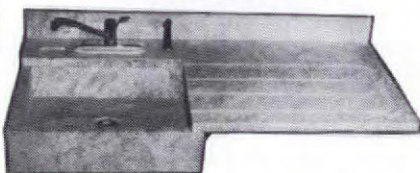


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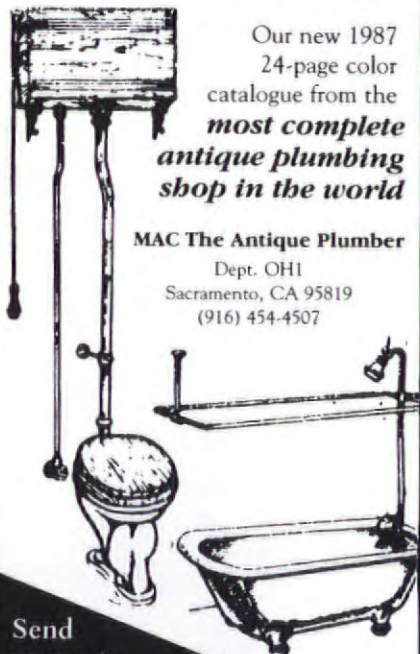
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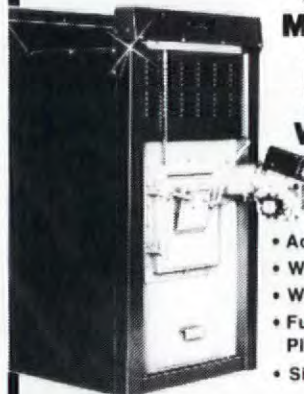
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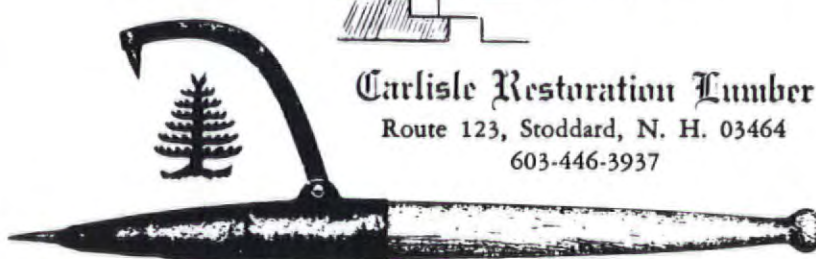
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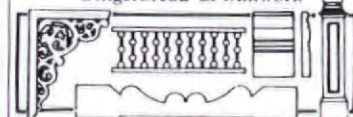
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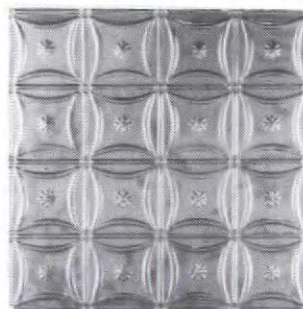
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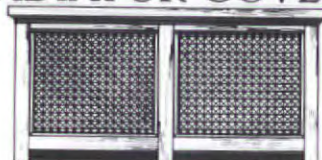


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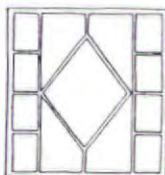
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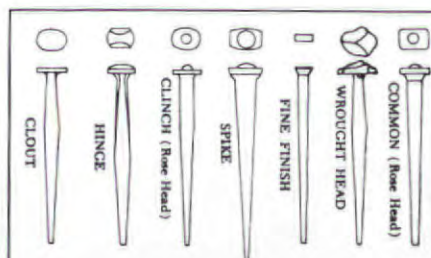
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**VINELAND, NJ** — Vineland's first Post Office, built 1858. Illustrious history. 2700-sq.ft., 2-story frame; 9 rooms (4 BR), 2 bath; 2-bedroom attic; basement; garage, tool shed on .7 acre. 2 FP, 2 staircases, random-width pine flooring (newly finished). New plumbing & kitchen appliances. 40 miles south of Philadelphia. \$95,000. (609) 696-0484.

**JONESBORO, TN** — A fine restored home featuring log (1790s) & frame (1840s & 1980s) construction. 2700 sq.ft. of quality materials and craftsmanship provide beauty and comfort as well as low maintenance. Greenhouse, passive solar sunrooms, stained glass, hardwood floors, wallpaper, & much more. \$59,000. Colin F. Robertson, Rt. 6, Jonesboro, TN 37659. (615) 753-5473.



**WESTCHESTER COUNTY, HARRISON, NY** — Circa-1757 farmhouse near historical battle of White Plains site. Many original beams & wide-plank flooring, brand-new kitchen & bath, outbuilding, studio, root cellar, approx. one acre. 6 rooms, 2 baths, 2-car garage. \$360,000. Nelson-Vrooman Assoc., (914) 682-9494. PHOTO



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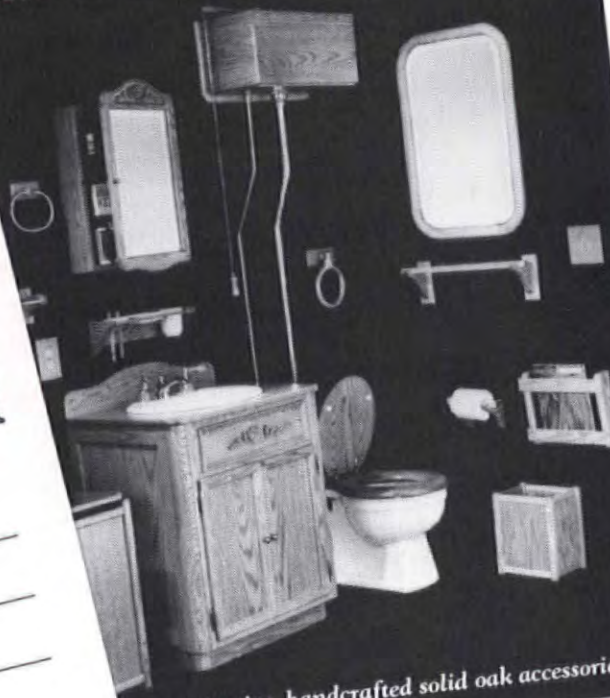
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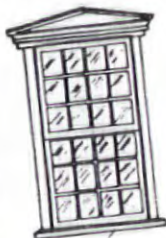
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The Old-House Journal

## THE EMPORIUM

**BUCKSPORT, ME** — Licensed, operating B&B and restaurant on Penobscot River. Circa 1797, colonial-style, 6000-sq-ft. home, wedding-ring arches, other architectural features. Excellent location 45 min. from Bar Harbor, Belfast, & Ellsworth. 7 BR, 3 BA, 4-zone baseboard. Hot-water, oil, & wood heat, insulated. Walk to schools, shopping. Turnkey operation. Room for expansion, plans approved. \$160,000. Send SASE for details to A. Stone, Box 1657, Bucksport, ME 04416.

**WOODSTOWN, NJ** — Nestled in the beautiful farmland of Salem County, this historic home known as "Morgan's Folly" was built in 1804. Restored, spacious, 5 bedrooms, brick, 1-1/2 acres, 4 fireplaces, excellent ... all describe this lovely, large Georgian colonial home. Fox & Lazo, Inc. Trudi Hathaway, (609) 769-1241.

### MEETINGS & EVENTS

**JACKSONVILLE XMAS ANTIQUES SHOW**, Civic Center, Jacksonville, FL, December 4-6. For further information, contact Robert W. Armacost, 1706 Park Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21217. (301) 383-9380.



**REHAB FAIR NORTHEAST**, November 7 & 8, in Albany, NY. Major exhibition for quality products & services for rehabilitation and maintenance of older buildings. Lectures, workshops, films. For exhibitor & visitor information, contact Rehab Fair Coordinator, Historic Albany Foundation, 44 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12206. (518) 463-0622.

**ANTIQUE EXHIBIT & SALE** to showcase whaling mansion in New Bedford: 18 rooms filled w/ fine antiques, Persian rugs, floral arrangements. Friday, Dec. 4, champagne preview, 6-8 PM, \$15 admission. Dec. 5-11, 11 AM to 5 PM, \$4 admission. Free parking available. The Rotch-Jones-Duff House & Garden Museum, 396 County Street, New Bedford, MA 02740. (617) 997-1401.

**XMAS CANDLELIGHT TOURS**, December 12-20, each evening from 6-9 PM; 1-9, Sundays. Belle Grove Plantation, located 1-1/2 miles south of Middletown, Virginia, on US #11. Adults, \$3; children 6-16, \$1.50. For further information, call (703) 869-2028.

**SEMINAR**, renovation/restoration of buildings, Nov. 15-18 at Colonial Williamsburg, VA. Fee, \$475. Call (800) 262-6243, ask for Engineering Information; in WI, call (800) 362-6243.

**9TH ANNUAL HOMES TOUR**, "Xmas in Lockeland Springs," a walking tour of Nashville's late-Victorian cottage residences, seasonally decorated. Sunday, December 12 til 5 PM. Tickets \$4. Contact Lockeland Springs Neighborhood Assn., PO Box 60734, Nashville, TN 37206. (615) 226-0219.

**21ST ANNUAL MILL HILL XMAS HOUSE TOUR** in historic Trenton, NJ, December 5. A sampling of 25 homes and historic buildings, dating from mid- to late-19th century, in varying stages of restoration, will be open from noon to 5 PM. Tickets \$5. Contact Old Mill Hill Society, 241 Mercer Street, Trenton, NJ 08611. (609) 392-2642.



**3RD ANNUAL VICTORIAN HOME TOUR & holiday boutique**. Recapture the magic of an 1889 Xmas at Heritage Park Bed & Breakfast Inn. Tours by Victorian costumed chambermaid; unusual gift ideas; antiques & collectibles. December 1 thru 23, by reservation, \$10 per person. Contact B&B at 2470 Heritage Park Row, San Diego, CA 92110. (619) 295-7088.

### WANTED

**COLLECTOR** interested in purchasing furniture mfg. by Hermann Miller Co., especially pieces by Charles Eames, George Nelson, Isamu Noguchi. Also glassware, china, wire wall sculptures, furniture catalogs, and design magazines from 1945-59. (301) 699-9248 or (202) 667-0246 after 6 PM.

**PLEASE HELP ME FIND** my "Halloween House." I want a large, dark, eerie, run-down Victorian (like "The Munsters") — perfect if near cemetery. Original features intact if possible. One or more acres, NY area preferred. Low to moderate price range. Marie Mansi, 11 Robinwood Drive, Mastic Beach, NY 11951.

**VINTAGE CLOTHING, SHOES, HATS** from early 1800s to 1920s. Please send photo, description, & price to Elizabeth Enarson, 601 4th Avenue SW, Puyallup, WA 98371.

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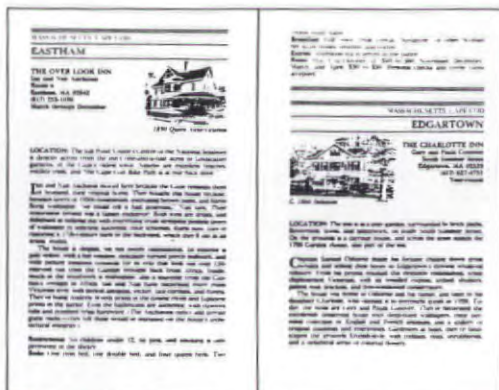
**F**rom The Old-House Journal, now there's an Inns Guide that connects you with a network of true old-house people. All of the listees in our book are subscribers to OHJ — and have a special interest in restoration.

Readers often tell us that they stay at restored inns to get ideas for their own houses, to see good period interiors — and to take a morale-boosting break from their messy, half-finished projects! Most of the writeups are illustrated, and every entry has the date of construction and

style of the building. So you can choose your architecture as well as your breakfast!

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## BUILDING COMPONENTS

**1. Traditional Wood Columns** — Wood columns from 4" to 50" dia. up to 40 ft. long. Matching pilasters and 6 styles of capitals. Ventilated aluminum plinth and column bases; load-bearing capacity of 22,000 lb. Custom work done. Free catalog. **Schwerd's**.

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**104. Rumford Fireplaces** — All-masonry classic Rumford fireplace is shallow to reflect more heat into room; throat is streamlined for heat efficiency. Can be used to upgrade old fireplaces, or for new construction. Free brochure. **Flue Works**.

**113. Chimney Liner** — System seals, relines, and rebuilds chimneys from inside out with poured refractory materials. Especially effective for chimneys with bends and offsets. Free brochure. **National Supafly Systems**.

**215. Moisture Vents** — Small, screened metal louvers, 1" to 6" dia., release moisture trapped in walls, cornices, soffits, etc. Just drill holes and press in place. Free literature. **Midget Louver**.

**228. Marble Mantels** — Reproduction marble mantels from all periods. Made from pulverized quarried marble, cast from moulds made directly from antique originals. Complete catalog. **Heritage Mantels**. \$3.

**233. Chimney Covers** — Keep rain and birds out of your chimney with a clamp-on aluminum chimney cover that's custom-made to your dimensions. Free flyer. **Hy-C Company**.

**236. Snow Guards** — Beautiful and practical: Cast-bronze eagle snow guards prevent avalanches of snow and ice from sliding off slate roofs. Solid copper straps. Free brochure. **Mullane Co.**

**242. Classic Columns** — For porches and pure decoration: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns sculpted from Ponderosa pine with exquisite craftsmanship. Many sizes and shapes; custom work available. Complete catalog. **Chadsworth, Inc.** \$1.

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## DECORATIVE MATERIALS

**20. Tin Ceilings** — 21 Patterns of stamped metal ceiling produced from original dies. 10 styles of cornice mouldings also available. Installation can be do-it-yourself. Shipped anywhere. Brochure. **AA Abbingdon**. \$1.

**24. Floor Registers** — Complete line of solid

brass and cast iron registers beautifully made from 19th and early 20th century originals. Send for detailed catalog. **Register**. \$1.

**27. Victorian Roomset Wallpapers** — A complete collection of Victorian wallpapers that you can combine in infinite variations. Color catalog shows 7 roomsets including: Neo-Grec; Anglo-Japanese; Morris; Aesthetic Movement. **Bradbury & Bradbury**. \$8.

**40. Documentary Papers & Fabrics** — A new collection of fabrics and wallpapers, based on originals found in America's great historic houses. Available through interior designers and fine shops. Color brochure. **Richard E. Thibaut**. \$1.

**47. Tin Ceilings** — 18 patterns of tin ceilings ideal for Victorian homes and commercial interiors. Patterns from Victorian to Art Deco. Comes in 2-ft. x 8-ft. sheets; cornices in 4-ft. lengths. Illustrated brochure. **Chelsea Decorative Metal**. \$1.

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**111. Medallions & Mouldings** — Lightweight polymer medallions and cornice mouldings are based on authentic designs — but are lighter and easier to install than the plaster originals. Send for brochure. **MRA Associates**. \$1.

**128. Tin Ceilings** — Using original dies, this company produces richly ornamented metal ceilings in turn-of-the-century patterns. Includes center plates, borders, corner plates, cornice and filler plates. 72-pp. catalog. **W. F. Norman**. \$3.

**176. Architectural Gift Items** — Historic architecture on quality products: stationery, note cards, calendars, rubber stamps, posters, casual apparel, and more. Free Catalog. **Architectural Originals**.

**223. Tin Ceiling Replicas** — Exact replicas of tin ceilings available in polymer styrene. Price, weight, ease of installation, and durability make these products suitable for traditional homes. Free brochure. **Old Jefferson Tile Co.**

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**249. Ornamental Plaster** — Fabricators of fine period & custom ornament: cornices, medallions, sculpture, niches, capitals, brackets, domes. 2,300 antique moulds available. Catalog. **Felber Studios**. \$2.

## DOORS & WINDOWS

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**149. Metal Weatherstrips** — Interlocking metal weatherstripping (the permanent, professional weather seal for doors and windows) is available in stainless steel, bronze, and zinc. Also automatic door bottoms. Standard or custom sizes. Free catalog. **Accurate Metal Weather Strip Co.**

**166. Custom Doors** — Company specializes in doors of virtually any size, shape, and species of wood. To discuss your needs, simply call (516) 352-4546. **The Doormen**.

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**31. Rotted Wood Restoration** — Two-part epoxy system restores rotted wood, so you can save historically significant and hard-to-duplicate pieces. Repairs can be sawn, drilled, sanded, and painted. Free 4-p. brochure. **Abatron**.

**35. Plaster Washers** — Inexpensive plaster washers can re-secure loose plaster ceilings and walls. Save enormous plastering bills. See OHJ Oct. 1980 for application details. Starter packet of 3 doz. washers. **Charles Street Supply**. \$4.05.

**112. Paint Preparation** — Proper preparation is 75% of any paint job. New brochure tells about the 3 types of Spackle and shows proper application for each. Free. **Muralo Co.**

**154. Wood Restoration** — Three new epoxies restore rotted or damaged wood: low-viscosity penetrant encapsulates rotted fibers; resin filler flexes like natural wood; trowelable mix fills large areas. Free brochure. **Advanced Materials**.

**155. Power Tools** — Professional-quality power woodworking tools at hard-to-beat prices: 3/8" heavy-duty drill \$66; heavy-duty light-weight finishing sander \$43; belt sander \$126. Free catalog. **Beaver Tool & Supply**.

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ping. More durable than regular paint. Free brochure. **Armor Plus Coatings.**

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**237. Milk Paint** — Genuine milk paint, homemade in the traditional way, gives an authentic look to furniture, walls, and woodwork. Comes in powder form in 8 colors. Brochure & color card. **Old-Fashioned Milk Paint Co.** \$1.

**244. Window Washer** — Telescopic pole extends 12 ft., to wash 2nd floor windows and other hard-to-reach spots. \$89.95 package contains pole and all attachments. Free flyer. **CG Corp.**

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**6. Radiator Enclosures** — All-steel radiator enclosures protect walls, drapes & shades from radiator smudge; direct heat into room. Many styles & colors; baked enamel finish. Buy factory-direct. Brochures \$1 (refundable). **Monarch.** \$1.

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**42. Country Curtains** — Curtains in cotton, muslin, permanent-press, and other fabrics. Some with ruffles, others with fringe, braid, or lace trim. Also bedspreads, dust ruffles, canopy covers, and tablecloths. Free catalog. **Country Curtains.**

**52. Oak Commode Seats** — These U.S.-made commode seats are crafted from furniture-grade solid oak, hand-finished with moisture-resistant lacquer. Dark or golden oak. Other wood bathroom accessories available. Free brochure. **DeWeese Woodworking.**

**54. Victorian Ingrain Carpet** — Finest quality, all-wool, 2-ply, reversible, 3-ft.-wide ingrain carpet available in two classic 19th-century designs: Maple Leaf pattern is \$125/yd.; Geometric is \$97/yd. Send for brochure. **Family Heir-Loom Weavers.** \$1.

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**183. Radiator Enclosures** — Handcrafted hardwood radiator covers are made to order. Hide ugly radiators with traditional-looking woodwork; 50 years' experience. Free brochure. **Margate Cabinets.**

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**202. Lace & Linen Curtains** — Bavarian Cottage curtains feature charm of the old world and the easy-care of the new. Machine-washable, ready-to-hang. Runners, table cloths, bed linens, and more. Catalog \$2 (refundable). **Linen & Lace.** \$2.

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**4. Victorian Lighting Fixtures** — Authentic reproduction Victorian & turn-of-century electric and gas chandeliers and wall brackets. Solid brass with variety of glass shades. Catalog. **Victorian Lighting Works.** \$3.

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**90. Carbon Filament Bulbs** — Clear carbon-loop bulbs are perfect for 1880-1918 lighting fixtures; Mazda-style zig-zag cage filament in a straight-side bulb for 1909-1930 fixtures. Also golden twisted silk-covered cord. Free brochure. **Bradford Consultants.**

**248. Brass Lighting** — Totally original line of desk lamps, ceiling fixtures, and wall sconces — hand-made from solid American brass. Available with variety of interchangeable glass shades. Catalog. **Brasslight, Inc.** \$3.

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**30. Historic Markers** — Proclaim your home's age with a cast bronze or aluminum marker. Company manufactures plaques for National Register of Historic Places,

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**55. Historic Markers** — Custom-made plaques for indoor or outdoor use. Standard solid-bronze cast plaques, 7 in. x 10 in., are \$90 plus shipping. Other dimensions and styles available. Free brochure. **Erie Landmark.**

**59. Cupolas & Weathervanes** — Aluminum cupolas, domes, weathervanes, cornices, ornamental load-bearing columns, and balustrades in exact detail for historic buildings. Rotproof. Baked-on finishes available. Free flyer. **Campbellsville Industries.**

**181. Historical Markers** — Unconditional guarantee on bronze historical markers and plaques. Six styles of National Register plaques. Also custom casting. Free brochure. **La Haye Bronze.**

## MILLWORK & ORNAMENT

**2. Heart Pine Flooring** — Flooring cut from 200-year-old lumber. Edges and bottoms of boards remilled for easy installation, but patina of old surface remains. Also: heart-pine wainscoting, hand-hewn beams, mantels, and stair parts. Color brochure. **The Joinery.** \$5.

**7. Exterior Shutters** — White pine plantation shutters with moveable louvers. Also fixed louvers and 3 styles of raised panel shutters. Unfinished or painted in your color choice using your paint spec. Hundreds of sizes. Brochure & price list. **Shuttercraft.** \$50.

**13. Victorian Gingerbread** — Authentic Victorian millwork for interior and exterior; custom-length spandrels, porch posts, corner fans, balusters, brackets, corbels, headers, gazebos, and more. 50-p. catalog. **Vintage Wood Works.** \$2.

**15. Victorian Millwork** — One of the largest inventories of precision-milled Victorian mouldings and millwork, available in both premium and commercial grades. No minimum order; rush orders handled. Full-color catalog. **Silverton Victorian Millworks.** \$4.

**19. Victorian Gingerbread** — Large inventory of Victorian millwork for interior and exterior: gable ornaments, porch brackets, fans, turned work, wooden grilles, gingerbread, mouldings, etc. illus. catalog. **Anthony Wood Products.** \$2.

**43. Colonial Millwork** — Specialist in 18th- and 19th-century millwork: open & closed pediment doorways, Palladian windows, mortise & tenon sashes, fanlights, paneled fireplace walls, featheredge wainscot, much more. Catalog. **Architectural Components.** \$3.

**44. Victorian Millwork** — 19th-century designs in solid oak and poplar: fretwork, brackets, corbels, grilles, turnings, and gingerbread — precision manufactured so product groups fit together. Color catalog. **Cumberland Woodcraft.** \$3.75.

**91. Wide Boards** — Supplies wide pine or oak boards, ship-lapped boards, feather-edged clapboards. Will consult on and design wood flooring and panelling. Serves Maine to Maryland region. Free brochure. **Carlisle Restoration Lumber.**

**98. Non-Rotting Lattice** — Keeping porch lattice painted is a real chore. Instead, use PVC lattice. It looks like wood (no fake wood grain!), comes in 11 colors, and can be cut, nailed, and installed like wood. Free color brochure. **Cross Industries.**

**101. Shutters & Blinds** — Specializes in



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# opinion... Remuddling

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Dear OHJ,

My dad and I took these pictures of this remuddled house. (That's me in front of the steps.) Notice how they've covered the mansard roof with siding, and shrunk the two windows above the portico. The fake stone siding didn't help much either. The comparison picture is about a half of a block away. It is probably what the remuddled house used to look like. Both of these are in the same block.

From Ned & Eliza Block  
Cambridge, Mass.

P.S. If we win, send half of the money to me and half to my dad.







# Dear Old-House Lover;

**D**oes the prospect of the upcoming holidays have you feeling overwhelmed? Are you embarrassed because your friends are deciding whom to invite for a holiday feast as you're replastering your dining room?

The editors of OHJ know what you're up against. Old-house living is rewarding, but it can also be very trying. And the worst part is that not all of your loved ones understand. This year, why not show them what it's all about?

A gift subscription to OHJ serves two purposes — it gives a friend a special appreciation for their old house, and it may convince them that you're not crazy for living in and restoring an antique home.

The pages that follow contain the perfect gifts for your old-house-loving (or potential old-house-loving) friends. From the complete set of Old-House Journal Yearbooks to the all-new 1988 Old-House Journal Catalog to the right tools for stripping paint to books on period decorating, there's something for everyone, whether they're moving into their first old house or enjoying life in a completely restored home.

Thank you for your support. Happy Holidays!

All the best,

*Stricia Moore*

P.S. Do you have several old-house enthusiasts on your gift list? Save money by ordering more than one gift subscription. See the order envelope for details.



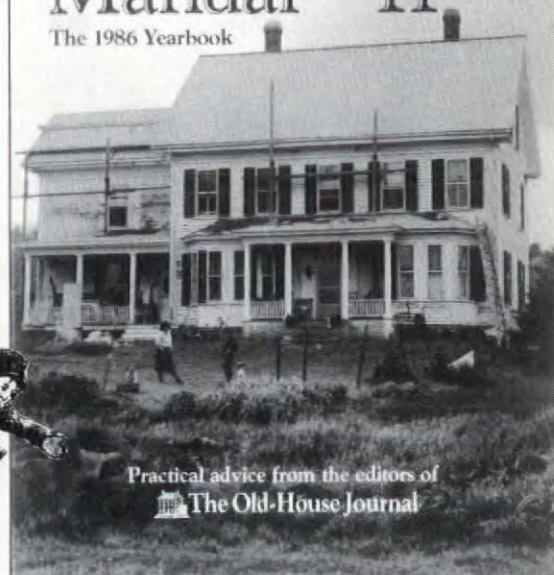


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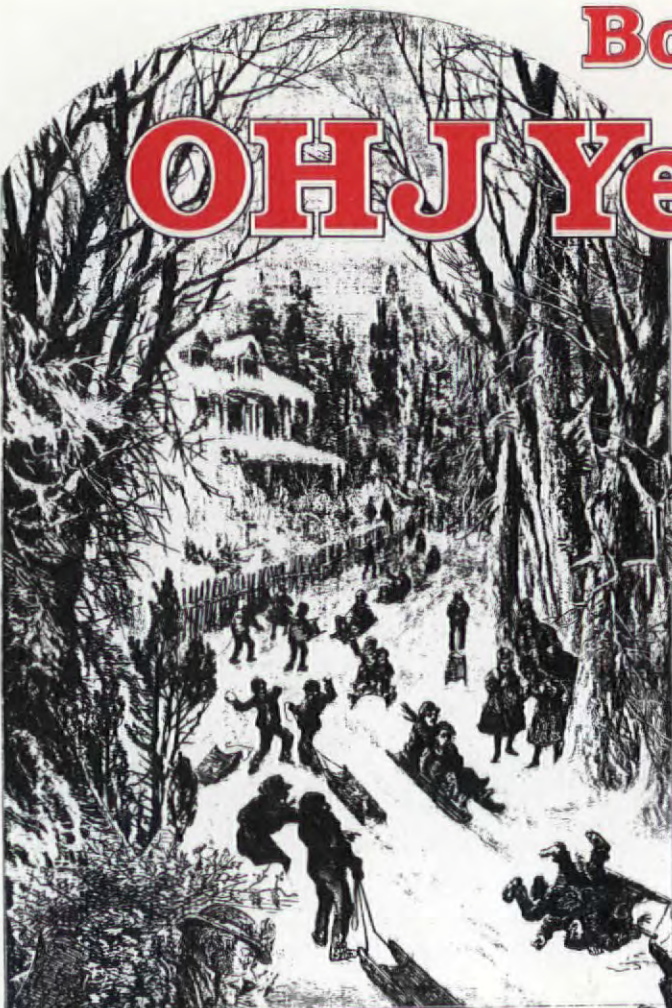
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Cast-Iron Newels

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Cast-Iron Repair: Part 2  
Dissipating Cat Odors  
A Catalog Ice Cream Parlor

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A Fancy Picket Fence  
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Beware Lead-Paint Removal  
Stacking Wood For Drying  
Wood Splice Joints

## MAY 1980

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Roofing-Slate Quarries  
A Slater's Dictionary  
Technological Trashing  
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Setting Tiles In Concrete  
Gutter Expansion Joint  
Slate-Roof Case History  
Paint-On Vapor Barriers  
Wood Filler For Exteriors

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Laying Brick Walks  
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Casting Iron Fence Parts  
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Getting Your Lead House In  
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Turkish Corners  
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Updating A Kitchen  
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Dumb-Waiters  
Fixing Old Floors: Sub-Floors

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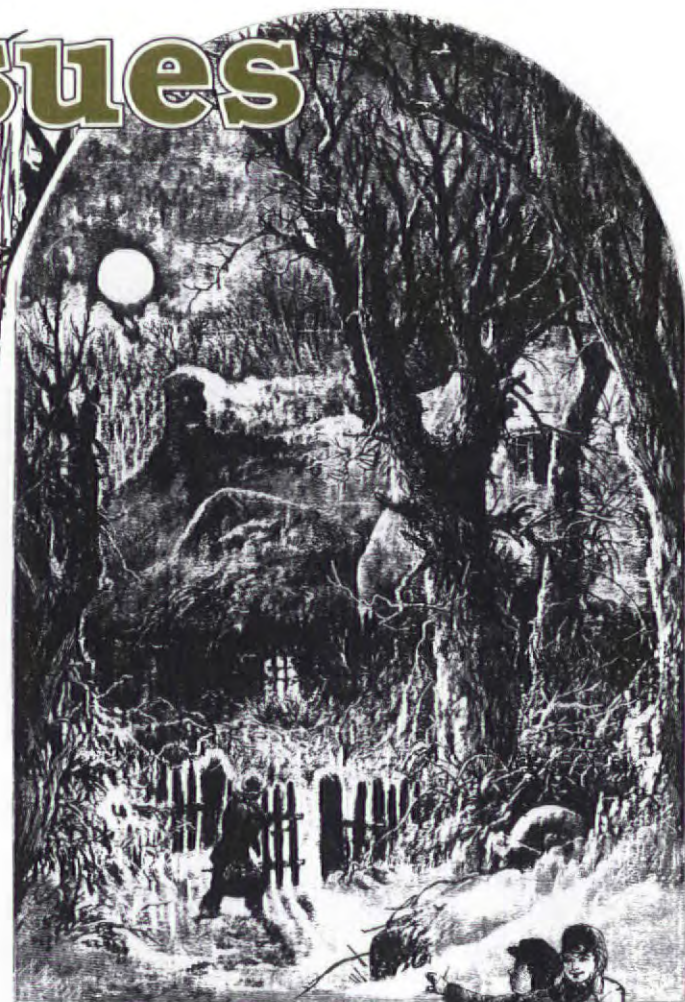
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Back To Meadows  
Fixing Old Floorboards  
Wood Staircases  
Chintz Decorating  
Italianate House Products

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Selecting Appropriate Colors  
Determining Original Colors  
Preparation for Painting  
Stripping Exterior Paint  
Causes Of Paint Failure  
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Maintaining Street Trees  
Care Of Butcher Blocks

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Victorian Picture Mouldings

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The Anglo-Japanese Style  
All About Cisterns

## DECEMBER 1983

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Restoring A Queen Anne  
The Perfect Drywall Patch  
Victorian Washstands  
Keeping Wood From Rotting  
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## JAN-FEB 1984

Rescuing A Porch Roof  
How To Match Paint Colors  
Restoring A Queen Anne  
Painting Galvanized Metal  
Using The Heat Plate  
The Prairie Style  
Victorian Porches  
Restoring A Parquet Floor

## MARCH 1984

Building A Circular Tower  
Thinking Polychrome  
Renewing Old Bathroom Tile  
Victorian Showers & Tubs  
The Queen Anne House

## APRIL 1984

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Cleaning & Polishing Brass  
Sheathing A Circular Tower  
A Pergola Sketchbook

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Patching Brownstone  
Bathroom Accessories  
(sources)

## SEPTEMBER 1982

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Formstone Removal  
Special Energy Section:  
Windows Update  
Space Pak Heat Pump  
Books On Energy

## OCTOBER 1982

Repairing Columns  
Spanish Colonial Revival  
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Marble Cleaning

## NOVEMBER 1982

Restoring Clear Finishes  
Anaglypta  
Chimney Fires  
Moving A 1905 House

## DECEMBER 1982

All About Adobe  
Stripping Paint  
Making Gingerbread Ornament  
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Adirondack Rustic Style  
Electrical Leakage  
Kitchens, 1899-1930  
Foundation Shoring  
Fixing Sagging Plaster  
Restoring An 1887 House

## MARCH 1983

Making Wood Blinds  
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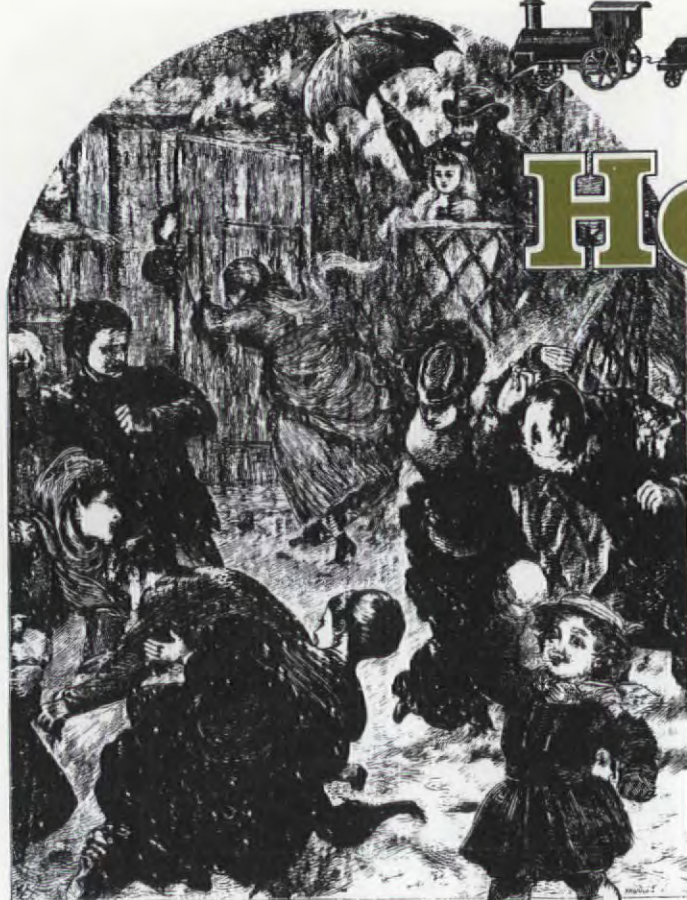
Gothic Restoration In N.Y.  
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# Heat Tools

## The Right Tools for Stripping Paint

*Heat is often the fastest, safest, and most economical strategy for removing paint. But different stripping projects require different heat tools:*

### EXTERIORS & FLAT SURFACES

The heat plate is the best tool for stripping large flat surfaces of all types: clapboards, door panels, shingles, and other flat woodwork. The heat plate's real advantage lies in its ability to loosen many layers of paint all at once. (In fact, the more layers, the better!) The heat plate is NOT recommended for removing varnish.

The heat plate has a wide-area electric coil that heats about 22 square inches of paint at a time. As the paint is heated, it begins to bubble and separate from the surface below. The bubbling paint can be easily scraped and lifted off the wood in one pass.

The heat plate creates a temperature of about 1100° F. at the paint surface. The tool draws 5½ amps at 120 volts. It weighs 1¾ pounds and has no moving parts.

### MOULDINGS & DETAILS

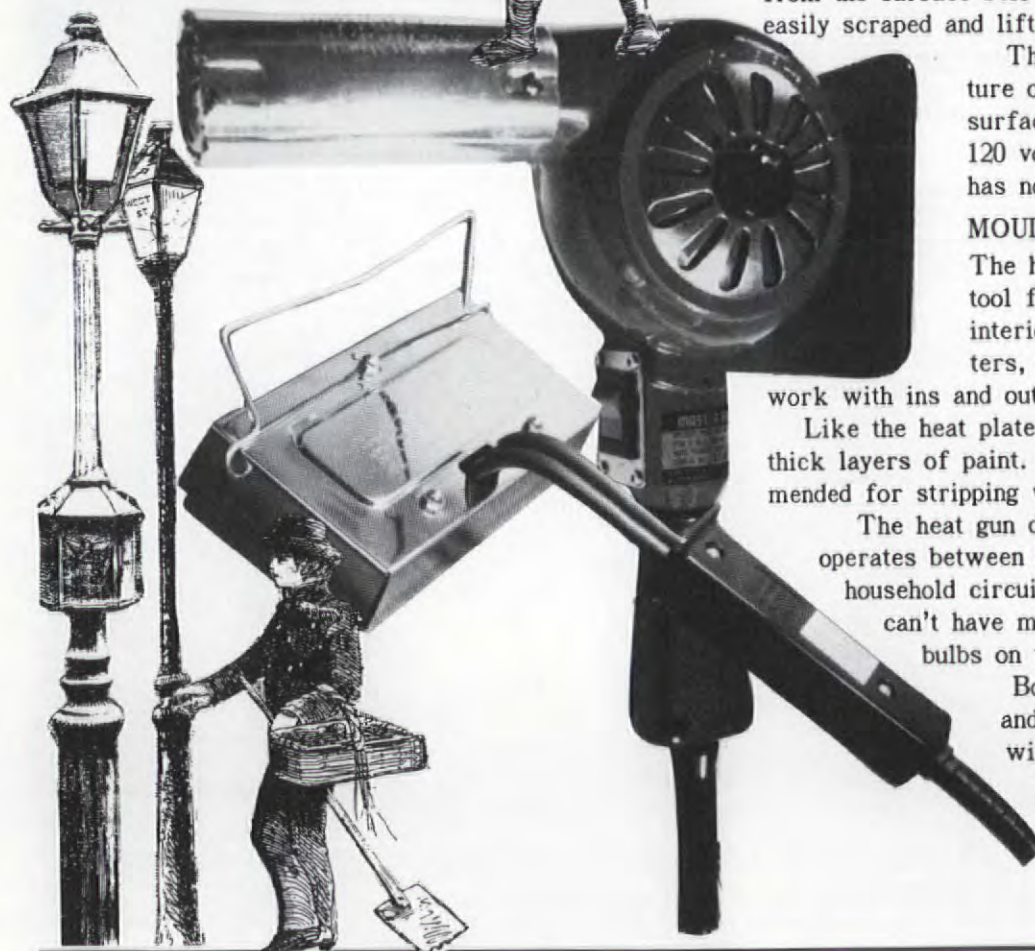
The heavy-duty heat gun is the best tool for stripping paint from moulded interior woodwork, turnings, balusters, porch trim, and any solid wood-

work with ins and outs.

Like the heat plate, the heat gun works best on thick layers of paint. The heat gun is NOT recommended for stripping varnish or clear finishes.

The heat gun draws 14 amps at 120 volts, and operates between 500 and 750° F. Because most household circuits are rated at 15 amps, you can't have much more than a couple of light bulbs on the same circuit.

Both the Master HG-501 Heat Gun and the Warner Heat Plate come with 4 pages of technical data including information on lead paint hazards. OHJ is the only retailer of heat tools to provide detailed information on the threat posed by lead paint.

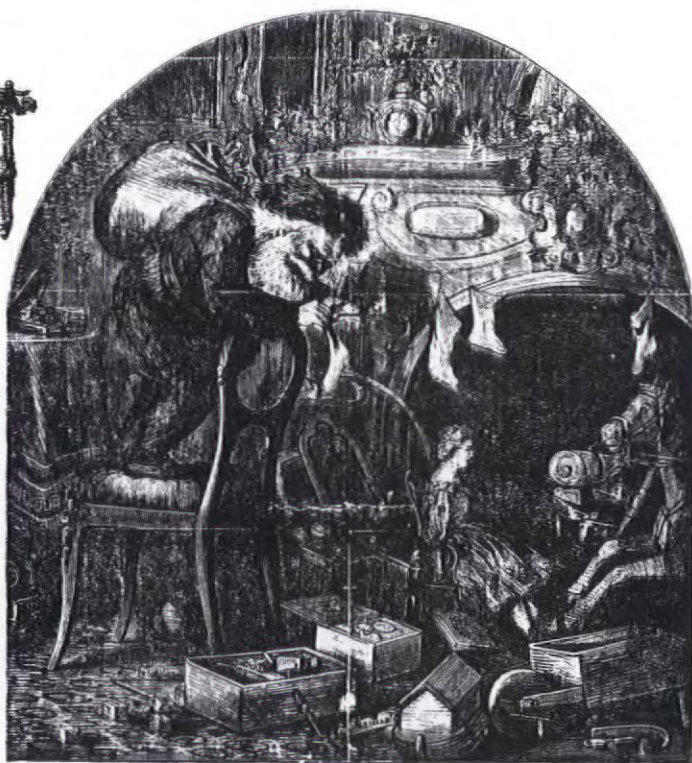
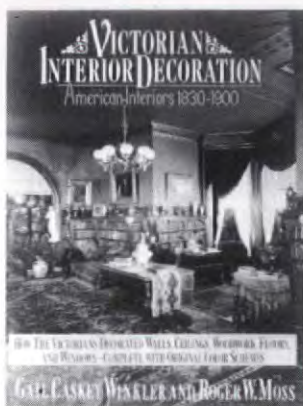






# Books

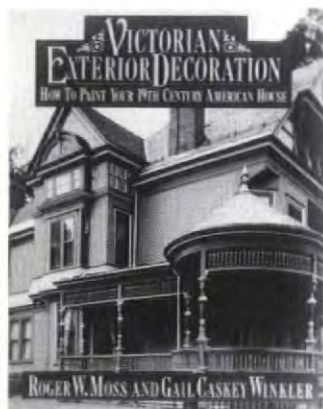
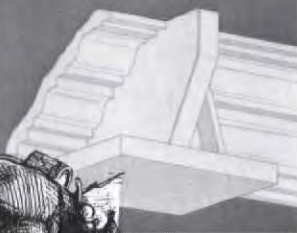
**VICTORIAN INTERIOR DECORATION** — Roger Moss and Gail Caskey Winkler show us exactly how the Victorians decorated their homes. Floors and floor coverings, ceilings, woodwork, window treatments, and wallpaper all receive equal treatment. Numerous color illustrations, period examples and new restorations. 144 pages. Hardbound. \$32.95.



**PLASTERING SKILLS** — The definitive text on the lost art of wet plastering! Have some failing plaster? This book is the place to turn for the correct repair methods.

Whether you want to replace ten feet of missing cornice, or replaster an entire wall, this guide shows you how. (Casting in plaster is not covered.) 543 pages. Softbound. \$24.45.

## Plastering Skills



**VICTORIAN EXTERIOR DECORATION** — by Roger Moss and Gail Caskey Winkler. The editors of OHJ are always being asked, "What color should I paint my house?" If your house was built in the latter half of the 19th century, this book is the first place to look.

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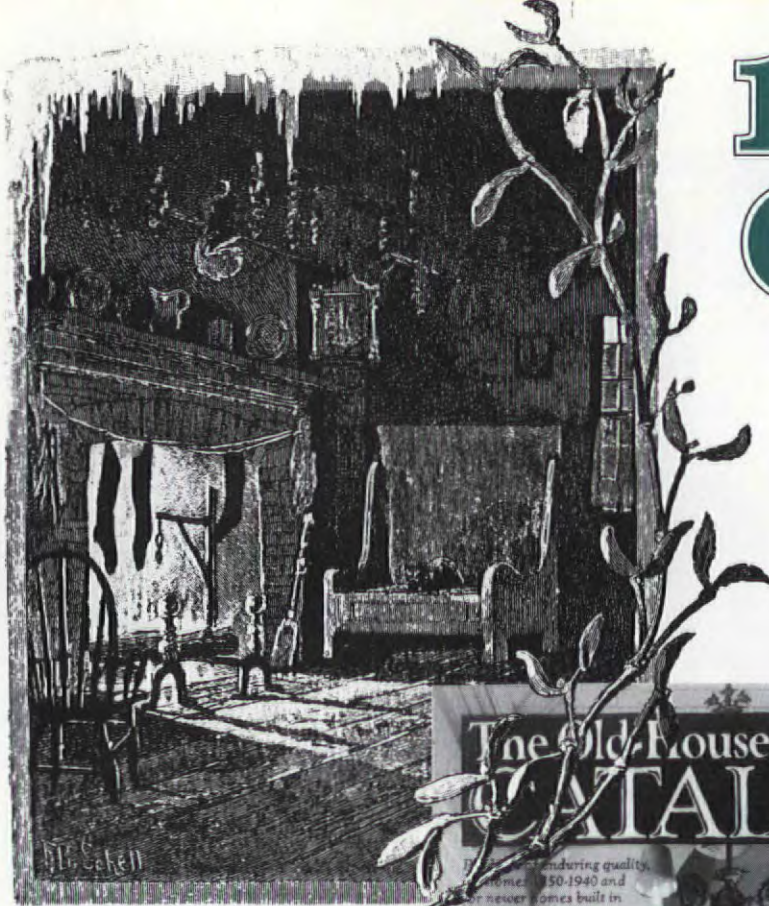
**THE COMFORTABLE HOUSE** — If your house was built between 1890 and 1930, you may have been frustrated to find there's not much in print about it. Now, in a book originally commissioned by The Old-House Journal, author Alan Gowans explores each style: Revivals, bungalows, foursquares, etc. Numerous illustrations. 304 pages. Hardbound. \$37.50.





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you need for  
your old house.



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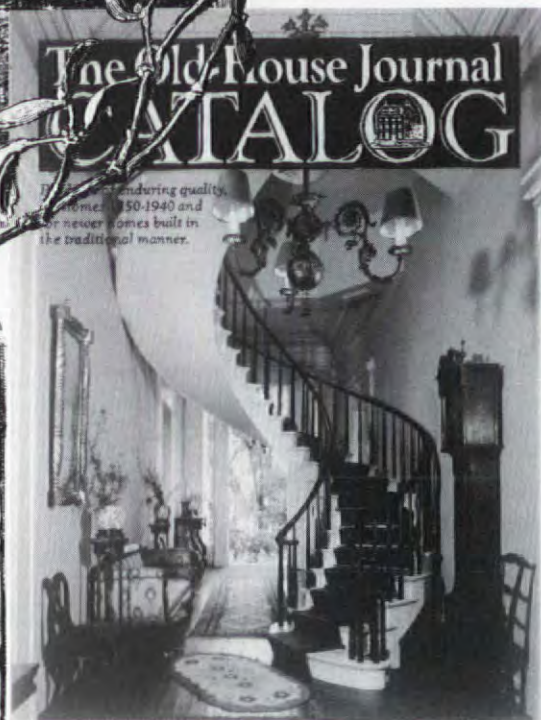
Open our NEW 1988 *Old-House Journal Catalog*, and open up all the possibilities in your old house. Browse through the pages, and see products you've been told "just aren't made anymore." No more fruitless phone calls tracking down hard-to-find old-house parts: This book does all the footwork for you. Now you'll have what it takes to bring your old house from "has a lot of potential" to "looks great!"

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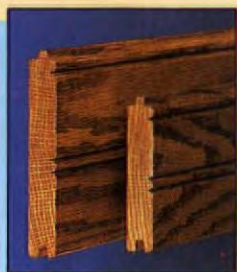


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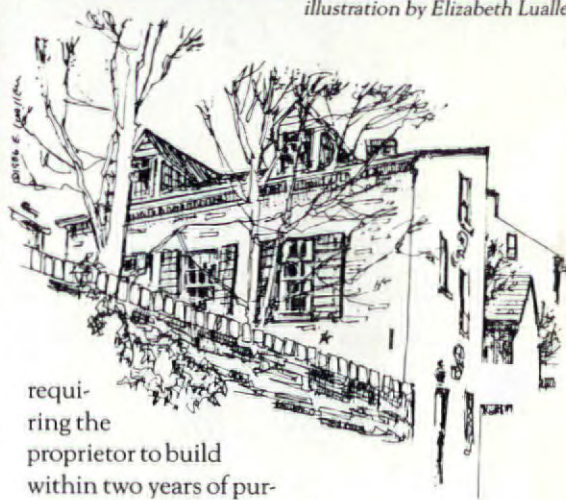
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# FLOUNDER HOUSES of Old Town Alexandria



illustration by Elizabeth Lualen



It's known as a half-house in Maine and has been confused with the Charleston House in South Carolina. In Alexandria, Virginia, whether brick or frame, it's called a *flounder*.

A flounder is a two- or three-storey house with half a gable roof. Like the fish for which it's named, its high side is blind and normally falls smack on the property line.

Although flounders were a mainstay of colonial residential architecture along the Atlantic coast, a vast number were razed where industry grew up at water's edge. Yet more than fifty flounder houses survive, pocketed in a couple of square miles along the Potomac River in northern Virginia. Scattered throughout Old Town Alexandria, flounders often hide from the casual eye and are more easily identified when they are in profile to the street. Those facing the street look like ordinary homes — but if you look out back, the house looks as if half had been sheared away.

Why half-houses sprang up in the Colonies is unknown. Some say it was because of a law

requiring the proprietor to build within two years of purchase of the land (or lose it); you could build an annex and add the main house later. Others claim the blind side was a tax shelter from a tax on the number of windows facing the main road (many examples make this unlikely). Still others believe the blind side (often north-facing) was energy efficient. Maybe a few people just wanted to be different.

For all their charm, very little has been written about these homes. If there was one good reason for building flounders in colonial America, it remains a mystery.

— Hal Feldhaus  
Alexandria, Virginia

