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OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL  
ISSN 0094-0178 Published bimonthly for \$21  
per year by Old-House Journal Corporation,  
435 Ninth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215. Tele-  
phone (718) 788-1700. Subscriptions in Can-  
ada \$29 per year, payable in U.S. funds.

Subscriptions: 1-800-234-3797

Second-class postage paid at Brooklyn, New  
York, and additional mailing offices. POST-  
MASTER: Send address changes to Old-  
House Journal, P.O. Box 58017, Boulder,  
CO. 80322-8017.

We are happy to accept editorial contributions  
to The Old-House Journal. Query letters that  
include an outline of the proposed article are  
preferred. All manuscripts will be reviewed,  
and returned if unacceptable. However, we  
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please keep copies of all materials sent.

Printed at The Lane Press,  
South Burlington, Vermont

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## Contents

Vol. XVIII No. 1

January/February 1990

### Architectural Ironwork: Cast & Wrought 20

*A history and description of cast and wrought work;  
techniques for repair, maintenance, and finishing*

### An Ironwork Sourcelist 28

*Suppliers nationwide for ornamental fences,  
balustrades, grilles, urns, and fountains*

---

### Wood Wainscot 30

*How to repair various types of wainscot, from colonial  
horizontal boards to Victorian raised-panel*

### Log Houses in America 37

*An in-depth study of an American symbol*

### Rustic Interiors of the Adirondack Camps 45

*Cozy, stylized rooms from the rustic,  
log-house revival, 1880-1915*

### Old-House Living 49

*Time capsules...or windows to the past*

---

<b>Editor's Page</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Emporium</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Letters</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Products Network</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Ask OHJ</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Advertisers' Index</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Restorer's Notebook</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Remuddling</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Outside the Old House</b>	<b>18</b>		
<b>Restoration Products</b>	<b>54</b>		
<b>Historic House Plans</b>	<b>63</b>		

*Cover: The log house, built in the 1930s,  
is located in Targee National Forest near  
Island Park, Idaho, and it's in the  
National Register. Photo by Harrison  
Goodall.*



## EDITOR'S PAGE

**N**OW REALLY, have you ever read those warnings on a ladder? Do you follow them? "Use only on a firm, level surface ... never stand on the top step ... never climb a damaged ladder ... keep your shoes clean. ..."

Aw c'mon. I've spent a lot of time working on old houses, and I've yet to encounter a "firm, level surface." I tend to ignore the safety information that I assume issues from the legal department of the manufacturer. Nevertheless, the time comes when using your common sense gives way to stupidity, plain and simple. Case in point:

My current restoration nightmare involves the Italianate "summer cottage" of my lady friend Jane. We're attempting to turn it into her year-round home. The wrap-around verandah at the second-storey level had to come down; after decades of neglect, it was little more than a wet sponge — and dangerous.

The first time I climbed Jane's one and only ladder to start the job, I knew we'd have to invest in some new tools. The five-foot, aluminum, household-grade ladder, rated at 150 pounds, was battle-weary (and I don't weigh 150 anymore).

Well, restoring a house nights and weekends leaves little time for shopping. Besides, the ladder had an *attitude* about it and it was growing on me. The ladder seemed to say, "I've carried heavier loads than you since before you were born, fella." It went with the house; it went with my make-do philosophy.

So one Saturday morning I was still trusting it. Jane was safely on the scaffold, reshingling. I set up the ladder nearby and climbed — with a sixteen-foot 2x8 over my shoulder — to the off-limits top rung and set to fitting it into the mortised posts. Tight fit. Reaching out left for additional leverage, I heard my old friend creak beneath me.

Then it happened. Jane shouted, "Oh Billy don't fall!" as the ladder simply disintegrated — it seemed to me to be in slow motion. Aluminum

**This month's Editor's Page has been hijacked by Bill O'Donnell, OHJ's Advertising Director. He's done plenty of hands-on work. Still, I wasn't surprised when he called, somewhat shaken. "Give me a page," he said. "I've had two accidents and I'm scared they come in threes; maybe if I do penance by writing about it, I'll get off easy." It's all yours, Bill.**

*P. Poore*

crumpled and I descended with it, then, to the twang of snapping metal, I fell hard three feet more to a sharp-cornered cement footing. I lay there a moment, panting, assessing my condition. Nothing broken, and I hadn't hit my head. Good. Skin grows back eventually.

But my pride was badly injured. Really, how could I be so stupid? I had broken every single rule of ladder safety, like a novice. But only after I fell did I resolve to be more careful in the future.

**A** WEEK LATER, I had a couple of hours before sundown and decided to get back on the job. We had new, sturdy ladders, but my confidence was still a little shaky;



*Bill monkeys around at Lady Jane's bouse of restoration horrors.*

I wasn't ready to resume the porch building quite yet. I'd planned instead to pull down the last section of rotted porch.

I had a pile of scrap lumber within half an hour. Into it now, I started bashing the framing. I knocked out one post and was surprised by how much of the upper structure collapsed all at once. Not to worry — I'm agile. I jumped clear.

Ah, the horror of deep bodily invasion. No pain yet. I had to hold the board down with my left foot to pull my right foot away from it — yanking it off a rusty 20-penny nail that protruded a good two inches from the rotted board. I stared down at my sneaker-clad feet, feeling like a jerk even in my dumbfounded state.

I've stepped on nails before, so I didn't worry as I went inside. In the bathroom, I found that my sock was soaked and pooled blood sat in the sneaker. Uh-oh. I took myself to the hospital.

Lucky again. Although the nail had just about gone through my foot, it missed all major blood vessels and didn't sever any tendons. A tetanus shot and a few weeks on crutches fixed it. Injury aside, I couldn't work on the house for nearly a month — all because I tried to save ten minutes by not going home for my workboots.

It took Jane a while to get over my injury, too. When she got home that night, she flipped on the bathroom light and found a scene from a horror movie — blood everywhere, but no body.

Anyway, I've changed my tune. Even a couple of hours of messin' around on a little summer house deserves workboots, and decent equipment, and a work site cleared of debris. Most of all, it deserves a more respectful attitude. I realize that, now, I work as though I expect an accident to happen. So maybe it won't.

*Bill O'Donnell*



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Family portrait with painted screen, 1883.

## Painted-Screen Query

Dear OHJ:

Enclosed is an 1883 photograph of the porch and entrance of a house in north-central Kansas. (You can see that the people are superimposed on the image.) The house was constructed in 1873 and this view shows an addition constructed c. 1876. The screen door and two screens over windows on each side of the door are painted. This photograph shows the painted screen door as it was in 1883. Today the images are extremely faded and the owner would like to restore the paintings or stencils. We don't have any written record of the technique and have been unable to find it in any of the modern literature in our library. Would any Old-House Journal readers have information about this practice?

— Barbara Anderson  
Preservation Architect  
Kansas State Historical Society  
Topeka, Kansas

## That Zinc-ing Feeling

Dear Ms. Poore,

As a consultant for the restoration of stained, or art, glass windows, I

would like to comment on Mr. Heinz's article on zinc came [September/October 1989 OHJ].

The Zinc Institute's claim that zinc withstands low pollution is slightly misleading, since most metropolitan areas of this country, including Chicago, do not have low pollution. Zinc came has a much shorter lifespan than lead came does in polluted atmospheres. Lead can last several hundred years, but zinc rarely lasts longer than a century when installed in an exterior window. Because zinc came is hollow, there is much less metal to withstand corrosion than there is in a lead came. The result is cracking of the zinc came along the folds of the profile. This is prevalent in many zinc-camed windows today, including many of Wright's.

I have to disagree with Mr. Heinz that Chicago was the center for American art glass at the turn of the century. Although art glass was undeniably popular there, the art-glass businesses already well established in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia were much bigger and more influential than those in Chicago. Louis C. Tiffany's studios in New York were at their peak. The popularity of win-

dows by John La Farge, D. Maitland Armstrong, Charles Connick, William Willet, Nicola D'Ascenzo, and J. & R. Lamb should not be underestimated, even in the Midwest.

Patternbooks for windows had been in use since the 1850s. By the turn of the century, those published in the Midwest incorporated some Prairie School designs, but usually at least 50 percent of the patterns were for opalescent or heraldic windows, which were more popular in the rest of the country. By the 'teens and 'twenties, the majority of the patterns in Midwestern pattern books may have been inspired by the Prairie School (not solely by Wright), but by that time Wright and his followers had moved on to another style, so these patternbooks were hardly innovative.

I would also like to add a cautionary note to Mr. Heinz's comments on the repair of zinc came: This is not a process which should be attempted by someone with no experience in stained glass. It is for professionals *only*. Geometric windows are much harder to glaze than floral or figural windows because there is no room for error, and a neophyte will find himself with a pile of shards he cannot put back together. In addition, the health hazards associated with any stained glass work are so serious that no stained glass work should be attempted in one's home.

— Julie L. Sloan  
McKernan Satterlee Associates  
consultants, stained glass  
Brewster, N.Y.

## Stile Conscious

Dear OHJ:

Your article in the September/October 1989 issue, "The Sash Window Balancing Act," was most appreciated in this household! Ever since the pre-closing house inspector pointed out our five tape-balance windows three years ago (other windows include

*continued on page 6*



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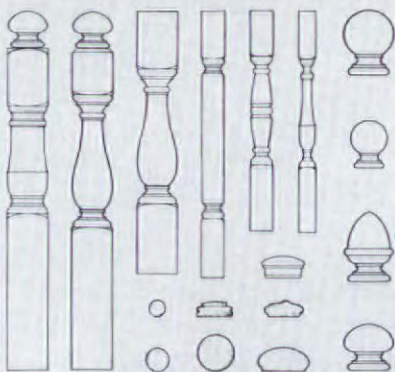
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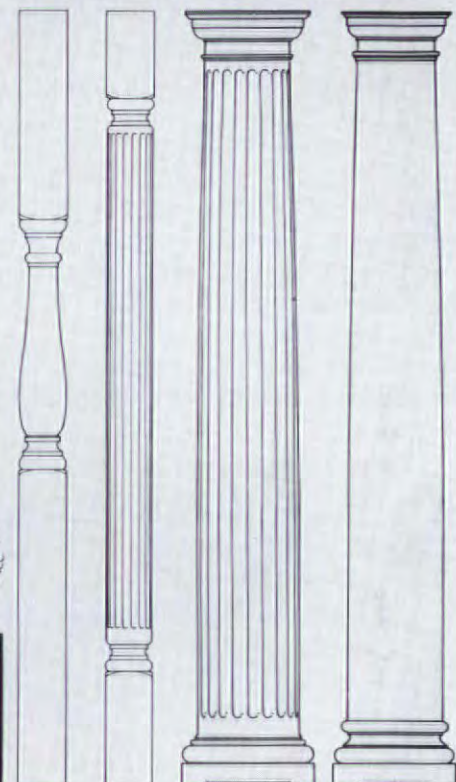
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continued from page 4

guillotine and sash-cord pulley), we had neither heard nor read mention of this type of window. Your description of the tape mechanism, the way the bail end catches a hook mounted on the sash stile, prompted a furious run to two windows whose bails had unhooked themselves long ago. Through determined unwinding of the tapes and jiggling of their bails along sash stiles, our windows once again got hooked on their tapes and no longer rely on scrap lumber to hold themselves open! I only wish our tape housings were as decorative as the "Sensible" brand pictured in your article. Maybe such detail is hidden under layers of paint. We're still exploring this 1750 house (with a mid-1800s addition and hidden "room" that concealed slaves on the underground railroad.) Thanks for the help!

— Alice and Bob Moulton-Ely  
Basking Ridge, N.J.

## Research Project

Dear OHJ:

I need help from OHJ readers for research on a book with the working title *Household Customs and the Folklore of Domestic Architecture*. My study concentrates on the folklore surrounding the structural elements of domestic architecture: the domestic customs, activities, and superstitions connected with the house. Pertinent areas include:

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Switzerland; also the Celtic peoples of Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and northwestern France (Brittany). Also included are those countries largely influenced by these cultures, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States.

Please broadcast my interest through your publication so that I may contact or correspond with people who remember, know of, or still practice household customs and superstitions originating in northern Europe.

— Michael Murphy  
P.O. Box 313  
Chatswood, N.S.W.  
Australia, 2067

## Inn Love

Dear Editors,

It was such a thrill to my husband and me to find the article about the Worley home in Dahlonega, Georgia,

continued on page 8

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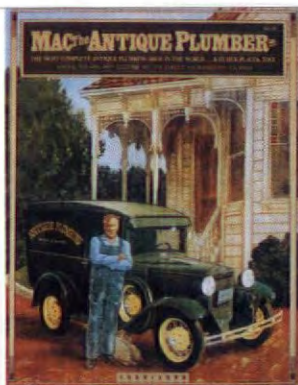
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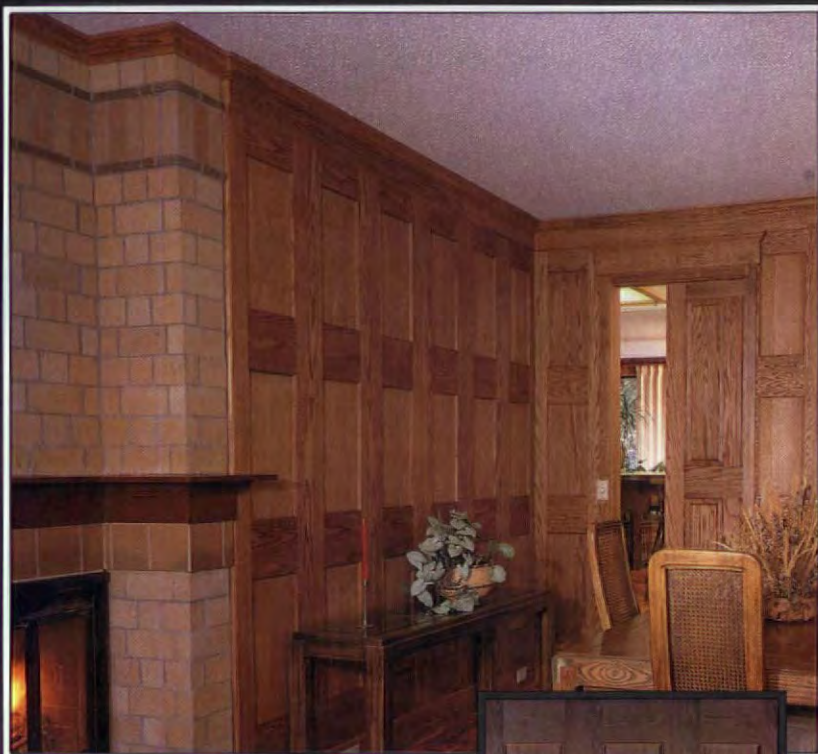
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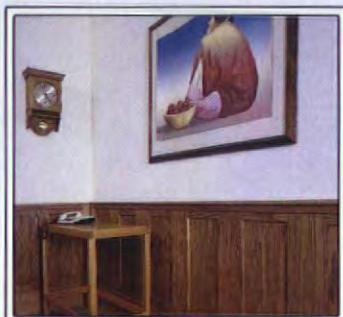
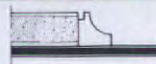


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# LETTERS



Mitzi Francis

*The Worley Homestead as it looks today.*

*continued from page 6*

in the September/October 1989 OHJ ["A Family Homestead Reclaimed"].

We had a short and very delightful visit there a few years ago. It must have been soon after it opened as a B&B. We still remember our quarters very well: a room with an extra alcove, to the left of the back hall downstairs. The bathroom had an old-fashioned pastel-patterned chen-

ille bathmat.

We remember the fabulous breakfast at the long dining table. There were only two other guests that day. The hostess dressed in period costume.

We took a walk on the college grounds across the street, and there was some sort of band practice going on which we enjoyed watching.

You might forward this letter on to the owner, Mitzi Francis. It was fascinating to learn more of the history of the home, and of her adventures in saving it. I thank her for doing that and for writing so beautifully about it.

— Nancy J. Bird  
Laguna Beach, Calif.

## Heart-Warming, But...

Dear Patty,

I appreciated the heart-warming story of "A Family Homestead Reclaimed," and the fact that a rural,

vernacular Southern house was featured. But the "restoration" work falls short in several noticeable areas and seems to do a disservice to OHJ's concern for sensitive work. Particularly troublesome is the reconstructed chimney. Virtually everything about it is wrong: the workmanship, the details, the massing, and (most important) the very idea that a seemingly salvageable original (albeit altered) chimney was taken down and rebuilt. Also, the new porch doesn't approximate either of the two earlier porches.

I'm not a strident preservationist — not everyone can or should feel compelled to do authentic restoration work. I also understand that "human interest" stories are important to OHJ readers. But there must be many examples of good rehab work combined with interesting personal stories.

— J. Randall Cotton  
Wallingford, Penn.

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# LETTERS

J.C. Massey



*Detroit's Freer House — a Shingle-style classic.*

## The Freer House

Dear OHJ:

I enjoyed seeing the Freer House illustrated on page 45 of the September/October 1989 OHJ [*The Shingle Style*].

Wilson Eyre built the home for Charles Lang Freer, the businessman of excellent taste who was to give his outstanding collection of Asian art to the Smithsonian Institution (as well as an endowment to build and maintain the Freer Gallery). A rear wing

was added to accommodate Whistler's famous Peacock Room. Only in later years was the home occupied by the offices of the Merrill Palmer Institute, which now operates under the umbrella of Wayne State University. The house is now under the caring eye of Preservation Wayne, a non-profit group with a record of accomplishment, and is a magnificent specimen in a three-block historic district of gracious 19th-century homes in this city's Cultural Center. For Detroiters, it will always be "the Freer House."

I'm an avid OHJ reader, and it's nice to see some positive press on our architecturally rich city.

— Patience Young  
Detroit, Mich.

[Whistler's Peacock Room is now a permanent part of the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. — Ed.]

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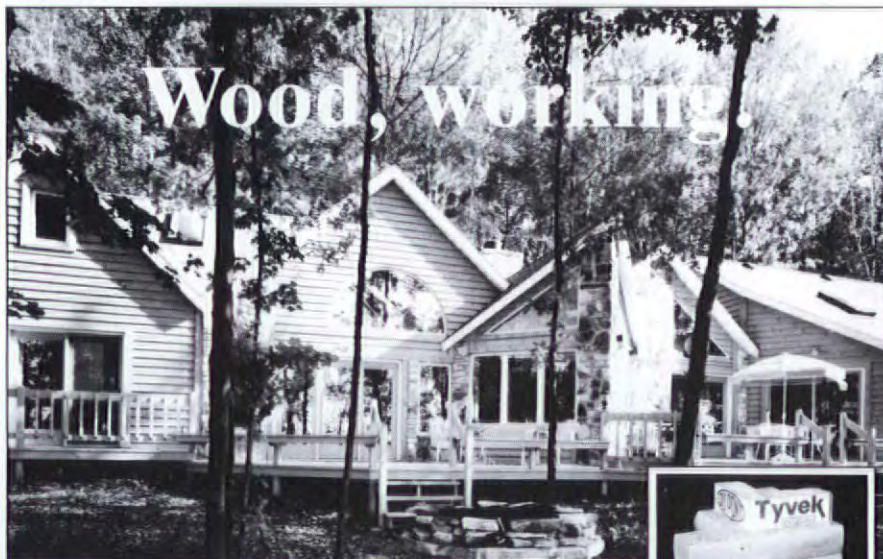
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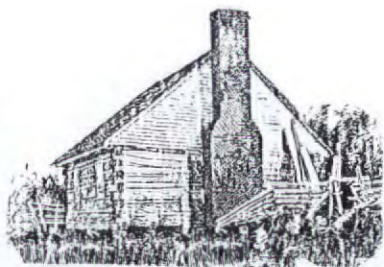
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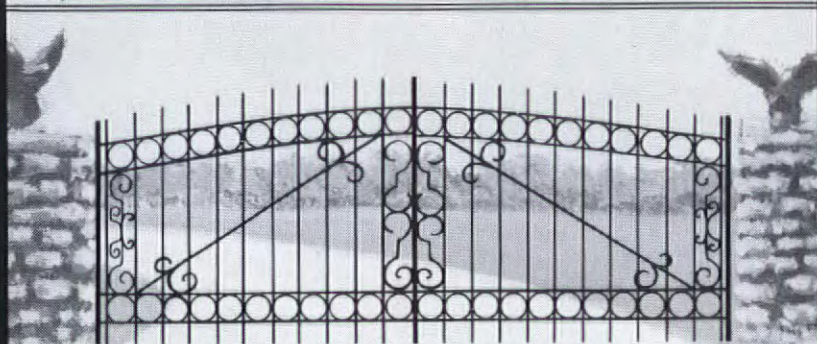
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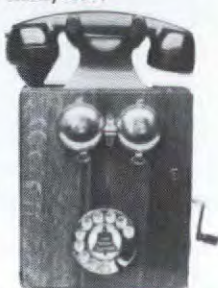
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## ASK OHJ



*The Avon Charter Township Museum (1840) and its 1926 garage addition.*

### Paint Woes

**Q** *I am responsible for the repair and maintenance of a publicly owned, 1840 Greek Revival farmhouse. We repainted the exterior wall of the 1926 garage addition this past summer because of excessive peeling. The garage has a dirt floor and I believe moisture is causing my problems. I would like to vent this room, but I am concerned about the aesthetics of vents in the exterior walls. The roof above this room is partially flat. Any suggestions?*

— Patrick J. McKay  
Museum Operations Manager  
Historic Districts Commission  
Rochester Hills, Mich.

**A** Even without seeing the building, there are some ideas we can offer which may be helpful in solving your problem.

If the paint on the garage exterior is peeling off down to the wood, interior moisture may indeed be the culprit. But if the peeling occurs between subsequent layers, there may well be another reason: poor preparation, perhaps, or too many layers of paint.

If moisture is to blame, it has to be limited at the source. Ideally, you would pave the garage floor (a good bed of driveway gravel might also help). With a museum house, however, such a sweeping change may not be permitted. A large rooftop ventilator, such as those used on agricultural buildings, might work if it

could be positioned in an unobtrusive spot. Miniature louvered vents are often used in eave soffits and may work well in your situation. They're available from Midget Louver Co., 800 Main Avenue, Dept. OHJ, Norwalk, CT 06851; (203) 866-2342. Adding a window (if permitted) would get sunlight into the space, and the additional warmth can create a convection current and aid any ventilation you install.

### Heated Question

**Q** *I own a Queen Anne built in 1901. I would like to replace an old, non-working, open-flame space heater with a more modern unit capable of burning natural gas and venting through a 3-inch pipe. I am unable to locate any attractive, tasteful units that would do justice to the original trim and 11-foot coved ceilings in my house. Can you supply me with a source for older units that can be retrofitted with a safety valve — or some solution other than the hideous hardware-store heaters I've seen?*

— Mark Gordon  
San Francisco, Calif.

**A** We're not clear on whether your unit is to be installed in a fireplace or not, but here are some product possibilities:

\* We know of no steady source for antique gas heaters, but house-salvage companies sometimes sell these units. You might also try running a



"Wanted" listing in our Emporium, which is free to OHJ subscribers.

\* The most decorative of the modern-day gas heaters are the burning-ember and gas-log models that simulate coal or wood fires. Two manufacturers who can supply these heaters with companion fireplaces in several styles are:

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### Two Styles in One?

**Q** *I would like your opinion regarding the style of my house. But in this case, we are talking about one house with two styles. The original house was built in 1895 by a local industrialist. In 1929, the same owner spent \$45,000 (1929 dollars) in a major remodelling. (I understand that the architect for the remodelling was Charlie Hilpertsbauser, who was quite well known in this area at that time.) How would you evaluate both architectural styles?*

— Mark Briesse  
Sheboygan, Wisc.



*In 1895, this house was a straightforward Queen Anne, from its cross-gabled roof to its turret-roofed verandah.*



*By 1929, a hip roof and a simplified verandah have muted — but not obliterated — its Victorian lineage.*

**A** In the original structure, the roof appears to be cross-gabled, with the dominant gable facing the street. This was a very common plan for Queen Anne houses, which were reaching their peak popularity at about the time. Other Queen Anne features are what looks like a two-storey cutaway bay window in the left of the photo, and a full-width, asymmetrical porch.

By 1929, the house has been significantly altered. The roofline has changed from steep-gabled to the hip roof so popular in the 'teens and 'twenties. (You see hipped roofs on American Foursquares, also of the period.) The side of the house has been built out with square corners, and the turret-roofed portion of the verandah has been simplified to a more classical porch. These alterations did not really change the house into another style, but they did a lot to soft-pedal its Victorian lineage. Details such as large gables, cutaway bay windows, and turrets were long out of fashion. Very likely, the owner and his builder decided to "update" the house by eliminating many of these 19th-century elements and replacing them with more contemporary versions — such as the jerkin-head gable, obvious in the photo below right, which was very popular in the '20s.

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## A Tie for a Sill

The former owners of our house poured a concrete porch slab against a 15-foot length of 8-by-8-inch timber sill — effectively destroying it by allowing water to soak the wood for 30 years. Now it had to be replaced, but I didn't know where to find a timber that large. One day, while driving past a landscaping shop, it hit me — railroad ties. Used "switch" ties, in perfectly sound condition, can be purchased for a few dollars. Some of them are 20 feet long, designed to support two or more sets of tracks in a switching yard. Most are hardwood, and all are soaked with creosote, providing the insect and water protection a sill requires.

The studs were lifted with jacks and the old sill taken out. After the new sill was in place, the wall was lowered back down on it. It worked like a charm; in fact, this sill is better than the original was.

— Kevin Cullen  
Danville, Ill.

## Reviving Gilding

Our lovely gilt picture frame had become noticeably dirty over the years. I was all set to wash it down, when a friend of mine stopped me cold. "Never use water on gilding," he explained. "It can loosen the size that holds the gold leaf."

Upon his recommendation, I went at the frame with trichloro ethylene, a dry-cleaning fluid, applying it with soft cotton swabs. This method cleaned off all the grease and dirt, without leaving the gilding too shiny and "new" looking — only the dirt was removed, not the patina.

— Rose Sayer  
Shreveport, Lou.

## Linoleum Removal

The handsome hardwood floor in one room of our old house had been covered over with linoleum many years ago. We ripped and

sliced away the linoleum, only to be left with a lot of glue and old backing paper still stuck to the wood. We soaked this mess with a commercial wallpaper-remover solution, purchased from our local hardware store and applied with sponges. To improve saturation, we scored the residue with a knife — carefully, so as not to scratch the flooring. Then we scraped up the material with a putty knife. It took us a while, but the results were well worth the trouble.

— Sheila O'Shea  
Denver, Col.

## Column Repair

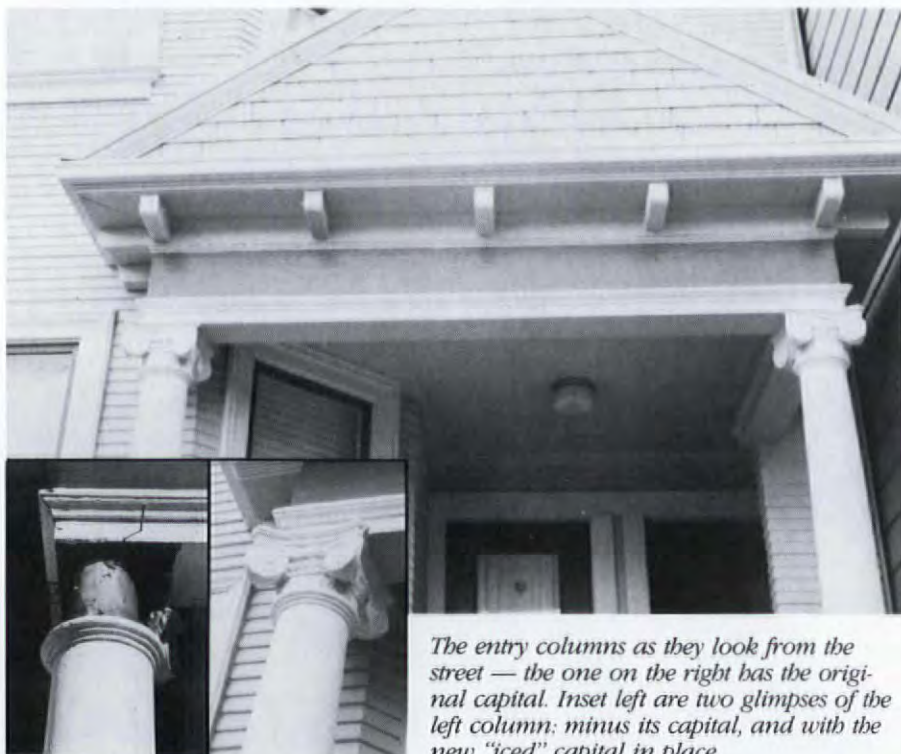
Over the years, one of the ionic capitals on our left entry column had broken, exposing the bare wood of the column itself. For both appearance and protection of the column, repair was necessary. But repair estimates from a variety of architectural plaster casters ranged from \$400 to \$1,000 — *excluding* paint and weatherization!

Luckily, we found some of the plaster fragments in the garage. We

began to piece them together with exterior Fix-all and construction-quality exterior adhesive, using the intact column on the right as a guide. Drilling holes every 5 inches or so, we secured the fragments to the wood column with wood — having taken care to apply linseed oil to the exposed wood first. It was a simple matter to hide the screw heads and remaining gaps with exterior Fix-all.

Still missing, however, was the raised detailing of the cast original. As I was sealing the top of the column with white exterior caulk, I realized how similar a caulking gun is to a cake decorator's tube. So I began to "ice" the ionic/cake! The first layer of caulking shrunk overnight, but three "icings" later, the detailing appeared sharp and read very well from the curb and stairs. The whole job was finished off with two coats of primer and two top coats. We're very pleased with the results and the savings — our costs were well under \$70. Two years later, it's still holding up perfectly.

— Suzanne Dumont  
San Francisco, Calif.



*The entry columns as they look from the street — the one on the right has the original capital. Inset left are two glimpses of the left column: minus its capital, and with the new "iced" capital in place.*





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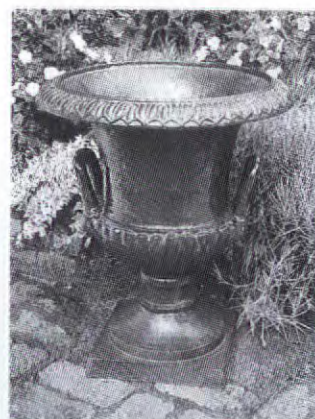
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# Garden-Variety Cast Iron

by Scott G. Kunst

**T** oak and terra cotta may be popular today, but stylish Victorian gardens were often full with cast iron.

A wonder of the Industrial Age, cast iron was once used to create everything from frying pans to locomotives to entire buildings. It was "cheap, beautiful, and imperishable" (according to an 1860s advertisement) and could imitate expensive carved stone at a fraction of the cost.

Cast-iron garden furnishings first appeared in the 1830s and '40s. Their popularity peaked in the decades following the Civil War and waned along with the Victorian age in about 1900. In this century, neglect, the elements, and wartime scrap drives claimed countless iron relics.

Survivors lingered on, though, and show up regularly at antique sales. (When buying, check for rusted-through spots and avoid cracked or broken pieces, which are hard to repair.) Modern foundries are also casting a wide range of reproductions, including many in that 20th-century wonder, aluminum.

Prices can be steep, and in truth they were little better for the Victorians. According to the Strong Museum in Rochester, New York, a simple, cast-iron settee in 1893 cost \$18, the equivalent of a decent weekly wage or new shoes for a family of five.

Today, a typical iron urn will cost \$300-700; a settee, \$800-1500. Antique prices are roughly the same as those for reproductions, while aluminum can be as little as half. Aluminum and iron both have their advocates. If possible, examine a piece first-hand before buying. Reproductions that may look identical

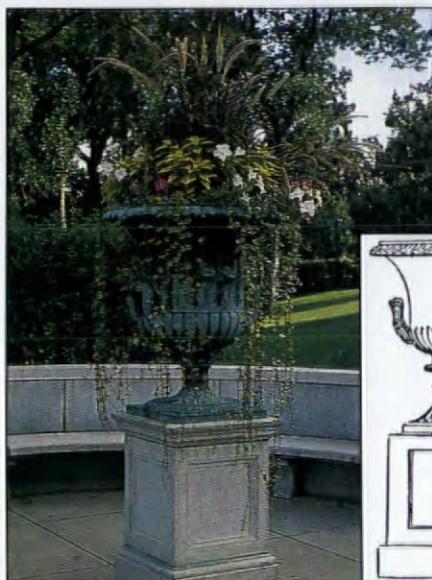


Fig. 1: The classic simplicity of the "Palo-Alto" vase. Inset: The "Palo-Alto" design

in illustrations may turn out to be quite different up close.

## Lawn Vases

Though we call them urns, Victorians knew these iron planters as vases. Recommended by Andrew Jackson Downing and other arbiters of taste in the 1840s, the early models were simple and classic in styling. One example, popular through mid-century, was the "Palo Alto" vase (Figure 1). As both cast-iron technology and the Victorian love of ornament developed, vase designs became increasingly rococo. The "French Reservoir" vase (Figure 2) is a typical late-century design.

Vases might be sited on terraces, in the middle of carpet beds, or — most frequently — in the open lawn. To keep a vase from settling irregularly, place it on concrete pavers. Fill



Fig. 2: The more ornate "French Reservoir" vase, favored by A.J. Downing.

it with potting soil rather than garden dirt (the better to hold moisture), and plant it with colorful annuals with maybe a variegated pineapple or agave in the center.

## Settees & Chairs

For most Victorians, outdoor furniture was simply a bench on the back porch or a kitchen chair carried outside on a Sunday afternoon. Cast-iron settees and chairs, however, offered an alternative that was much more refined.

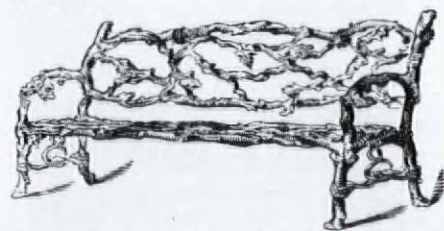


Fig. 3: A rustic pattern bench from Janes, Kirtland & Co.



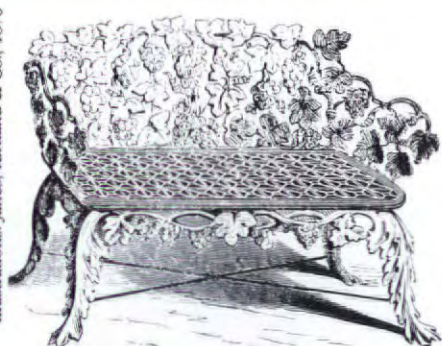


Fig. 4: *Janes' grapevine bench.*

Cast-iron seating was produced in dozens of patterns, but according to scholar Ellen Marie Snyder, five were most common. The earliest was the rustic pattern (1840s-'90s; Figure 3), which imitated the naturalistic look of twig furniture. The grapevine pattern (1850s-1900s; Figure 4) was the



Fig. 5: *A reproduction fern-pattern bench.*

all-time best seller, while the fern pattern (1870s-'90s; Figure 5) reflected the late-Victorian passion for ferns. More formal patterns included the Gothic (1850s-'80s; Figure 6) and a variety of "curtain" or panel designs, incorporating a series of decorative panels on the back of the settee (1880s-1900s). Most patterns were available in both settees and chairs, and several are being reproduced today.

Although common today, benches

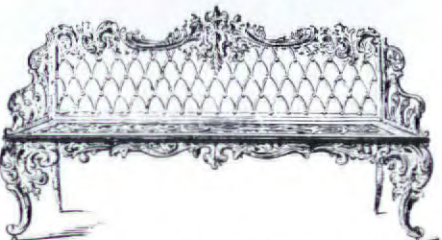


Fig. 6: *One variety of the Gothic pattern.*

with wooden-slat backs and seats were known as "park benches" in the 19th century and were rarely found in home landscapes.

## Fountains

Vases and settees are simple, but fountains are not. Fountains need to be assembled, leveled, piped, pumped, cleaned, drained in winter, and generally coddled. But they *are* something special, and the Victorians loved them, often siting them in courthouse squares, public parks, and other grand outdoor spaces. Due to their expense, however, fountains were rare in ordinary home landscapes.

Cast-iron fountains usually consist of one, two, or three "spills" (shallow bowls) stacked one above the other. Figures, frequently cranes and water plants often support the largest spill (Figure 7). Less often, there is a figure at the top or alone; for example, a boy and a dolphin or a woman with a water jug.

The ground-level basin was generally iron, but many have been replaced with concrete. Sometimes, to give the fountain greater height, the basin was set on a low, earthen mound ringed by fieldstones.



Fig. 7: *A typical "3-spill" fountain, here 36 inches from fountain tip to the ground.*



Fig. 8: *A life-sized buck in cast iron.*

## Statuary, Etc.

Cast iron was versatile. Cast-iron stags (Figure 8) on the lawn may be an acquired taste, but if plastic flamingoes have developed a certain cachet, then why not iron stags — or dogs, or lions? The Victorians appreciated them all. Cast-iron birdhouses are another possibility. Simple wren houses survive, and elaborate martin houses (Figure 9) are being reproduced (see Restoration Products, page 58). Other cast-iron furnishings for the landscape include hitching posts, carriage blocks, tree guards, and trellises. Forward-looking Victorians even experimented with cast-iron sidewalks — an idea that, apparently, is still ahead of its time.



Fig. 9: *A molded-metal martin house.*



# ARCHITECTURAL IRON WORK

## CAST & WROUGHT

TECHNIQUES FOR REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE



Black isn't the only color for iron. This well known cast-iron fence at 915 Rue Royale in New Orleans is painted with yellow ears of corn and green stalks. The unusual pattern, cast in 1855 by the Wood and Perot foundry in Philadelphia, was ordered by Dr. Joseph Biamonti, who hoped to console his new bride who had just joined him from her home in Iowa. Frequently a foundry would advertise a successful design and use the already-made moulds to cast new orders. Another cornstalk fence was installed in 1859 at the Short-Favrot house, also in New Orleans.

A typical perception of architectural iron is that it's any metal painted black found on or near a building. In this light, all forms of ironwork, whether cast, wrought, or steel, are lumped together under the general heading "iron" — resulting in such blunders as an owner giving a mass-produced steel fence status and treatment equal to that accorded a hand-wrought railing. A better, more accurate view of architectural iron considers cast iron, wrought iron, and steel as three distinct materials, each with its own technology. For the sake of appreciation and restoration, we shouldn't confuse work beaten at the anvil with that poured into moulds.

The source of all iron and steel is iron ore. The first step in the manufacturing process is the removal of the oxygen from the iron ore by melting it in a blast furnace with a fuel, normally coke. Limestone is mixed with the ore to take away the oxygen. The iron obtained is cast into bars known as pig iron, which contains about 3.5% carbon. From pig iron is manufactured the various kinds of iron and steel. The amount of carbon is the element which gives each of these alloys its distinct characteristics. Wrought iron contains between .02% and .03% carbon, with no more than .035%. Cast iron contains between 2% and 4% carbon. The various classifications of steel, including mild, low-carbon, and high-carbon, contains between .2% and 2% carbon.

## Wrought Iron

The low carbon content of wrought iron makes it very malleable, easy to weld, and less susceptible to rust than either cast iron or steel. Commercially produced wrought iron is made by refining pig iron in a reverberatory furnace. It is then hammered and rolled, which gives it its fibrous structure. If you have ever seen a blacksmith beating out a hook or hinge, then you have had some experience with true wrought iron. Unfortunately, there is very little hand-forged ironwork produced today. In fact, commercially available "wrought iron" is quite different from what was used up until the end of the 19th century. What generally is called wrought iron is actually mild steel that has been hand-forged using traditional blacksmithing techniques. This technique distinguishes what is often not wrought iron at all, but rather steel bars that have been bent and twisted by machine into the multiple scrolls commonly associated with the term wrought iron. Often this machine-shaped work is given a mock hammered look to simulate hand-crafting.

America's history of wrought iron used in architecture is closely linked to the European traditions that found their way to the cities in the South and East. The first forge in America, the Saugus Ironworks in Massachusetts, then called "Hammersmith," was established in 1644. Ironwork produced by such small forges was mostly hardware, such as hinges, locks, and andirons. The outstanding wrought-work produced in Charleston, South Carolina, and found



in that city's railings and fences, was by three German smiths: J.A.W. Iusti, Christopher Werner, and Frederick Julius Ortmann. New Orleans's early wroughtwork was influenced by the French and Spanish. In fact, there is evidence that a great deal of it was produced in Spain. Very little is left, as it was lost in the fire in 1788. The Parisian-style ironwork that New Orleans is famous for is mostly *cast* iron.

At the turn of the century, there was a revival in wrought iron. Everything pointed to it: the Colonial Revival, the Arts & Crafts Movement, and the classical Beaux-Arts-influenced architects. One of the ironworkers employed by these architects was a young Polish immigrant named Samuel Yellin. Yellin, who had settled in Philadelphia, brought with him knowledge and skill of a rich European tradition. He and his shop produced some of the most magnificent wrought ironwork in America. (The shop bearing his name is still in business — and in the family. See the sourcelist on page 28.)

## Cast Iron

Cast iron and the 19th century are synonymous. By the 1850s, foundry technology for the production of cast iron, and the engineering necessary to its employ, had advanced dramatically. Nearly every product imaginable began to be cast in iron, from whole building facades to fountains, fences to iron-clad warships. Cast iron is made by melting pig iron with coke and a small amount of limestone in a cupola or air furnace, and then pouring it into moulds to make castings. The high carbon content makes it extremely brittle, highly susceptible to rust, and weak in tension, but extremely strong in compression. Cast iron cannot be bent or twisted and is also very difficult to weld. Pieces are usually held together mechanically with bolts. Gray iron is produced through a slow cooling process. White iron is produced by faster cooling and is a more brittle material.

Cast iron for architectural ornament was first used for stairways because of its fire-resistant qualities (which proved to be considerably less than was hoped: Iron and steel must both be encased in fire-resistant material such as tile or plaster to gain sufficient fire rating). The repetitive nature of steps and railings also made efficient use of moulds. Iron had been cast for centuries prior to the 19th century, originating in China. Examples exist in medieval European architecture, especially in Germany. The popularity of firebacks in 16th-century France expanded the use of cast iron. In 1713, Abraham Darby of Coalbrookdale, England, developed the process for turning raw coal into coke, which produced the high heat necessary for iron production to flourish. The following year, cast-iron railings were installed around St. Paul's Cathedral in 1714 (much to Wren's disapproval).

## Steel

The history of steel in architecture is closely tied to its superiority as a structural material, being stronger in compression than cast iron, and stronger in tension than wrought iron. The building of the railroad and projects such as the Brooklyn Bridge contributed to its development. By the end of the 19th century, steel began replacing wrought iron as both a structural and ornamental material. Steel parts could be shaped for railings and fences by rolling mills, then welded together in manageable sections that were assembled at the site much more easily and economically than wrought iron. By adding decorative cast-iron elements, an expensive-looking fence could be made.

Steel had been made for centuries by cementation, a process of heating bars of iron with charcoal in a closed furnace for a long period of time, so the surface of the iron acquired a high carbon content. In 1856, a new English technique known as the Bessemer Process revolutionized steel making.

—Jeff Wilkinson



**This railing was executed at Schwartz's Forge & Metalworks in Deansboro, New York. It is made of hand-forged mild steel and features a balustrade with basket-twist spindles alternating with simple twisted spindles. As it is an interior piece, it is finished with oil and wax, which emphasize the warmth and beauty of the hand work. The floral motif near the stair tread is cast bronze (Swanke, Heyden, Connell Architects).**



# MAINTAINING & REPAIRING ARCHITECTURAL IRON

Corroded cast iron lines residential streets, encloses yards, and decorates buildings. Of the few repairs attempted, most have failed and even added to the problems. A lack of printed information and professional advice has contributed to the sad conditions. But metalworking expertise isn't required for the stabilization of elements, or for the scraping, priming, and painting operation. *Time* is what's required, along with the same patient attention that's given to other restoration tasks.

Cast iron presents repair problems not applicable to wrought iron. First, cast pieces are often bolted together to form balusters, newels, etc., and these pieces eventually begin to come apart. If not tightened and caulked, the tension and compression which hold the piece upright are lost; also, water gets in and parts may oxidize (rust) from the inside out.

The second problem is lack of available replacement parts. A foundry in full production could turn out quantities of cast-iron pieces of every style. But the large iron foundries are gone; and to have a modern metalworker make a special sand mould, cast a replacement piece, and ready it for painting is necessarily expensive. It is, therefore, very important to fix problems before they destroy the iron, and to salvage whatever pieces are still around. This is where ad-hoc mending techniques come in.



The maintenance principles for cast iron can be summarized:

A. Prevent Rust & Corrosion

1. Paint
2. Plug holes

B. Maintain Structural Soundness

1. Keep it together with metal plates and bolts, welding, etc.
2. Brace loose elements by resetting

C. Recreate Missing Pieces

1. Sheet metal
2. Casting replacement parts: iron, aluminum, fiberglass, or epoxy
3. Wooden replacements

## Scrape, Prime, Paint

Even the smallest chip in the paint allows rust to spread underneath. After the cast iron is restored, proper maintenance will include periodic checking for rust and peeling paint. Peeling areas should be wire-brushed, then spot-primed and painted.

If the iron has been neglected, the whole piece should get the scrape/prime/paint treatment. You may want to strip off all of the old paint layers, to bring out the details of the casting; however, all that's necessary is complete rust removal.

The severity of peeling and rusting conditions will clue you in on what tools to use. For mechanical rust and paint removal, some simple tools are tried and true:

\* **WIRE BRUSH:** Start with this. It removes rust and flaking metal, as well as loosened paint.

\* **SCRAPERS:** To help you get under the paint and into crevices. But don't chip or bang the paint off cast pieces — you might fracture the iron. (Wrought iron is more resilient.)

\* **ROTO-STRIPPER** (or the like): Rotating wires that you chuck into an electric drill, and which flap abrasively against the iron, removing paint very successfully. Wear eye protection!

\* **SANDPAPER:** Useful for smaller jobs or final feathering of high paint edges and corners.

Naval jelly is an alternative for badly rusted areas, especially where the corroded spots are less accessible to mechanical removal. However, naval jelly has its drawbacks. It is phosphoric acid in a gel, so it has certain safety limitations: Be aware that the run-off during rinsing may kill garden plants. And it must be flushed away with copious amounts of water — the enemy of naked iron. After wetting down iron, it's a good idea to dry it with a heat gun.

Really extensive jobs may warrant sandblasting. Successful results are directly related to the skill of the operators; they must be able to judge pressure and grit of abrasive, and be diligent about masking all other surfaces. Sandblasting machines are available for rental — and it's





*Paint layers build up; detail is uncovered by complete scraping, chemical removal, or sandblasting, which won't damage cast iron.*

possible that with care and dexterity a first-timer could do a respectable job. Sandblasting has compelling advantages: It means fast and complete paint removal. But keep in mind that highly pressurized abrading pits the iron to some extent, increasing its surface area. More exposed surface is more to worry about . . . theoretically, at least.

Prime immediately. You can't wait until the next day, so start early or scrape only as much iron as you'll have to time to prime before nightfall. Prime everything you intend to paint. This is important to assure bonding of the new paint to the old surface.

Metal primers are readily available. Their pigment is usually zinc oxide or iron oxide, which have rust-inhibiting properties. (Zinc chromate, until recently found in popular paint brands, has been named as a known carcinogen.) Red lead has a reputation for being the best iron primer, and it does have unsurpassed qualities; however, it has very definite disadvantages, and recent studies show that iron oxide was probably used even more often than lead in the 19th century. Lead paints are illegal nowadays.

Don't prime or paint when the temperature is below 50° F. or when it will drop to below freezing at night, or in wet weather, or in direct sunlight.

Dependable oil-based paint has a long track record, but it may soon be banned in some states. Generally speaking, the problem that crops up in using latex paint is not failure of the paint film, but rather improper bonding of the new paint to the old surface. Oil paint, with its longer drying time, more thoroughly wets the surface and creates a better bond. Meticulous preparation and the use of a compatible primer mitigates the bonding problem.

The primer should be left to cure according to the specifications on the label. Usually this means from three days to over a week before final painting. The finish paint must go on a clean, dust-free surface in two thin (not thinned) coats, with proper drying time in between. Exterior enamel — glossy — offers the most resistance to dirt and abrasion. Some people prefer flat-finish paint for aesthetic reasons; it will probably need touching up and repainting sooner than a glossy surface.

The most popular color for ornamental ironwork has

always been black. In some instances and locales, cast iron may have been brown or dark bottle-green. For some styles in some regions, more fanciful colors were used. In front of brownstones, the massive cast-iron balustrades were often painted with brown sand paint in imitation of carved stone.

## Minor Repairs

Chances are that old ornamental ironwork is going to need more than paint. Mostly you'll find cracks, holes, and separations between pieces. Even though some of the conditions look quite distressing, we'll call them minor because repairs can be done by an interested homeowner.

An understanding of the on-site assembly of cast-iron elements helps when you have to put it all back together. A balustrade consists of hollow cast balusters, each pinned to a masonry slab by a small protrusion inside, and a two-part cast rail. The bottom piece of the rail is bolted to threaded tabs inside the balusters, and then the top rail is bolted to the bottom rail.

A cast-iron newel is usually four cast sides with a cap or cap and finial. It is put together hollow with minimal bolt-



*A segment of hollow rail has been displaced. The solution is realignment, a bolt through top and bottom of rail, and caulk between segments.*



*An example of exfoliated iron expanded by rust due to filling with concrete.*





*Well maintained cast iron: All repairs were done by owners as soon as problems appeared. Detail below.*

ing and little interior structure. It is held to the ground by a simple bracing system that consists mainly of a central threaded rod the height of the piece, which is set into the masonry and packed in lead (see the illustration on page 25).

Years of expansion and contraction cause the pieces to separate from one another. These cracks especially must be filled with an elastomeric compound that will move with the iron and still keep water out. High-quality exterior caulk, such as architectural-grade silicone rubber sealant, is the choice. (It's not usually marketed in retail hardware stores; try builders' suppliers.) Paint won't stick to silicone for very long, but this caulk comes in black and sandstone colors. A butyl caulk — which is paintable — is the second choice, although for large joints in extreme climates, flexibility might not be adequate.

In using all of these products, read the labels and follow the directions. If the caulk label says to apply to a clean, non-glossy surface in certain weather conditions, take their word for it. And always be sure to allow sufficient time for curing of sealants and primers.

Small holes can be filled with plumbing epoxy such as Smooth-On, Kwik-Metal "Cold Solder," or Plumber-Seal. Auto-body putty, which is easily found, not hard to use, mouldable and sandable, and which has a compatible expansion/contraction factor, is useful for do-it-yourself filling. (Wear gloves when working with epoxies.)

No one knows who started the practice of pouring concrete into hollow cast iron — but in some places it's so



*This sheet-metal patch, held by screws and caulk, are nearly 40 years old.*

common that people (mistakenly?) believe it's original to the construction. It is unacceptable. Concrete absorbs water, encouraging the iron to rust from the inside out. The pieces will eventually buckle outward, which looks ugly, besides admitting water and debris. And moisture that does get into the parts has no chance to evaporate.

## Major Repairs

Major repairs refer to structural problems that require disassembly or resetting of a cast-iron element; welding; or extensive mending and rebuilding.

A wobbly newel calls for a professional ironworker. Usually it can be repaired on site: In addition to resetting the



*A professional repair job: The small tabs at the base of the newel are welded to the iron and set into holes in the masonry for stability. This is a shortcut job — the tabs should have been welded on the inside, where they'd be less conspicuous.*

center rod in the base, he or she will weld "little feet" to the newel at the bottom (see photo above). Holes are drilled in the masonry step or walk to correspond with these feet. In the best jobs, molten lead is poured into the holes and the newel is reset. Joints are caulked.

Optimally, any iron that is set in concrete or stone should be packed in lead. This creates a barrier to prevent water from rusting the iron; also, lead is soft enough to allow some movement. Nevertheless, it's more common now to skip the lead-packing step. When the piece is set very tightly into the stone, this won't cause any problems for years. If water does get to the metal, there will be future trouble because metal expanded by rust will rupture the masonry into which it is set. Iron that goes into masonry should be scraped, primed, and painted.

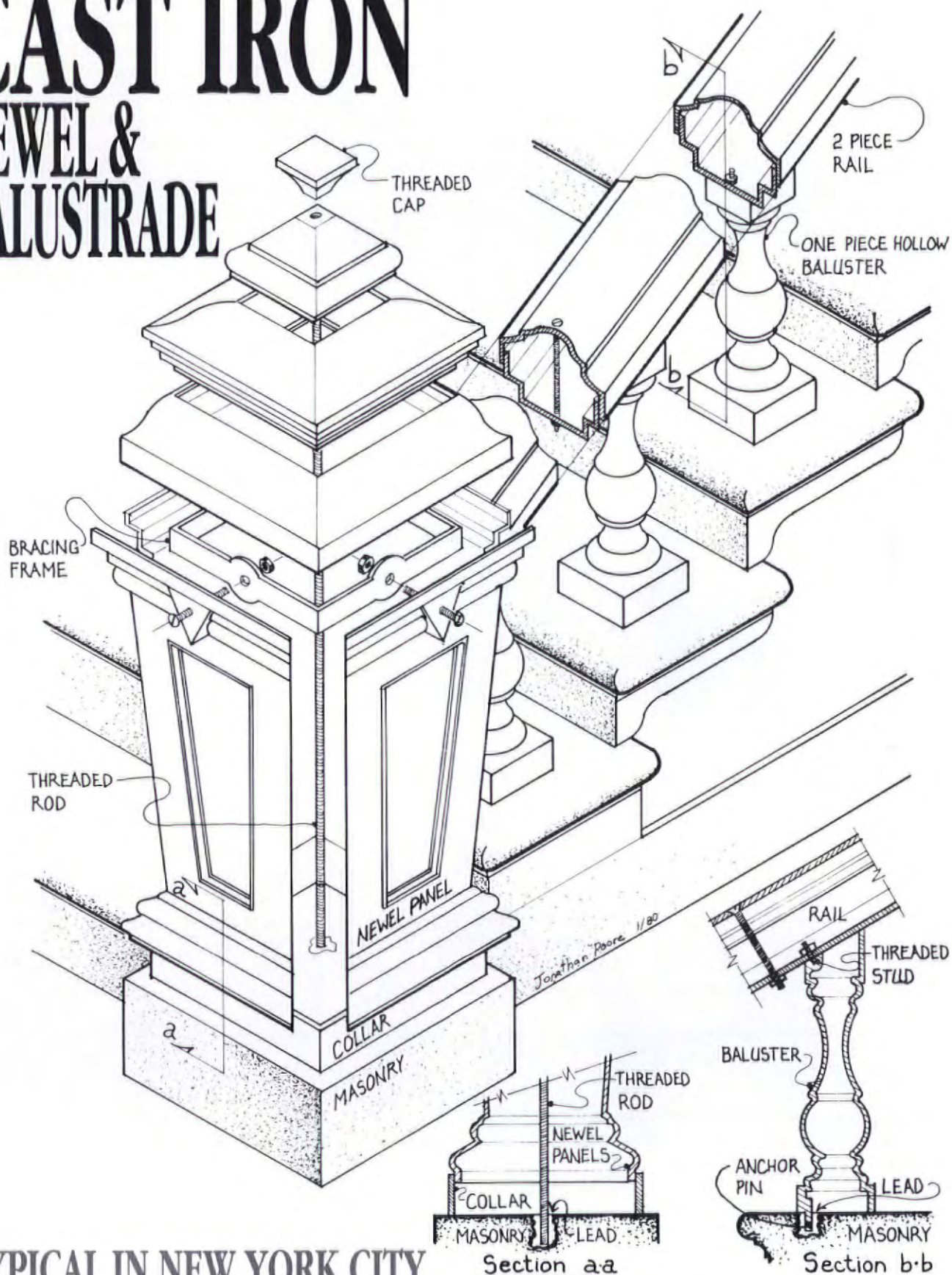
## Binding & Bolts

Judicious use of steel mending plates and bolts can prevent a balustrade from falling apart. A hidden metal binder will span open spaces and allow more movement than welding would permit.

*continued on page 26*



# CAST IRON NEWEL & BALUSTRADE



TYPICAL IN NEW YORK CITY



# STEEL FENCES

If a wrought-iron or steel fence has parts over an inch thick, better consult an ironworker. When the metal is lighter, careful unbending with simple tools often works.



Black iron pipe (used for gas lines) is useful for straightening "spikes." Get a 2- to 3-foot length with a 1¼- or 1½-inch interior diameter. Slip the pipe over the bent spike and use leverage to gently bend it back where it belongs.

If the bottom of a picket is bent, try a length of straight-grained 2×3 with a notch in one end. Hold the notch against the

picket and strike the end of the 2×3 with blows from a heavy hammer until the picket is nudged back in line. For mid-



span bends, start above the center of the picket, then move towards the middle as you work. This way you'll get less spring as you hammer.



Black pipe is also handy for bent scrollwork. Slip the pipe through the scroll so that one end rests on a concrete-block fulcrum at about the same

height as the bent iron. Lift on the free end of the pipe to lever the iron back in place.

For a lot of bent parts, you may want to invest in a *come-along* — a hand-operated winch with a steel cable and hook. Anchor the come-along to a secure base (say, a chain around a tree) and attach the hook to the bent picket. Work the handle until the cable is taut, then ease it a little at a time to make sure that the winch is powerful enough. (Most come-alongs, rated in pounds of force, have handles



that will bend if overloaded. Read the manufacturer's directions.) To straighten welded pickets without breaking the welds, tie blocks of wood at top and bottom of the bent picket. These blocks will transfer force to the next picket and protect the welds.

— Tom Flagg  
Jersey City, N.J.

*continued from page 24*

Where metal is missing because of corrosion, sheet-metal patches are an acceptable answer. The metal should be compatible with iron — steel, for instance, or aluminum or terne metal. Both sides of the patch should be primed, and the underside painted, before installation. Seams can be caulked.

Welding is often an expedient solution for cracks in the iron. This is better than resorting to unattractive mending

methods. However, avoid EXTENSIVE welding of cracked pieces, or of one piece to another. Welding an entire fence back together makes a radical change in the original bolted assembly: Pieces can no longer move with the expansion/contraction cycles caused by seasonal weather changes. This produces internal stress which may eventually lead to major structural breaks at the weakest points.

If this is a do-it-yourself job, resist the impulse to call in an ironworker to do all repairs, major and minor — this kind of specialized on-site work is necessarily expensive.





*Ad-hoc reconstruction: A mending plate holds lower sections rigid; sheet steel is moulded for the top rail. Next, a salvaged top rail will be added and all the joints caulked.*

Best to look to professionals for welding or for major disassembly and bracing. An arrangement can be made with a foundry, sometimes through the ironworker, for casting of replacement pieces. Be aware of cost before work begins.

## Recreating Lost Pieces

There's a limit to what can be replaced by auto-body filler and sheet metal. Occasionally, an entire cast element, such as a finial, will be missing; or cast newel panels may be deteriorated beyond repair. In these instances, replacement of a piece is necessary. There are two basic choices: a cast replacement or a wooden replacement.

A choice should be made considering both cost and aesthetic appropriateness; much depends on the piece that's missing and the services available in the region. The very best answer, of course, is a cast-iron replacement. This is usually the most expensive choice, but it is the most correct; future problems may be avoided by choosing such a compatible replacement.

Much is still available (see Sources, page 28). Cast-iron newels, alas, are not. Some foundries still offer iron casting in a custom-made sand mould. But the lost-wax process is more likely nowadays. This method uses a wax model of the piece to be recast. From this model an investment mould is made (using a kind of dental plaster or colloidal silica). Next, the wax is electrically burned out of the mould by an induction furnace. Molten iron is then poured into the plaster mould.

Before considering epoxy casting or wooden replacements, check out the availability of iron casting in your area. Check with ironworkers, foundries, and even art schools. Often the shops that offer such a service are not foundries, but sculpture studios.

It's usually cheaper to have the piece recast in aluminum. There should be no problem with compatibility of materials, or with reattaching an aluminum replacement. Aluminum has a much higher expansion coefficient than iron has. Compression strength is sacrificed. Backprime all before assembly.

## Modern Casting

Replacement casting with modern materials is another option. It's a time-consuming process, and the results are not the same as metal replacement. Nevertheless, it may be a rewarding solution if you're facing an exorbitant bill from a far-away foundry.

The process is relatively simple. A clean model (such as an iron piece identical to the one that's missing) is used to create a rubber mould. Then a casting material (for instance, polyester resin fortified with fiberglass) is poured into the mould. When cured, the new piece is a tough, detail-accurate copy of the original. With proper installation and paint, it does the job.

Different materials are used for the mould, among them latex, polysulfides, silicone, and urethane. In the same way, different epoxy-compound systems are used as the casting material. Some products are not available in all parts of the country; you can't use every casting material with every moulding material; safety requirements differ according to the chemical. It's best to get information about using these compounds from your supplier. The supplier might be a plastics distributor or a large art-supply store that caters to sculptors.

Once you've chosen a moulding/casting system, doing the job isn't complicated. Just be sure to think ahead through the steps, right through to reinstalling the new pieces. For instance, you might want to cast protruding steel rods into the piece, which later will be twisted around a center rod, or welded or bolted.

When the pieces are in place, a high-quality caulk can be used to seal gaps. The new parts can be primed and painted like iron.

## Wooden Replacements?

If you can't find anybody who does casting, you may know someone who could duplicate the missing piece in wood. Generally, this is only acceptable for "free" pieces such as finials, caps, balls, and so on. It's not a good idea to splice wood into an existing iron piece (such as a baluster or newel panel). The expansion/contraction coefficients of wood and metal are very different, so you'd have recurring gaps and you'd be sacrificing structural strength.

If a replacement part is turned or carved from wood, give it two coats of paint-compatible water repellent. Then prime and paint the piece. Wood will absorb moisture, leading to rust deterioration in nearby iron. The object is to seal the wood completely with paint and caulk, so this can't happen.

Many of these ideas could translate into temporary solutions to maintain the structural and visual unity of your cast iron. Ad-hoc measures can always be replaced again in the future, when the budget allows.

— Patricia Poore



# ARCHITECTURAL IRON SOURCES

**Shops listed below deal with architectural ironwork suitable for restoration needs. (Companies that produce hardware only are not listed.)**

## **Akron Foundry Inc.**

501 Main St., P.O. Box 37, Dept. OHJ  
Akron, IN 46910  
(219) 893-4548  
Free brochure.  
*Family-run foundry that makes custom castings.*

## **Antique Cast Iron**

RD 1, Box 187 R, Dept. OHJ  
Cherry Valley, NY 13320  
(607) 264-3607  
Literature available upon request.  
*Custom cast-iron restoration and fabrication.*

## **Architectural Iron Co.**

Box 126, Schocopee Rd., Dept. OHJ  
Milford, PA 18337  
(717) 296-7722  
Catalog, \$4.  
*A full-service restoration company, wrought and cast iron. Consulting services available.*

## **Bokencamp's Forge**

10132 Liberty Road, Dept. OHJ  
Powell, OH 43065  
(614) 889-0819  
No literature.  
*Custom-forged metalwork for the house and garden.*

## **Bradley Metal Design**

2645 Garfield Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
(301) 589-7828  
Free literature.  
*Custom wrought and cast iron.*

## **Cassidy Brothers Forge**

US Route 1, Dept. OHJ  
Rowley, MA 01969  
(508) 948-7303  
Brochure, \$1.  
*Custom wrought and cast iron.*

## **Clarksville Foundry, Inc.**

P.O. Box 786  
Clarksville, TN 37040  
(615) 647-1538  
No literature.  
*Gray-iron and aluminum foundry and*

*machine shop. Operating since 1854. Many castings available.*

## **Custom Ironworks**

Box 99, Dept. OHJ  
Union, KY 41091  
(606) 384-4486  
Brochure, \$2.  
*Produces reproduction cast- and wrought-iron fencing.*

## **Ian Eddy**

Road 1, Box 975, Dept. OHJ  
Putney, VT 05346  
(802) 387-5991  
Brochure, \$3.  
*Full-service architectural blacksmith.*

## **Elm Industries**

1539 Race St., Dept. OHJ  
Cincinnati, OH 45210  
(513) 241-7927  
Free literature.  
*Custom and stock wrought iron.*



*Replacement castings for railings, available from Lawler Machine & Foundry, and Steptoe & Wife Antiques, Ltd.*

## **Fairmount Foundry Co., Inc.**

3125 35th Ave. North, Dept. OHJ  
Birmingham, AL 35207  
(800) 821-2501  
Free catalog.  
*Ornamental fencing in aluminum or gray iron. Decorative castings and components available.*

## **Greensboro Art Foundry & Machine Co.**

2101 Park Terr., Dept. OHJ  
Greensboro, NC 27403  
(919) 299-0106  
Free literature.  
*Custom-casting services.*

## **Hardware + Plus**

701 E. Kingsley Rd., Dept. OHJ  
Garland, TX 75041

(214) 271-9726  
Catalog, \$3.  
*Stocks over 200 iron parts.*

## **Hern Iron Works**

1900 Milview, Dept. OHJ  
Couer D'Alene, ID 83814  
(208) 765-3115  
Free catalog.  
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*Wrought Iron in Architecture: An Illus-  
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# WAINSCOT

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**BY GORDON BOCK**

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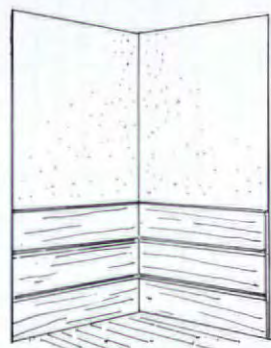
If you believe an old story, wainscoting started as short flooring boards set on end around the main rooms of a house to prevent damage to the plaster. Whether that's the whole story or not, wainscoting has been a practical and beautiful wall finish in houses since the earliest buildings in North America. In kitchens and bathrooms, it protects the walls from food and water; in dining rooms, from furniture; in halls and stairways, from traffic. And it gives rooms a rich finishing touch.

No less popular today, period wainscoting is the highlight of many restored rooms. Giving new life to old wainscoting isn't difficult, but it does require an understanding of basic woodworking repair techniques — as well as an understanding of how various types of wainscot were built.

## Historical Types

In dictionary terms, a wainscot is simply a covering applied to the lower part of an interior wall. Tile, glass, sheet metal, and specialty materials (such as Lincrusta-Walton) have

been used to make wainscoting. But wood has always been the favorite. The design and construction of wood wainscots is limited only by the skill of the carpenter, and over the past 300 years, the variety of patterns has been tremendous. Three basic types of wood wainscoting, however, stand out.



*Horizontal board wainscot*



### 1. Horizontal Boards

The construction of early colonial houses in the Northeast made it logical to use a system of wide boards for wainscoting. At first, use of lath-and-plaster was uncommon in the average house, and inside walls were finished with vertical broad pine boards then plentiful. By the mid-18th century, plas-

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## PANEL WAINSCOT RESTORATION AT OHJ

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*Alterations, wear, and the "missing-pieces syndrome." Trim expert Vito DiDonno began by rebuilding the (accessible) outside corner.*



*This moulding was duplicated by first cutting the coves with a router. The center bead was added with a Stanley moulding plane.*



*The 8'-long top rail was spliced; the corner guards (all missing) came from appropriate stock patterns in oak. Nail beads were set, then filled.*



ter was preferred for finishing the front rooms of a house. Used in combination with plaster walls, the wainscot boards were run *horizontally*.

This true wainscotting normally ran to the same height above the floor as the window sill. The window stool moulding was then run continuously onto the top of the wainscotting to form a cap or chair rail. The wainscotting itself was almost always pine stock, planed down to about 7/8-in. thickness. Three moderately wide boards might be used with identical joints to produce a wainscotting around 33 inches high, but two large boards (14 to 15 inches wide) with a single joint was also a common scheme. Simple joints might be a half-lap (shiplap) or bead-and-half-lap, while more involved joints employed *shadow-moulded* edges for a more decorative effect.



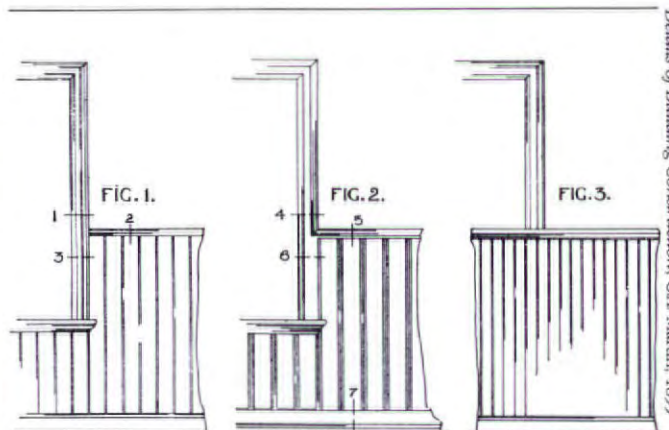
*Shadow-moulded joints*

## 2. Vertical Boards

Wainscotting with vertical boards really took off in the 19th century, when machine production of millwork and frame construction of houses became commonplace. In its most rudimentary form, vertical-board wainscotting is installed a lot like flooring. *Grounds* are nailed horizontally across the wall studs at the top and bottom limits of the wainscot (and centers, if necessary). Then boards are attached vertically



*Grounds in plaster at d, c, & a anchor wainscot.*



*Three typical treatments for trimming around a window*

along the length of the wall — like floorboards onto joists. A cap moulding is added at the top edge to finish off the board ends and serve as a chair rail. At the floor, a horizontal baseboard was common. To compensate for gaps and drafts when the wood shrinks and swells, most wainscotting stock is edgemilled in either a shiplap or tongue-and-groove joint (which also allows for blindnailing, as with flooring). Adding a decorative bead or other moulded pattern here helps to further disguise the seam. Additional mouldings below the cap and on top of the baseboard make the wainscotting even more ornamental — an approach which was taken to its limits in the glory days of the Victorian era.

The variations possible with this basic plan are endless. One common scheme is to run the wainscot to 5 ft. or more in height and swap the chair rail moulding for a grooved plate rail. The variations more or less fit into



*Missing panels: Cut on a table saw with an ordinary combination blade. After blade angle and depth were set, panel was run through on edge.*



*Applied panels were originally toenailed from the hidden side of the wainscot. Many were damaged by previous "restorers" prying them off.*



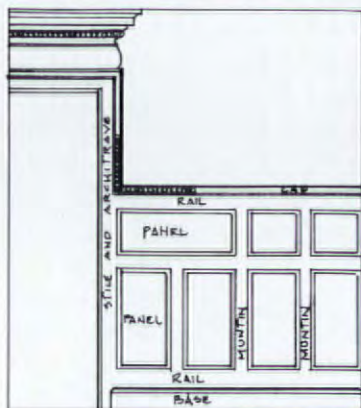
*To reinstall a panel the same way, whole wainscot would have had to come off. Instead, a pair of short grounds were nailed to the wall.*



prevalent styles by period, as you'll note by leafing through patternbooks or books on historic houses — or by looking at your own house.

### 3. Panels

Paneled wainscotting is the most complicated to build but the most sumptuous to look at, and has been sought after for stairs, hallways, and important rooms of houses in almost every era.



The construction of paneled wainscotting is very similar to that of a paneled door. In each case, large wood panels are held in a framework of stiles and rails that allows the panels (which usually make up the bulk of the surface) to "float" — that is, expand and contract according to their normal mois-

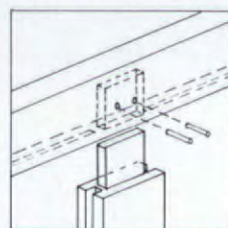
ture cycle without distorting or being confined by the surrounding woodwork.

Panels can be simply flat, thin stock, but are usually of a *raised panel* design. They are made by milling or hand-planing the perimeter of an inch-or-so thick board to a featheredge. There are many designs of raised panels, but one of the most popular is the *fielded panel*, where the central portion of the board is left flat. Raised panels not only produce attractive shadowlines in the final wainscot, but were also probably stronger and easier to make by hand than a thin panel. Moreover, they could simply be reversed in the wainscot if an unraised surface was desired

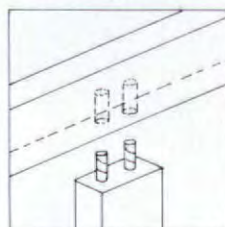
for the interior.

Rail and stile construction has taken different forms in the course of two hundred years. In colonial-era panel wainscotting (and most handmade work), stiles and muntins (which separate panels) are connected to rails with mortise-and-tenon joints. These joints are secured without glue by pegging through the rails — traditionally, square pegs in round holes for maximum grip. Rails, stiles, and muntins are ploughed (rabbeted) to receive the feather-edge of the panel. With this type of construction, the decorative moulding that surrounds the panel is *solid-moulded*, that is, planed on the edges of the rail-stile stock and an integral part of it. Later, machine-made wainscotting usually did away with mortise-and-tenon joints in favor of doweled-and-glued joints, a common practice in the 1800s.

Where panels are not held in a rabbet, a system of *applied* panels may have been used.

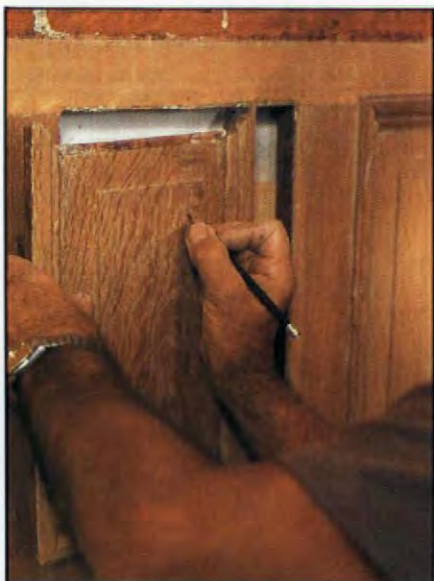


Mortise and tenon



Dowelled joint

Here, panels are retained in the frame by individual mouldings in any of several configurations. Some methods recess the panel into a dado in the frame (like a pane of glass), where it is held in place with applied or *planted* mouldings. Others make use of a *bolelection* moulding (which bridges two surfaces of different heights). This type of moulding holds the panel, at times proud of the surface of the frame.



Ground locations were transferred to panel fronts. Mouldings securing the panels would be facenailed to grounds (wainscot frame might split).

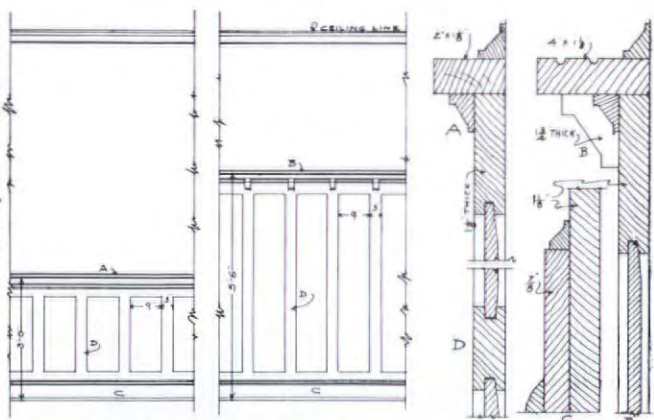


Some mouldings were salvaged, others newly made. All were nailed in the original "picture frame" arrangement that allows panels to move.



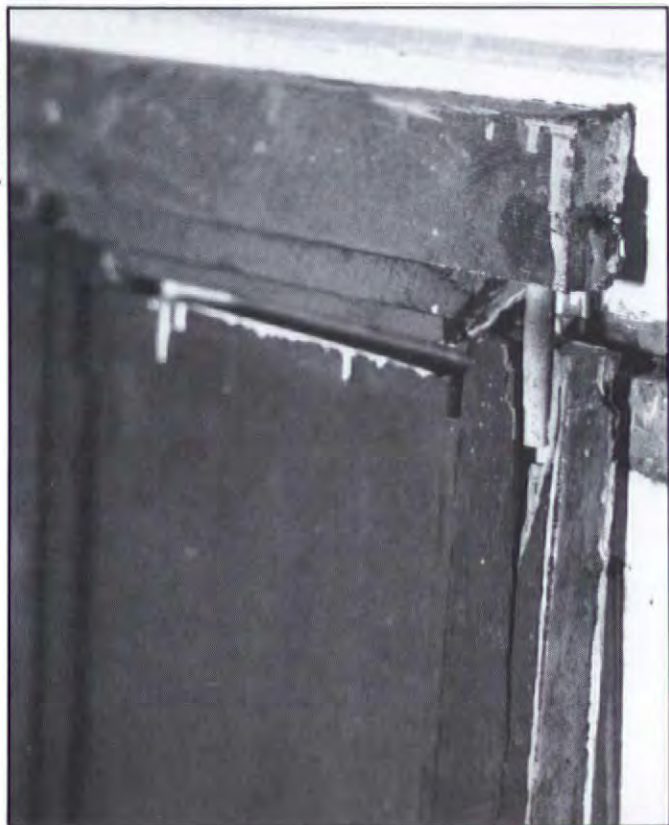
Completed panel was reinstalled with finishing nails, left and right, in pre-drilled bores. The panel floats and should survive another 100 years.





Designs for a Craftsman-era, flat-panel wainscot. Dining-room version (center) is over five feet high and incorporates a plate rail.

photos: Gordon Bock



This fractured stile-and-rail dowel joint shows damage only from the rear. Regluing, clamping, and a mending plate across the joint will make a sound repair.

## Installation and Repair Techniques

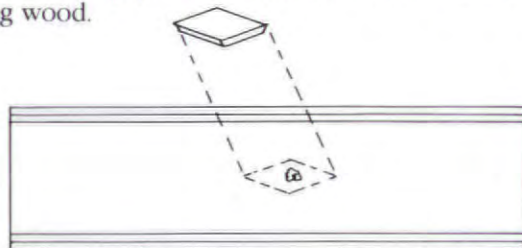
Wainscot building is not a specialized trade or craft; instead, it draws on many time-honored skills and methods in carpentry and joinery. In the same way, wainscoting repair involves little specialized knowledge, but rather depends on a good woodworker's "bag of tricks." While every project is different, here are some general techniques to keep in mind when restoring wainscoting.

### 1. Horizontal Boards

Wainscoting with horizontal-board construction is so basic that most problems come from direct physical injury to

the wood — either wear and abuse or alterations to the building. When individual boards are grossly damaged or missing altogether, replacing an entire board is the route to go. Colonial horizontal wainscoting is typically attached with a minimum of nails (such as handmade "T-heads") and this usually makes removing and reinstalling boards a simple project. Locating wide-board lumber and planing it with a period edge pattern, however, might best be left to restoration companies who have the moulding cutters right at hand for this kind of woodworking. In these cases, it pays to send a sample of the original board for best matching of moulding profiles. Don't forget to check locally, too, with sawmills and independent carpenters and cabinetmakers.

Repairs can also be made without replacing entire lengths of lumber. Splicing in new sections is a well established method for restoring sections of wainscot or cap which have disappeared in the course of alterations (as when someone added a partition or built-in cabinet). New pieces should be fitted with a scarf joint (cut at a bias rather than square) to make the repair less obvious, then glued and nailed. In such cases, the repair stock can be just roughed out when fitted and then final shaped (with, say, plane and sandpaper) to match and blend with the neighboring wood.



A dutchman repair

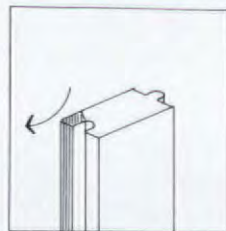
Dutchman repairs also fall into this category and are well adapted to filling holes left by plumbing or heating pipes. Repair stock should be the same species as the original wood, and looks best when the grain runs in the same direction. When cutting the dutchman, choose a shape that is easy to reproduce, but is irregular enough not to make the patch obvious (a lopsided diamond or trapezoid, say, rather than a circle or square). The edges of the dutchman should also be shaped so that it will not fall through the wainscot when it is fitted in place (a bevel edge is common). Dutchmen can be glued in with white carpenter's glue and then finish planed and sanded when dry.

### 2. Vertical Boards

Dutchmen and scarfing are handy for repairing vertical-board wainscots, too, but they're not the only techniques that might be useful. Depending upon the construction of the wainscot, replacing or changing the location of individual boards can also be an effective way to minimize or eliminate damage. First, any retaining trim (such as baseboards or cap moulding) are pried clear or removed entirely. This should leave the board(s) held in place only by nails, which can either be pulled or driven through the board with a set. Where the wainscoting is blindnailed in place (as in tongue-and-groove boards), an initial board may have to be split out with a chisel to make for neat



removal of the rest. Installing replacement boards is a lot like repairing flooring. Butt-jointed or shiplap-type boards usually fit back with a minimum of fuss and can be face-nailed. Tongue-and-groove boards, by nature, do not reassemble as neatly, but removing the back "half" of a groove on the last board usually lets it slip in as if it were shiplapped.



"Shoeboarding"

Sometimes wainscot restoration means completing a missing length of several feet or building a whole new section. This work is basically new construction and

several general tips are helpful.

- \* For best results, install the wainscot over a wall that is plastered or drywalled. Covering over a naked wall cavity increases the chances that the wainscot will be drafty or suffer from a big difference in front-to-back moisture levels.

- \* In most buildings, grounds can be anchored to wall studs in three different ways: 1) on top of the plaster or drywall surface; 2) directly to the stud surface (plaster or drywall is either cut away or installed around grounds); 3) between studs, similar to bridging (ground faces are flush with stud surfaces.) Each method has a different depth in the wall and will be appropriate depending upon the clearance needed in the final wainscot.

- \* If there is a chance gaps may show through vertical board joints when they shrink (as with a butt-jointed wainscot), paint the wall black behind the joints to mask the gaps.

- \* For wainscots that end on an open wall (such as an outside corner of doorway), calculate the positioning of the boards carefully so that the wainscot "breaks" gracefully — in most cases, finishing with a whole board. If a fraction has to be used, place it at an inside corner.

- \* Where durability was a factor, period carpentry texts recommended softwoods (such as pine) for kitchen wainscots and hardwoods for bathrooms.

- \* As with any flooring or paneling, it is good practice to store wainscot stock as long as possible — say, a minimum of two weeks — in the room where it will be installed. This lets the lumber stabilize at the same moisture content as the room and guards against surprise shrinkage or swelling once the wainscot is up.

### 3. Panels

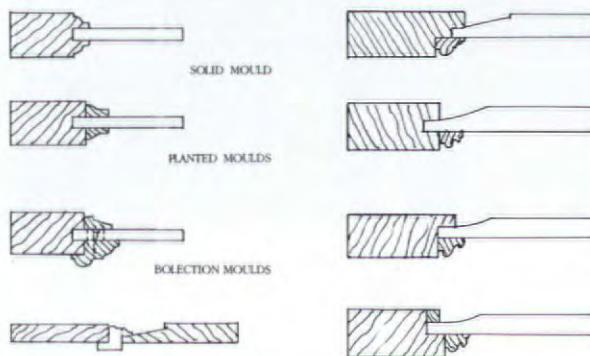
Countless designs of panel wainscotting exist, so it's hard to generalize about repairs. However, setting aside time for a quick, two-part evaluation of any wainscot before breaking out the tools always improves the final results.

First, examine the wainscot closely until you understand its construction. (This may mean a little paint stripping and gentle testing of mouldings with a putty knife or thin pry-bar.) How are the panels held in place? Are the mouldings applied? If so, how? What holds the stiles, muntins, and rails together? The answers to these questions are important for making repairs efficiently without causing more damage.

Second, assess each damaged area in terms of its need for repairs. In other words, "decide where you are going



*This panel framework is anchored directly to masonry. Panels, bolelection mouldings, and finish trim are applied later.*



*Three basic ways to secure a floating panel (top, left); and variations. Inspect panel wainscotting carefully to determine which system is used.*

to stop" in the restoration process. Is every crack and split in the woodwork going to be filled so that it looks nearly new? Or, are you just going to mend areas that are unsightly or structurally unsound? Do you replace every area of gouged moulding? Or do you smooth these spots with sandpaper so that they still show wear, but won't snag on clothing or a dustrag? These decisions set the scope of the work and also determine the level of finish for the completed wainscot.





*This panel had a hairline crack the owner may have been tempted to fill with paint. But a closer look showed it was completely unattached and ready to fall into the wall.*

Moving on to the problems themselves, heavy paint and varnish buildup is a common threat to panel wainscotting. Paint that clogs between a floating panel and the stile-and-rail framework glues it in place. The result is that the panel cannot expand or contract. In time, it succumbs to the stress and splits. (The same thing happens when misguided restorers glue in "loose" panels.) Paint buildup also jacks out mouldings and opens joints in woodwork. If it fills spaces so that the wood is forced to move when it expands, the effect is almost like the freeze-thaw cycle of ice on masonry. The solution is the same in both cases: Strip and clean the buildup from the working panel areas and joints of the wainscot. In addition, future painting or varnishing should be done carefully — for instance, painting up to panel joints instead of running the brush into them.

Split panels are also common. Unfortunately, they are also tricky to repair, so it pays to first decide if a fix is indeed better than just living with a split. Try to determine, too, *why* the panel split. If it parted due to impact damage or being painted in, gluing the sections together will probably be successful. A check-type split due to the growth of the wood, however, may not be repaired as easily or reliably.

Repairing splits is relatively simple if the panel can be removed from the wainscot. Gluing and clamping requires white carpenter's glue and enough clamps to close the split and hold the panel flat (sheets of wax paper will prevent the panel from sticking to the benchtop). For working glue into narrow cracks, use a thin artist's palette knife or draw



*The opposite case: Although its split is long and old, the panel itself — which is still well-secured in the wainscot — is not in jeopardy.*

it in from behind with suction from a vacuum cleaner. Filling produces a more noticeable repair, but sometimes works better on short cracks. Tapered wood slivers (that match the panel stock) can be fitted to the split, glued in place, and then finish-planed and sanded. Alternately, wood fillers with good adhesion properties (such as epoxy-based products) can be used. The finished repair won't be invisible, but it can be stained or colored to a wood tone so it resembles a sap mark.

Epoxy fillers and adhesives are also ideal for repairing panels that cannot be removed readily from the wainscot. Unlike resorcinol glues, for instance, these materials do not need the pressure of clamps to work well and will make a good fix so long as the panel isn't disturbed during curing. When panels have to be removed from the wainscot, repair becomes very complicated (and so should be avoided). Mortise-and-tenon joints can often be released by driving pegs through the woodwork with a punch. With luck, this will free the top rail to permit access to the panels. Dowelled wainscots are even trickier. It's sometimes possible to coax the rail up by tapping all along its length because joints and glue have shrunk over time. This will break the bond on some dowels so they move easily, and expose others so they can be cut with a hacksaw blade. (Cut dowels can be bored out and replaced once the rail is off.)

Warping is the other panel problem that crops up from time to time. Good quality panels are traditionally made from quartersawn lumber ("wainscot oak" originally meant





Deciding "how far to go": Putting back the baseboard cap moulding would be relatively simple and would complete the woodwork. Replacing the gouged panel moulding, however, might only create an obvious repair and would be a lot of work.

quartersawn oak), specifically because it's the most stable of cuts. But even these panels can be affected by the temperature and moisture extremes of radiators, air conditioners, or heating registers. Warped panels can't always be straightened successfully, or *stay* unwarped. Still, methods that swell one side of a panel and/or shrink the other (after you strip off all finishes) sometimes work:

- \* Lay a wet towel on a solid, flat surface (concrete or flagstone is good). Then, place the the panel, cupped side down, on the wet towel with a weight on top until the towel is dry (at least twelve hours).

- \* Lay the panel, cupped side down, on wet grass while the sun is hot and shining.

- \* Lay the panel, cupped side up, on a warm radiator or hot-air register with a damp towel on top.

- \* Swell the cupped side of the panel by placing it over a steam source such as a radiator vent or a hot-water trickle from a sink faucet.



Whole sections of wainscoting that may have to be removed (for access to service areas, for instance) are best attached with screws. These screwheads will be hidden by wood plugs, but they'd be almost as invisible if stained or painted black.

- \* Shrink the crowned side of the panel by drying it slowly with a hair dryer or heat gun (say, while watching a movie).

If a panel doesn't respond to these treatments, try kerfing it on the hidden side with several parallel saw cuts. The final approach, of course, is substituting a new panel. These can usually be made with a table saw or hand plane, or ordered from a cabinet shop or other supplier. To help prevent future warping, panels should be finished on both sides (to keep the moisture content of both faces in balance) and have coatings doubled up if near dry-heat sources, such as radiators.



#### Special thanks to:

Vito DiDonno  
New Britain, CT  
(That's him pictured on pages 30-32.)

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# LOG HOUSES IN AMERICA

BY J. RANDALL COTTON

Since the early 1800s, the log house has been romanticized, even used as a campaign gimmick in presidential elections: William Henry Harrison ran a "Log Cabin" campaign in 1840, capitalizing on his humble beginnings in order to identify with the common man. And of course, our most beloved president, Abraham Lincoln, was born in a log cabin — as were seven other presidents. (In what has to be one of the oddest architectural juxtapositions ever, what is believed to be Lincoln's log-house birthplace is now ensconced, like a statue of some Greek goddess, in a monumental temple plunked down in the Kentucky countryside.)

But the romantic notions we hold about log houses, even today, do not provide an accurate picture of the true place of this building type in American history. For one thing, the common notion that log houses were *only* expedient "frontier" dwellings is a myth. Yes, log dwellings were probably the most common type of shelter built by pioneers on the forested American frontier. But in many regions of the country, log houses were considered more than just temporary — throughout much of the country, including the Mid-Atlantic region, the upper Great Lakes region, and particularly the South extending into Texas, log houses were often built as permanent homes. Many have been continuously lived in for more than 100 years, and surviving examples date as early as 1700.





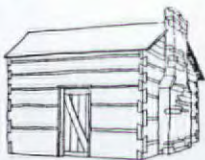
**What is there about a log cabin that appeals to our imagination, that seems so alluring and full of the suggestion of romance? Is it not because the house of logs is a part of our heredity? It was a primitive home to man, a rudimentary sheltering of domestic life, a place of safety where love and friendship could be shut in and foe and danger shut out.**

So said designer Gustav Stickley in the 1912 edition of *More Craftsman Homes*.

Second, many think log houses were fairly rare, and surviving examples even rarer. Not so. For example, one survey estimated that there were *ten to twelve thousand* still standing in the state of Georgia alone in the 1950s. Early descriptions indicate that entire towns consisted virtually of log structures — early Hagerstown, Maryland, and Zoar, Ohio, for example. A 1794 account of York, Pennsylvania, indicates “400 houses, of which 60 were brick, the rest log and mortar.” One of the reasons we don’t notice so many surviving log houses today is that many have been sheathed over with clapboards, shingles, etc., or incorporated into larger frame houses. Also, many survive in out-of-the-way places.

Early log houses are folk housing, a form of vernacular building. Like the “soddies” of the American plains or the adobe houses of the Southwest, log houses made maximum use of the natural materials at hand. They could be erected using a minimal number of tools and skills. They provided relatively cheap, quick shelter that effectively kept out the cold and rain.

## The Origins of Log Houses



Log houses have been built for many centuries in parts of Europe. Some claim that examples can also be found in Russia, Siberia, Asia, and Korea as far back as the Middle Ages.

Despite regional and cultural differences in the details, most log houses have a basic form in common: a simple one-room space (called a “pen” in this country) constructed of horizontal logs laid atop each other and interlocked with notches at the corners.

There is little doubt that the Swedes and Finns who settled New Sweden, beginning in 1638, were the ones who introduced log cabins into the New World. (New Sweden consisted of the region immediately bordering the

Delaware River, what is now northern Delaware, southeastern Pennsylvania, and southern New Jersey.) These Scandinavian settlers came from woodland cultures where hewn log-building technology had been known for centuries. Little wonder then that they continued that tradition when they landed in the heavily forested Delaware Valley.

There are very few 17th-century log houses remaining today in the area once known as New Sweden — and even the provenance of these survivors is debated. New Sweden never really succeeded as a colony, and by the 1860s the area was settled by the English, who had no log-building traditions of their own. (A couple of log “blockhouses” believed to date from the 17th or early-18th century still survive in English-settled Maine. These, however, were intended as defensive structures and represent a very different type and tradition from the log houses considered here.)

The next cultural group to bring log-building tradition with them to the Colonies were Germanic settlers. These colonists emigrated from several European regions: the Palatinate, Alpine Switzerland, Moravia, Bohemia, and other Slavic regions of the East German-Czechoslovak borderlands. Germanic immigration to North America began in earnest in the 1720s and 1730s. The colonists settled southeastern Pennsylvania — some of the same territory settled earlier by the Swedes and Finns — and many of their first houses were also log.

Among folklorists, archeologists, and architectural historians, a debate continues as to which ethnic group contributed *most* to log-building technology in America: the Swedes and Finns, or the later Germanic settlers. But there is a consensus on these points: Building houses of logs began in the Delaware Valley region, was quickly adapted by other settlers — particularly the English and Scots-Irish — and spread from there to most of the wooded areas of America. (Exceptions: New England, where English frame-house traditions were so strong that log houses never caught on, and the Hudson and Chesapeake regions, which



were largely settled before the advent of the log house in America.)

## The Tradition Spreads

Whoever taught them, the English and Scots-Irish settlers seemed to have taken to log-building quite easily. After all, its technology was not all that difficult to learn. And because the East Coast was so heavily wooded, it made perfect sense to use the trees felled when clearing the fields as the raw material for erecting a house of logs. The *form* of folk housing they'd left behind — the stone or frame cottages of the English, the stone cottages of the Scots-Irish — was easily translated into log. Thus the beginnings of an *American* tradition: the log construction of the Scandinavians and Germans combined with the form and plans preferred by settlers from the British Isles.

Although there continued to be numerous variations, the prototypical American log house averaged 16 × 6 to 18 × 22 feet in plan dimensions; it had a single room with a loft space in the attic, an exterior chimney on one gabled end, and a door centered on one eave-side of the house. Sometimes another door stood opposite the first on the other eave side. Windows were few, sometimes non-existent. The gable-end chimney and plan were features infused by British Isles traditions; fenestration was influenced by both Germanic and British Isles precedents.

Wherever these colonists went, the log house was a favored dwelling. From southeast Pennsylvania, settlement paths took log-building pioneers down the Shenandoah Valley into the piedmont, foothills, and mountains of Virginia and the Carolinas and thence into the Deep South. Others travelled over the Alleghenies into the Midwest.

Later waves of immigrants built log houses in Missouri, the Ozarks, and eastern Texas. Only when the forests gave way to the Great Plains did the predominance of the log house stop. But the tradition was picked up again in the forested regions of the Rocky Mountain states, the Northwest, and wooded valleys of California. From the early 1700s into the first part of the 20th century, log houses were built in this country on a nearly continuous basis.



Reconstructed log soldier's but (Valley Forge, Penn.). Note log chimneys and in the round wall construction.

We should make a distinction here: In some log shelters, the logs were left *in the round* with bark remaining on. The buildings were small — one room, one storey with a loft — ill-fitting, and often crude. These are usually referred to as log *cabins*. A log *house* was intended to be more or less permanent. It was characterized by close-fitting *beun* logs interlocked at the corners by relatively complicated notches, such as dovetails. Log houses were sometimes two full storeys, often had interior-room partitions, porches, and occasionally some stylistic features such as beaded woodwork. It is interesting to note that, even as early as 1803, a commentator made a distinction between log cabins and log houses.

## Building Log Houses

The siting of a log house varied from region to region, but commonly — especially in hilly or mountainous terrain such as southern Appalachia — it was situated midway on a sloping part of the property. A river or creek, along with cultivated bottomlands, might lay below, pastures and woodlots above. Outbuildings, as required, were situated about the main log house.

Conceivably, log houses could have been built entirely from the materials at hand: wood, stone, and earth. In reality, most also incorporated some manufactured building materials: glass for windows; iron hardware; milled lumber and nails for such refinements as porches, floors, stairs, roof rafters and partition walls, and occasionally plaster for interior finishes.

A stone foundation, usually dry-laid, came first. In the South, the foundation was often not continuous but consisted of stone piers at the corners and at critical points in between; this allowed air to circulate under the log house and prevent rotting. Cellars under log houses were uncommon.

With a felling axe, a man could clear his fields and provide the raw material for his log house. Although many wood species were used for log buildings, indigenous trees that provided long, straight, and rot-resistant logs were clearly preferred. Oak, pine, and cedar were commonly



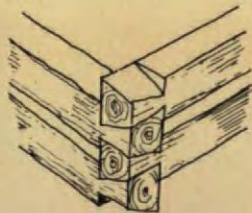
One-pen, windowless log house surrounded by log barns, springhouse, and smokehouse (Iron Duff, N.C.)



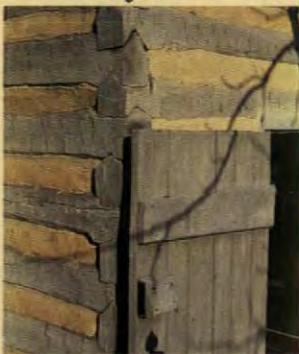
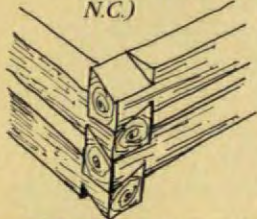
# TYPES OF NOTCHES



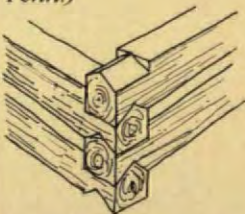
**FULL-DOVETAIL NOTCH**  
*Lick Boner House, c. 1787 (Salem, N.C.)*



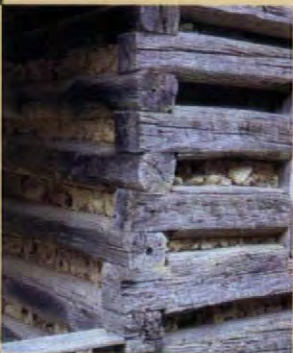
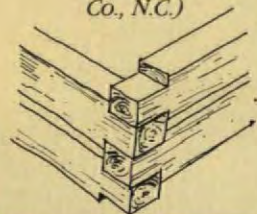
**HALF-DOVETAIL NOTCH**  
*Smokehouse, early 1800s (Burke Co., N.C.)*



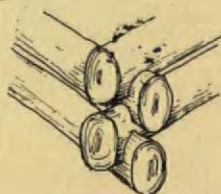
**V NOTCH**  
*Reproduction stable (Ephrata, Penn.)*



**SQUARE NOTCH**  
*Leatherwood House, 19th century (Haywood Co., N.C.)*



**SADDLE NOTCH**  
*Moody Farm log barn, 19th century (Fines Creek, N.C.)*



used in the Deep South, lower Mississippi Valley, and eastern Texas. Elsewhere in the East and Midwest, poplar, locust, ash, and oak were popular. Chestnut — now rare due to blight — was highly prized for log houses because of its straight grain and rot-resistant qualities.

The length of the straight, untapering part of the tree trunk, and the size of the logs that a couple of men could hoist, limited the dimensions of the basic unit, or "pen," of log houses. Thus the size of the pens of most log houses tended to fall within a relatively small range: 12 to 18 feet for the narrow dimension, 16 to 24 feet for the longer dimension.

Except for the rudimentary log cabins, in which logs were left round, the logs were hewn flat on two sides (and often on all four sides) with a broadaxe or adze. In the most refined examples, the axe marks were removed with a draw knife. Next came the most critical part of building any log structure: making the interlocking corner notches that held the whole thing together. There were numerous kinds of corner notches, some harder to make than others. Different ethnic groups preferred certain types of notches, and in different regions of the country, one or two notch types usually predominated. The most common are:

- **Full Dovetail** — Resembling the dovetail joints used in furniture making, it provides the tightest corners and is quite attractive. But it's also the most difficult notch to make and is therefore uncommon. Making full-dovetail notches was tackled by meticulous builders such as the German immigrants.
- **Half Dovetail** — One of the most common notches, it resembles the full dovetail but is splayed only on the top side. It's almost as strong as a full dovetail, but easier to make.
- **V Notch** — In this common type, the "V" is always inverted so as not to trap water (a design feature in almost all notch types). Sometimes the ends (the "crown") of V-notched logs extend beyond the corners.
- **Diamond Notch** — Fairly uncommon and often used with round logs, it is of Scandinavian origin according to some experts.
- **Square Notch** — Essentially just a rabbet joint, it's very easy to make. When the log ends don't extend beyond the corners, a square joint offers little interlocking structural integrity and is therefore often pegged vertically as well. When the log ends *do* extend, the joint is the same kind that was used with the once-popular Lincoln Log toy sets. (Trivia question: Who invented Lincoln Logs?\*)
- **Saddle Notch** — The most easily made notch is also the least weathertight. It is usually used with round logs and therefore commonly found in temporary log shelters, log barns, and other outbuildings.

Some "plank" logs were so finely hewn (or sawn) and fitted that little or no chinking and daubing was required to fill the spaces between them. Typically, however, chinking and daubing was necessary to make an otherwise drafty log house weathertight. The spaces between the logs were first filled with chinking material, such as small stones or

\*Lloyd Wright, son of Frank Lloyd Wright, invented Lincoln Logs.



sticks; over this was applied a daubing of mud or clay mixed with a filler, such as straw, sand, pebbles, or animal hair. Sometimes the surface of the chinking material was purposely left exposed and laid in a decorative pattern, such as a herringbone pattern of sticks.

In modern log-house restorations, traditional chinking and daubing is often replaced by a Portland-cement mixture. However, there is an increasing appreciation for authentic materials and methods, even though traditional daubing needs to be touched up periodically.

Although it may seem jarring to our modern aesthetic sensibilities, the exterior of log houses was occasionally whitewashed. But more commonly, the logs were covered with weatherboards (clapboards), sometimes immediately, often within a few years. This practice was an attempt not only to "dress up" a log house and make it more fashionable, but also to eliminate the need to regularly renew the daubing. (A note to would-be log-house restorers: If you find that the logs beneath siding show virtually no signs of wear or weathering, chances are that the house was originally sided. For the sake of authenticity and longevity, resist the urge to remove the siding, even though exposed logs are very appealing.)

The roof systems of most extant log houses are of conventional construction, consisting of hewn or milled rafters covered with nailing strips or sheathing boards. Some early or primitive log houses might have "pole" rafters, with the bark left on and hewn flat only on the top side. Roof gables were usually covered with lapped, horizontal weatherboards, although some German-Americans preferred vertical gable boards.

Hand-hewn wood shakes or milled wood shingles were the most common original covering for roofs, although few original examples survive. Replacement roofs run the gamut from asphalt shingles to standing-seam metal, which was popular in the South.

Window and door openings could be cut out after the log walls of the house were laid. Factory-made window sash was generally used as soon as available. The sash was usually small, however — 6-pane fixed sash, or 2-over-2 or 3-over-6 double-hung sash, for example. A board-and-



*The Turck-Schottler House sports vertical gable boards, a pent roof, and rear shed addition (Old World, Wisc.).*

batten door was the quintessential log-house door type, but manufactured panelled doors were also used, especially as replacements.

Log-house chimneys were most commonly made of stone: either smooth "river stones" that had to be set in mortar, or sharp, fragmented field stones that could be dry laid. Some dry-laid chimneys are real works of art, with crisp corners, plumb lines, and flat faces. Chimneys would narrow in what is called a "shoulder." Large, flat stones, laid diagonally, would act as weatherings at the shoulders.

Early log-house chimneys were sometimes made of "cobwork," extant examples of which are very rare (see photo on page 39). A cobwork chimney consisted of hor-



*A c.1780 dogtrot house lies at the heart of the Col. John Carson House (Marion, N.C.).*



*Note the tight, crisp, stonework of this single-shoulder, dry-laid chimney (Grayson House, Rutherford Co., N.C.).*

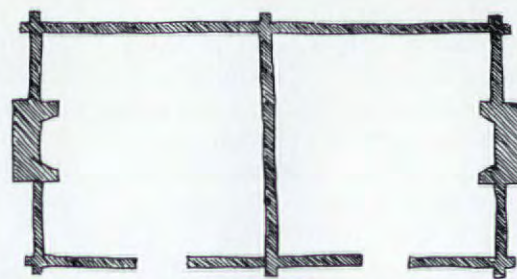


izontally laid, interlocking sticks coated with a mud plaster to keep the chimney from burning up.

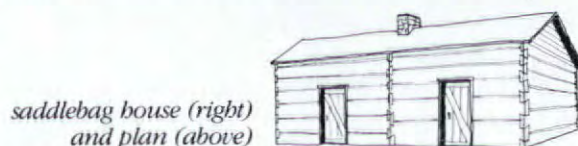
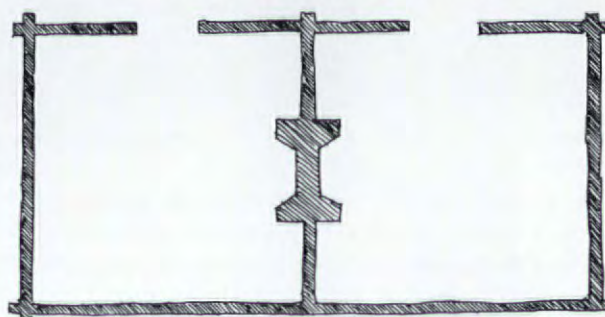
## Log Houses Upgraded

Few families could remain comfortable indefinitely in a one-room log house, so most log houses were improved and enlarged in a variety of ways. Using the single-pen unit as a building block, a number of plan variations developed:

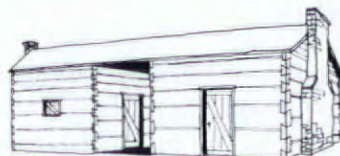
- **Saddlebag** — By adding an additional pen onto the existing chimney end wall, a two-pen configuration was created, with the original chimney now standing at the center and providing heat for both rooms.
- **Double-Pen** — Like the saddlebag plan, another pen was added onto an original end wall — in this case, the one without the chimney. An additional exterior chimney was built onto most double-pen log houses, so that each room had one.
- **Dogtrot** — This distinctive plan was popular in the South. A mirror-image pen was built facing, and a short distance away from, the chimneyless end of the original pen. The resulting space between the pens was spanned over by the common roof, creating a breezeway. The breezeway was used in fair weather for such activities as food preparation and washing, and was the domain of the family dog — hence the name “dogtrot.” The breezeways were often subsequently enclosed and converted to another room or center hall.



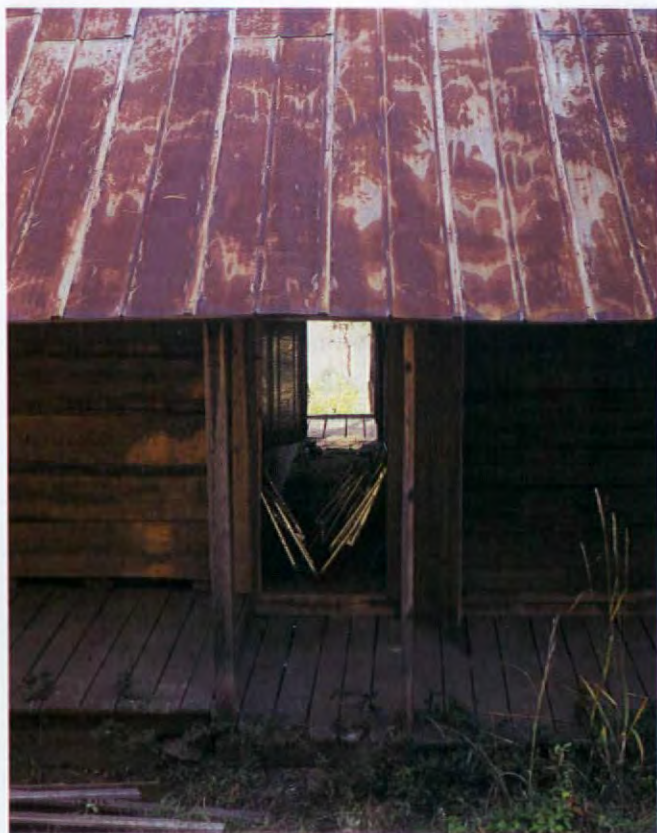
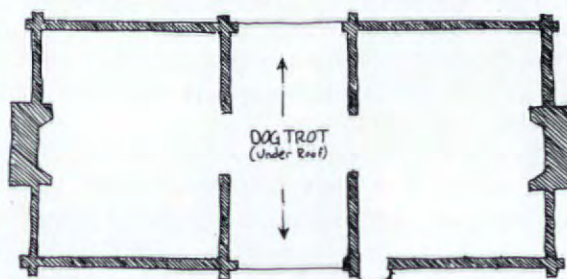
*A two-chimney, double-pen plan.*



*saddlebag house (right)  
and plan (above)*



*dogtrot house (left)  
and plan (below)*



*The narrow dogtrot of a 19th-century log house (Grayson House).*



*A two-storey log house with rare stone-end construction, restored in 1986 (Chester Co., Penn.).*





*A frame gabled ell added at right angles to a one-pen plan log house (Henson House, Jonas Ridge, N.C.).*

● **Two-Storey Log House** — Some log houses were originally built with two full storeys; others were created by raising the roof line of original one-storey log houses. Although uncommon, there are even examples of log houses with full-blown center-hall Georgian plans, complete with elaborately panelled interiors.

Another very common way of expanding log houses was to add rear additions. The additions were sometimes also of log, but just as often of frame construction. A shed-roofed addition across the rear elevation, especially on two-storey log houses, created a profile resembling the Saltbox houses of New England. A rear, gabled ell, built at right angles to the main house, was even more common. This rear ell would often have its own end chimney and side porch.

Like the evolution of virtually all North American house designs during the 19th century, the different rooms in expanded log houses became identified with specific and specialized domestic uses. As log houses grew, the “all-purpose” function of the original pen was no longer necessary. Rear ells became kitchen wings, workrooms, and wood-storage areas. Added side pens or second floors were used as extra sleeping quarters. According to one source, a Chillicothe, Ohio, log house was described in 1802 as having seven or eight rooms, including a library and servants’ quarters.

Porches on log houses became nearly universal by the 1800s, particularly in the South. Although there are many variations, the quintessential log-house porch stretched across the facade and had a shed roof supported by log poles or simple, unadorned square posts. The porches not only provided open-air living spaces, but also protected the chinking and daubing from the weather.

Like other vernacular house types, log houses were often refined as time went on. Interior-room partitions, often made of vertical boards, were added. Mantels with basic elements of style — cornices, pilasters, beaded edges, decorative trim — dressed up fireplace openings. Interior walls were whitewashed or plastered. Exterior log walls were clapboarded or shingled. Often log houses were so enlarged and improved that the original section eventually became an obscure appendage — a kitchen wing, for example — on a large house.



*Early 1800s log smokehouse with rare, surviving wood-shingle roof (Burke Co., N.C.).*

Not all log structures were houses, of course. There is evidence and numerous surviving examples of log churches, schools, inns, mills, stores, courthouses, and jails. On southern plantations, the brick or frame “big” house might be relatively extravagant and stylish, yet the surrounding dependencies were often log, including the slaves’ quarters. On farms of all types, outbuildings were log: barns, stables, cribs, springhouses, smokehouses, dairies, equipment sheds, and summer kitchens. Although some outbuildings were of hewn logs, most were of logs left round and constructed with relatively simple notches. Chinking and daubing was usually not needed, and in fact unwanted in some cases: Open spaces between logs provided needed ventilation in tobacco barns and corn cribs.

## Old World Traditions

During the 19th century, most log houses in America were a blend of Old World traditions and New World adaptations. Yet throughout the 1800s, arriving waves of immigrants brought log-building traditions from their various homelands. Today, you can find surviving examples of Old World log structures in many regions of North America: Russian immigrants built log houses in Alaska; the French,



*An example of a Norwegian “svalgang” — and integral recessed porch and corner chimney (Dane Co., Wisc.).*





*A traditional adobe barn in the center, combined with a "plank" log barn on the right (Los Trampas, N.M.).*



*Sagamore Lodge, a c.-1890, Adirondack-style log house by Will Durant (Racquet Lake, N.Y.).*

in Canada; the Moravians, in North Carolina; the Mexicans, in the mountains of New Mexico.

One of the richest areas for Old World log-building traditions is the upper Great Lakes region — especially Wisconsin and Minnesota — settled from the mid-1800s on by Finns, Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, and others from northern, central, and eastern Europe.

German-influenced log houses in America might have had a characteristic three-room, or "Continental," plan organized around a central chimney. A pent roof, unsupported by posts, might shelter the facade. The Finns built end-to-end double- and even triple-pen log houses. The Swedes continued a tradition of building their chimneys into the *corners* of the rooms. Both Finns and Swedes were known for using logs hewn to an almost-planklike thinness, and so finely fitted that chinking and daubing was often unneeded. Scandinavians were known to have built even log saunas in America.

## The Fashionable Log House

Toward the end of the 1800s, the log house was "discovered" by architects and their rich clients. Log structures provided exactly the rustic idiom that was ideal for the "backwoods experience for the rich," as one put it. These "Great Camp" retreats showed little resemblance to the common American log house, however. Their designs were self-consciously rustic, they were often very large, and, although given the appearance of primitiveness, they were outfitted with all the domestic amenities that their rich occupants required.

The "Great Camp" movement began in the Adirondack Mountains — hence, the name Adirondack Style (see Jan/Feb 1983 OHJ) — where architects such as Will Durant designed romanticized log lodges on picturesque, remote lake sites. The camps used natural materials: stone, shingles, and especially, logs, often with the bark left on. The designs were influenced less by a true American tradition and more by Swiss chalets, traditional Japanese architecture, and other exotic styles.

The influence of the Great Camps was felt across the country. Rustic log cabins became *de rigueur* for vacation retreats. Early-20th-century planbooks, including those of Gustav Stickley, often featured some log-cottage designs in every issue. These designs usually incorporated some Arts-&Crafts or Bungalow elements, such as broad rooflines with widely overhanging eaves, carved rafter tails, and diamond-paned windows.

In this century, the National Park Service built monumental log houses — such as the 1904 Old Faithful Inn, which narrowly escaped destruction in the disastrous fires at Yellowstone Park in 1988 — as well as countless humble log cabins in national parks and forests across the country. This tradition was continued in the Depression era by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Work Projects Administration.

Today, the enthusiasm for log houses is unabated. They are popular not only as vacation and second homes, but also as primary residences. Historic log houses are in great demand. Unfortunately, because they're so easily dismantled, they're commonly moved and rebuilt miles, even states, away from their original sites. Many preservationists do not like to see log houses relocated, because this practice destroys the integrity of the historic site. Others argue that abandoned log houses can be saved by moving them from their remote locations.

Contemporary log houses continue to be put up, even though the new designs more often resemble chalets or split-level ranch houses than historic American log traditions. The logs for new log houses are often standardized and factory produced (latest innovation: a hollow metal "log"), and are assembled with high-tech insulating strips and composition mortar. Still, America's love for the log house lives on!



*Randy Cotton is a Contributing Editor to Old-House Journal and a staff member of the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation. His interest in log houses began while conducting historical resources surveys in the rural areas of Indiana and North Carolina.*





## RUSTIC INTERIORS OF THE ADIRONDACK CAMPS

by Harvey H. Kaiser



The Adirondack Rustic Style is a design tradition linked with the private summer homes built in the Adirondacks of northern New York State from around 1870 to 1930. Located on shores of lakes or in vast preserves of thousands of acres, the Great Camps of industrialists, financiers, and rail-

roaders played on the romantic traditions of the pioneering spirit and the simple life. In comfort and social life, however, the camps were far from the rustic image they conveyed: To ease the burden of coping with the wild, household staffs and caretakers gave guests the care and attention they were used to from mansions in the city. As William Wicks wrote in 1888, "If in the desire for a return to the woods you discover elements of an uncivilized condition, that is no reason you should go back to the woods in a barbaric fashion."

This style civilized the wild by bringing the outdoors to the indoors. Logs, timber, and stone taken from the site were considered "right" for creating the rustic character sought by the early camp builders. Log construction, though construction was time-consuming and expensive, was perhaps the most striking element of the Great Camps. Logs were laid up as walls, framed as trusses, used as supporting purlins for the roof, and peeled as beams and studs. Extensions of log ends, coping of intersecting logs, and crossbracing of poles became decorative elements.

Previously, rustic work was seldom used as an architectural ornament, being confined primarily to 19th-century garden gazebos and summer houses and their furniture. But in the Adirondacks, roughly dressed limbs and roots of native trees were used to create imaginative, ornamental patterns, producing unique architectural embellishments.

Interiors incorporated them into fireplaces, decorative trim, and imaginative woodland furniture produced on site.

The furniture and accessories of a great camp added to their character. Wicks urged that "as far as possible, both log cabin and its furniture be made on the spot and with material at hand." Beds, chairs, tables, cupboards, and decorative pieces of peeled poles, twigs, and birch bark were works of art, crafted by caretakers and guides over a long winter and presented to the owners upon their arrival the following summer.

William West Durant, building at Raquette Lake beginning in the 1870s, brought the rustic style to its height. Twig-and-branch was used as decoration on walls and furniture. Interior walls were layered with peeled birch bark, and selected tree limbs, either with bark or peeled, were incorporated into built-in furniture or free-standing pieces. Natural materials were contrasted with wood surfaces polished with beeswax to reveal the natural grain — still fresh in appearance today, after almost a century.

In some of his last work, Durant's camps have an elegance of Japanese composition in restraint and harmony. Planked floors and ceilings frame peeled logs blending from column to lintel to ceiling beams. Built-in seating edged with half-round poles and covered with corduroy fabric sinuously turns corners. Handrails are peeled logs selected with just the right curvature to rise from the floor to the top of a staircase of halved-timber risers in an unbroken line.

Architects and camp owners alike saw the style as naturally adapted to the setting of lakes, streams, forests, and mountains. Under the true craftsman — anonymous or known, such as Ben Muncil, Jr., at Camp Topridge — an interior of rustic furniture blended harmoniously with





Two glimpses of William West Durant's bedroom at Camp Pine Knot, from the 1880s. *Above:* The bed is made from an unpeeled cedar-log frame with white birch-bark panels and is coordinated with the twig-and-branch table, and mirror and painting frames. *Below:* The fireplace of carefully integrated stone, polished and peeled log poles, and birch bark ties in with the bark ceiling.



handrails, lighting fixtures, and woods of interior surfaces. Log interiors were sometimes skillfully revealed with white plaster joint chinking; other times, planking bevel-cut to match the width of logs finished an interior. Massive granite fireplaces usually dominated a living room. Carefully crafted wrought-iron lighting fixtures, door hardware, and fireplace equipment contained forest or animal symbols.

The furnishings were an owner's choice of what felt "right." The "look" was cluttered and eclectic. Rustic work was expressed by handcrafting of natural materials, preserving their rough textures. Interiors were rich with experiences for the senses: fragrances of pine and cedar; the glint of reflection from granite fireplaces; warmth from the touch of woods and fabrics; the roughness of bark or wood grain; the smoothness of polished log poles.

Furnishings were a mixture of the rustic and Japanese decorations, the fad of the day. On one wall the owner mixed snowshoes, woodblock prints, trophy heads, and fans. A Japanese screen could stand next to a peeled and polished log-frame bed covered with an American Indian blanket. Oriental rugs and skins covered the floors. A delicately executed twig-and-branch table could stand below a painting or mirror framed in birch bark or twigs.

The early Great Camps were simple affairs. Clusters of small scaled buildings evolved from tent platforms, each for a separate family purpose: living room, dining room, kitchen, family "bedrooms," and servants' quarters. Later, the plan was retained as platforms were replaced by permanent buildings, some owners selecting log construction and others using frame structures sheathed with slab siding. The simple boathouse emerged as an important feature, with slips at water level, rooms for guests above, and a broad balcony for a view of lake or mountains.

If the first camps were built more or less by inspiration, in time professional architects were called in. The design





**Above:** In this 1888 camp, light is given a warm reflection off polished and peeled log poles and wall panelling.

**Below:** A hutch cabinet crafted for Durant is veneered with yellow birch bark, trimmed with cedar.

trend of the Great Camps shifted from collections of small buildings towards an emphasis on main lodges of large size. The versatile guide was adequate for the simple structures of the early camps, but as owners sought grand hunting lodges designed in the Adirondack Style, professional architectural skill became necessary. As the style became nationally known by the turn of the century, it was captured in the image of the massive lodge of log, timber, and stone, furnished with an eclectic mixture of locally handcrafted furniture and wrought ironwork, assemblages of canoes, game trophies, and American Indian blankets and rugs.

The influence of the style was seen across the country. To what extent the designers of early lodges at Yellowstone, Glacier, or Yosemite were inspired by the Great Camps is unknown. Certainly, their railroad builders were friends of the Adirondack camp owners, and their visits may have inspired them with the suitability of the natural materials, building forms, and furnishings. When it came to building their projects in the West, the rustic style was "right."

The Adirondack Rustic Style took on national character when the National Park Service adopted the principles of "harmony with the landscape" at its founding in 1916. Founder Stephen Mather pronounced that Park Service buildings would fit with the natural environment and not be intrusive elements. Rapidly developing designs and recruiting architects to satisfy this edict, the Park Service produced buildings that carefully emulated the Adirondack camps. Gatehouses, ranger residences, and public buildings in the rustic style began to emerge in the parks. A series of log and stone buildings by Gilbert Stanley Underwood, built in the 1920s at Bryce, Zion, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, could have originated on the shores of Raquette Lake. Underwood's Ahwahnee Hotel at Yosemite is a tour-de-force of rustic work executed in *faux* concrete. Herbert Maier created a series of buildings in-







cluding museums at Yellowstone that were inventive refinements of log and stone, carefully fitted to their sites.

The Park Service projects and designs for the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s repeated the Adirondack concepts across the country. Indoors were integrated with the outdoors, with emphasis on natural materials and handcrafted furnishings. One of the more famous designs is the President's retreat at Camp David.

A lull in interest in the Adirondack Rustic Style descended with the modern movement in architecture, but a revival has occurred in the past decade. A renewed appreciation for the environment, combined with a respect for handcrafted furnishings, has won a new respect for the essence of the style. Signs of the reawakened interest are in the notices for exclusive real-estate sales and auctions of Adirondackiana. Early Adirondack camps or their counterparts across the country and in Canada are selling for extraordinary prices. Sets of furniture crafted for Adirondack camps are selling for tens of thousands of dollars.

The impact of the Adirondack Rustic Style will last far longer than the current trendiness of presentations in "slick" magazines of mountain lodges alongside city townhouses or country mansions. New industries of craftspeople building with logs or fashioning twig-and-branch furniture are reviving the old skills. Old Hickory furniture is still available from the Indiana Correctional Facility System. And, as long as there is a desire to seek relief from the boredom of urban life, the image of the Adirondack Rustic Style will provide a welcome haven.

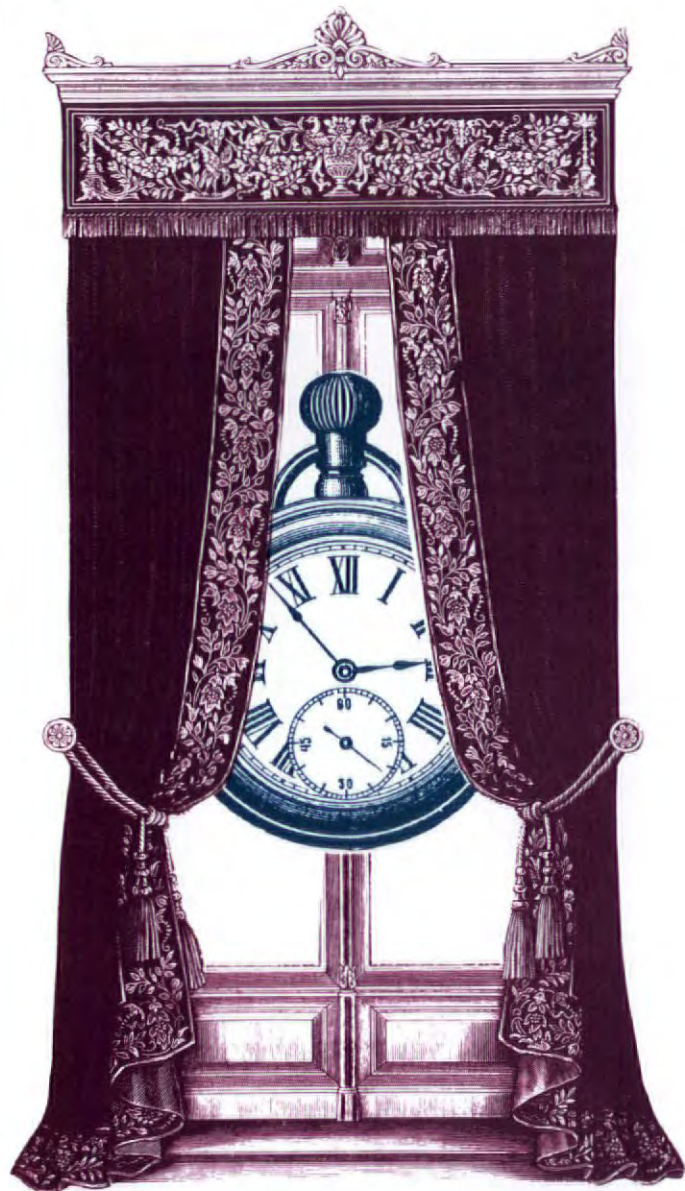


*Harvey H. Kaiser is the Senior Vice President for Facilities Administration at Syracuse University, and a practicing architect since 1965. His book Great Camps of the Adirondacks is available for \$45 from Wildwood, Old Forge, NY 13420.*

**Above:** Boathouse benches of cedar pole and a stone fireplace create an "outdoor" living room at Camp Topridge. **Below:** This camp, at Blue Mountain Lake, is a contemporary interpretation of the Great Camp lost by fire. Locally made birch armchairs are flanked by an Old Hickory reproduction chair from the Indiana Correctional Facility System. The handcrafted wrought-iron chandelier includes a deer-and-leaf motif to match the andirons.







# Old-House TIME CAPSULES... LIVING: WINDOWS TO THE PAST

*Hidden signatures or autographs are very common. Many readers told us about the "John Hancocks" left by workmen as they finished walls or interior trim.*

◆ JOHN L. EVERNGAM ◆

**T**wo years ago, my husband and I purchased a large Victorian of eclectic design, circa 1904, which had been built by a prosperous local merchant, John L. Everngam.

One afternoon, as I was removing the faded wallpaper in the gentlemen's parlor, I was startled and thrilled to discover Mr. Everngam's signature and a long-ago date on the wall. I couldn't wait for my husband Matt to come home so I could share my find with him.

After supper, Matt went out to his workshop in the former carriage house. Shortly thereafter, he returned to the house, laughing. "I think Mr. Everngam is speaking to us from the grave, Sally." While rooting around in an old cupboard built under the stairwell in the carriage house, Matt had felt a bulky piece of paper. Pulling it out, he discovered it to be a copy of Mr. Everngam's last will and testament. It was really rather spooky to have these two discoveries in one day! Since then, we have found a paperhanger's signature dated 1935 and that of another former owner, but these don't come close to our first "time capsule."

— Sally Anne Palucci  
Denton, Maryland

*In the September/October 1989 issue, we asked OHJ readers for stories about "time capsules" — forgotten or intentionally hidden artifacts from past inhabitants. Judging by the enthusiastic pile of letters that came in response, this subject is a passionate interest of restorers.*

*Scholars say that purposely leaving time capsules in buildings is a peculiarly American practice, which seems to have taken root around the national centennial in 1876. Finding evidence of previous occupants is almost inevitable when you're working on an old house.*

*The time-capsule stories we received fall into patterns. We've selected a sample of each. Thank you to all who wrote.*

— Gordon Bock



*The original owner's signature on a bare plaster wall.*

photo: Matthew Palucci



## ◆ TIME-CAPSULE PARTY ◆

**M**y wife and I bought a repossessed brick house, c. 1850-80. During our renovation, we found my wife's grandfather's name, Hobart Ivie, and "October 28, 1947," written on the wall. He had worked as a wallpaper hanger long before my wife was born! She barely remembers meeting him as a child. We later found out that wallpaper hangers often put their names on walls.

This led to our own time capsule. We had an open house for Christmas 1988. Since the house was still under "reconstruction," we invited our guests to sign our guest register — one wall in our dining room!

Our 80-plus guests signed their names and some even wrote little good-luck messages to us. In our small town, future owners of our house will certainly recognize a name on our time-capsule wall.

— Phil Howell  
Shelbyville, Indiana

**Paper, of course, is the easiest thing to hide or lose in a house. Letters, cards, and newspapers are far and away the most common "time capsules."**

## ◆ THE WINSLOW RECORDS ◆

**A**fter we bought our house 10 years ago, we discovered a time capsule that had "exploded."

When I chopped a hole in the wall of the finished attic to check for insulation, I found thousands of pieces of paper, keepsakes, etc., strewn all over between the joists. Many papers had disintegrated or were mouse-eaten and very dirty, so my wife and I donned breathing masks and sifted out the intact personal letters, business papers, cancelled checks, grade-school, high-school, and college papers, greeting cards, house-construction receipts, and so on. Now, we could write a book about our house and the family that first occupied it, based upon what we have found and subsequent contact with the family.

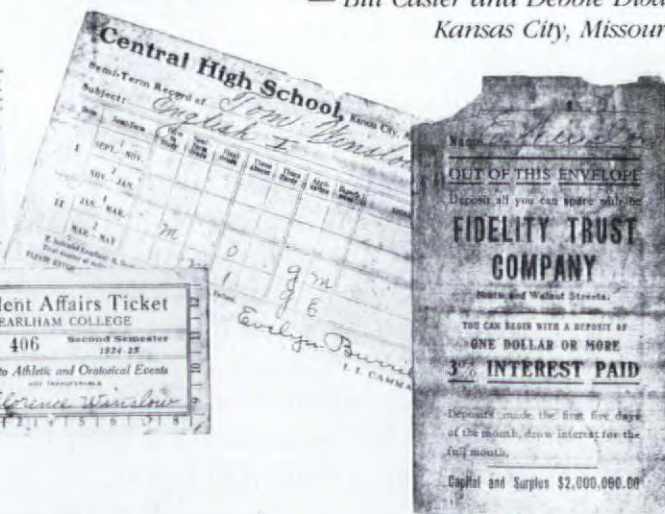
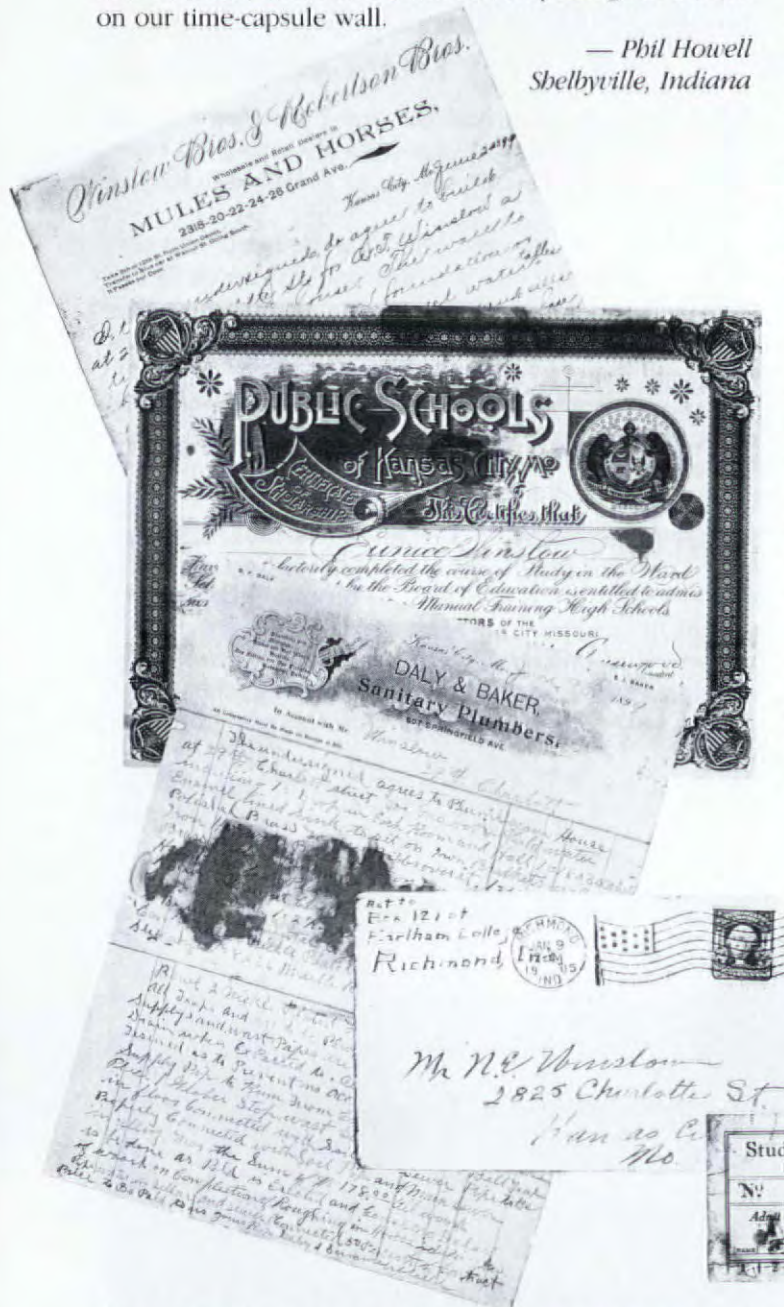
A.T. Winslow came to Kansas City from North Carolina before the turn of the century to make his fortune. He founded a horse and mule wholesale company and had eight children, one born in our house. He was the general contractor for work on the house and saved every receipt.

By the Great Depression, only one family member remained in the house. Eventually, this person moved and, apparently, forgot a chest of family records in the attic, which was unfinished at the time. During World War Two, the attic was converted into an apartment and the papers were shoved aside and sealed behind a wall. The chest must have decomposed, because all we found were pieces of leather straps and buckles. Reading the letters acquainted me with the family and provided an interesting perspective on their time.

Some of the letters were from a Harvard student to one of the Winslow girls at Earlham College in Indiana in the early '20s. I traced her to St. Augustine, Florida, and telephoned her with my discovery. She told me she'd married that Harvard man — and that he was standing right next to her. (She was born in our house in 1900.)

Like I said earlier, I could write a book, so I'll close here.

— Bill Caster and Debbie Dibal  
Kansas City, Missouri



Invoices, certificates, cards, and tickets forgotten in an attic crawl-space — the "archive" of the Winslow family.



**Then there's the architectural surprise sealed in a wall.**

◆ ART IN THE WALLS ◆

**W**hen it was time to rewallpaper, we put up with a mess for three weeks while stripping the walls in our 18- $\times$ -33-foot living room. During this time, company from out of town visited. They asked what the black stain marks were on either side of the existing large window. Flippantly, I said, "Oh, maybe there were windows there at one time." Staring at the blank plaster walls, we dismissed this conversation.

The next day, I was prepared to start early and work late hanging my new paper. But then I thought: What *about* those black stain marks? Could there possibly be windows inside my walls? I went to the garage and said to my husband, "Give me a hammer and chisel." (I'll let you guess what he said as he handed them to me.) Up on the ladder, I made a small hole that got bigger as I worked excitedly. My husband came in with a wire. He fished it into the hole and tapped. It was glass! We did the same on the other set of black lines. Not one window, but two!

We chiseled out plaster until they were both exposed from the inside. What a mess. Afterward, my husband sawed an opening for one window on the outside of the house. The sun came streaming through our new old window and made us smile with pleasure. Our house is a lot of work, but it always seems to repay us in surprising ways.

We had lived for five years in our 1917 house, never dreaming that hidden in our walls were Arts & Crafts stained-glass windows. Why were they covered up? We guess it was done when the house was about 20 years old — just long enough for a house to need a little updating, and maybe stained glass was *pas*se. There they stayed for 50 years until we discovered them.

— Carol Rice  
St. Francis, Minn.



*One of the walled-in windows, fully lit again after 50 years in the dark.*

***It would seem Old-House Journal people leave their own time capsules almost as often as they find them.***

◆ LEAVING A TRACE ◆

**S**ince I was young (I'm 43), I have placed time capsules in everything I have built and remodeled. Examples: jars with letters, photos, etc., in concrete work; catalogues, newspapers, calendars, and some personal items in floors, walls, and ceilings. We recently put a new roof on a small building I purchased; in the ceiling are clothing catalogues and newspapers, and in the attic I left a whole box of newspapers and magazines (including *TV Guide*).

We also always sign our names and put dates on bare wood pieces so that the date will be known.

— Dale G. Niewoebner  
Rugby, N.D.

◆ HIDING PHOTOS ◆

**W**hen I bought my Dutch Colonial Revival house three years ago, I knew there was a lot of updating to do, and decided I should chronicle my efforts from the very first day. Thus began my photo album of "before" and "during."

As we got ready to seal up a window seat, I made a time capsule with duplicates of all the before and during pictures (annotated on the back), the Sunday *New York Times*, and *Newsday*. I also included a long narrative letter telling who I was, from whom I bought the house, why I liked it, and my wish that the people who'd find these treasures would also take care of the property — a tidal marshland that surrounds the house. I told them I would be watching!!

— Joy Gillies  
Northport, N.Y.



*Careful work on inside and outside walls uncovered two c. 1917 art-glass windows.*



**A found time capsule doesn't have to be big to be valuable. Sometimes just a scrap or two unlocks many doors. . . .**

◆ WHO LIVED IN 11A? ◆

**H**istoric Manhattan directory sources are great at placing people in buildings — but not in apartments. Cross-checking the known past tenants of our building, The Cornwall, had yielded no results in the past, and I had resigned myself to eternal ignorance about who had once lived in our home, #11A.

Then, in 1981, when tearing out the old kitchen cabinets, two blue pieces of paper fluttered out from behind the countertop. I was ecstatic — the papers, which had lain there since June of 1914, turned out to be tickets to the Smith College commencement of that year.

Correspondence with the very cooperative archivist at Smith established that one woman had given this address on West 90th: Dorothy Lilian Spencer, class of 1914. Dorothy was the daughter of Robert F. Spencer (listed in the 1915 census), who had relocated to New York to become comptroller for the U.S. Rubber Company. Now my task was to trace his descendants.

Through diligence and good fortune I traced Dorothy to the place of her death in 1973: Seattle. A surviving friend thought she was childless, but suspected she had a nephew named "Joseph Miller" living in or near Washington, D.C. Not a promising start. I began calling all the Joseph Millers — a *pro-forma* exercise as far as I was concerned.

As it turned out, I was thrice blessed. After much telephoning, I made the acquaintance of Joseph S. Miller, the desired nephew. He has since visited 11A and showered me with various artifacts: the only known interior views of the building, photographs of the family, and (a sweet prize) a 1918 *New York Times* bearing headlines of the Armistice — and marked for delivery to "11A"! He also sadly recalls how a dear little kitten was accidentally crushed when one of the heavy dining room doors was closed on it.

The Spencers left in the early 1920s, and as I see myself and my own family departing, I understand that our times — happy and sad — have become simply another episode in the millions of family histories in the city. I hope we have left behind impressions as rich and wonderful as those we find.

— Christopher Gray  
New York, N.Y.

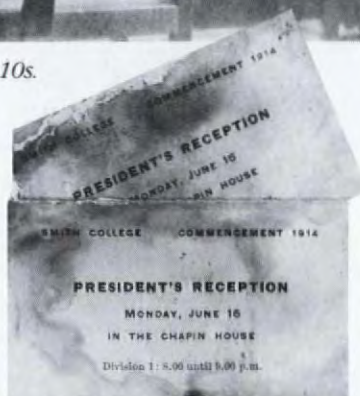


*Dorothy Lilian Spencer.*



*The dining room of 11A sometime in the 1910s.*

*Tickets to the 1914 commencement at Smith College for Dorothy Lilian Spencer.*

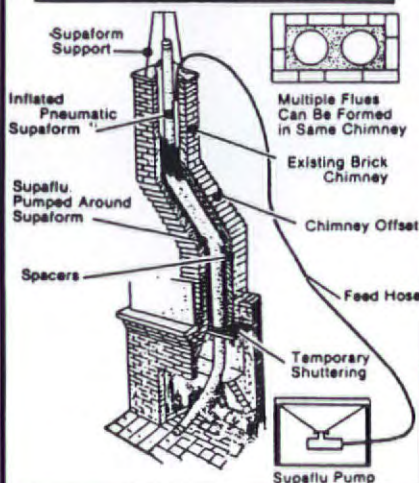


*Richard F. Spencer and Richard W. Wood in the corner bedroom of 11A (1910s).*



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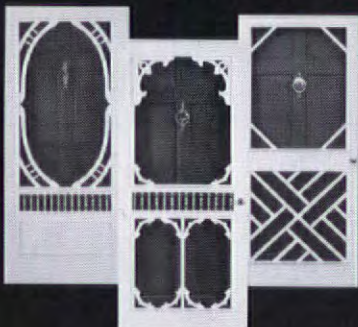
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low or twig furniture is kiln dried for two weeks. The LaLune Collection offers a choice of 24 different finishes. The loveseat pictured left costs \$477.

The canvas cushions and throw pillows are included in the price. At extra cost, cushions of cowhide or steerhide are also available. LaLune Collection, 930 E. Burleigh St., Dept. OHJ, Milwaukee, WI 53212; (414) 263-5300.



### Forest

The forest-inspired furniture by Daniel Mack has a more sculptural quality than traditional rustic furniture. Made from the hardwoods of the Northeast, the furniture is offered in various styles. The forest style (shown in the photo above) incorporates natural scars, splits, and curves in its designs. The peeled style is dramatic. Most of the seats are done in Shaker webbing and are available in a variety of colors. Chairs range in price from \$1,100 to \$1,600. Daniel Mack Rustic Furnishings, 3280 Broadway, Dept. OHJ, New York, NY 10027; (212) 926-3880. By appointment only.



### New & Rustic

Originally a stone mason, Barry Gregson turned to making rustic furniture after he paid a visit to the Great Camps in 1981. Using woods that are native to upstate New York, he makes pieces such as the three-tier desk and chair pictured above. The desk costs \$1,200; chairs are between \$450 and \$650. For more information, contact: Adirondack Rustic, Barry Gregson, Charley Hill Road., Dept. OHJ, Schroon Lake, NY 12870; (518) 532-9384.



### Snowshoes

Log homes aren't complete without snowshoes! Traditionally hung on walls, snowshoes were ready for a day in the snow. They became a decorative element in the camps. Carl Heilman II has been making snowshoes since 1974 from handsplit white ash. "Catpaws" are recommended for recreational snowshoeing and the Ojibwa style (shown above) are great for trail breaking. With neoprene bindings, Catpaws and Ojibwas are \$155 and \$290, respectively. Contact: Carl E. Heilman II, Box 213A, Rt.8, Dept. OHJ, Brant Lake, NY 12815; (518) 494-3072.



### Old & Rustic

The Adirondack Store and Gallery has a unique collection of original, one-of-a-kind furnishings rescued from the Great Camps. In designing this distinctive and imaginative furniture, the Adirondack Camp craftsmen took advantage of many local materials. Log beds, hickory bow-arm rockers, twig stands, and birch-bark mirrors are just some of the ever-changing collection. The birch twin bed shown above costs \$1,200 for a matching pair. To see more of the collection, contact: Adirondack Store and Gallery, 109 Saranac Ave., Dept. OHJ, Lake Placid, NY 12946; (518) 523-2646.



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(PLEASE PRINT INFORMATION CLEARLY)

✂ These photos appeared in previous issues. Every issue of *Innsider* is illustrated with full-color photographs!







### Old-Style Lock

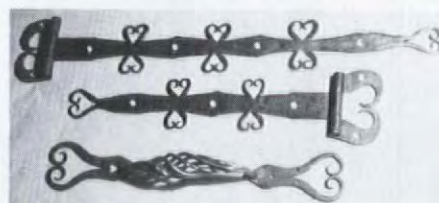
Developed for a major Virginia restoration, Ball and Ball's modern door lock looks like an 18th-century rim lock (see photo above). It has the security of a cylinder-type lock and operates as a panic device from



the inside. A Carpenter Patent-style lock is also available and plans for a mid-1800s cast-iron lock with china knobs is in the works. The 18th-century-style lock is priced at \$325. Ball and Ball, 463 West Lincoln Hwy., Dept OHJ, Exton, PA 19341; (215) 363-7330.

### Hand-Forged Hardware

Need to replace or restore your colonial hardware? Steve Kayne's hardware is hand-forged to meet individual needs. The hardware can be designed from a sketch, or an item you already have can be restored. All



of the hardware is forged in "mild steel" and is available in five different finishes. The custom hinges with Moravian heart design shown above cost \$150 each. Also decorated with Moravian hearts, the Renaissance twist handle is priced at \$100. A month's delivery time is needed for all items. Contact: Steve Kayne, 76 Daniel Ridge Road, Dept. OHJ, Chandler, NC 28715; (704) 667-8868 or 665-1988.



Escape the coldest months by reading about the most beautifully designed gardens in England! Jane Brown's *The Art and Architecture of English Gardens* reviews four centuries of style and architectural influence in garden design. Beginning in the 17th century with James I's reign, she follows the changing fashions through the Victorian period, Arts and Crafts Movement, and Modernism up to the classicism of present-day gardens. A unique feature that enhances the text is the reprinting of rare watercolors, drawings, and working plans. The hardcover edition costs \$87.50 ppd. It is available through Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 300 Park Avenue South, Dept. OHJ, New York, NY 10010; (212) 979-3280.

Plan ahead for your spring garden with advice from noted garden designer Gertrude Jekyll. The Ayers Company has reprinted four of this English gentlewoman's books, origi-

nally published between 1899 and 1908. Her first work, *Wood and Garden*, is a great beginners' book with tips on landscaping and proper tools. *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden* sets understandable and artistic guidelines for well-blended color gardens. *Wall and Water Gardens'* most instructive section (which the title doesn't hint at) is rock-garden arrangements. *Lilies* — best suited for the diehard admirers of this species — gives practical advice for a temperamental plant. For hardcover editions, *Lilies* and *Colour Schemes* are \$24.25 ppd.; the remaining books are \$26.25 ppd. Ayers Company Publishers, Inc., 50 Northwestern Dr. #10, P.O. Box 958, Dept. OHJ, Salem, NH 03079; (603) 898-1200.

If gardening doesn't interest you, let Ronald S. Barlow's *The Vanishing American Outhouse* take your thoughts outdoors. Despite the humorous treatment, this book takes its subject seriously. Mr. Barlow has truly considered the historical importance of two-holers. Starting with the surprising fact that four million out-houses are still in action, he takes us from the first biblical references to commodes all the way up to the birth of modern plumbing in the Victorian Era. Along the way is a collection of privy trivia, poetry, postcards, and photographs. For those inspired to build an outhouse, the author includes a section on how to build a round-brick privy, as well as a reprinted U.S. Government pamphlet on out-house construction. The book is available only in paperback for \$17.45 ppd. For further information, contact: Windmill Publishing, 2147 Windmill Road, Dept OHJ, El Cajon, CA 92020; (619) 448-5390.



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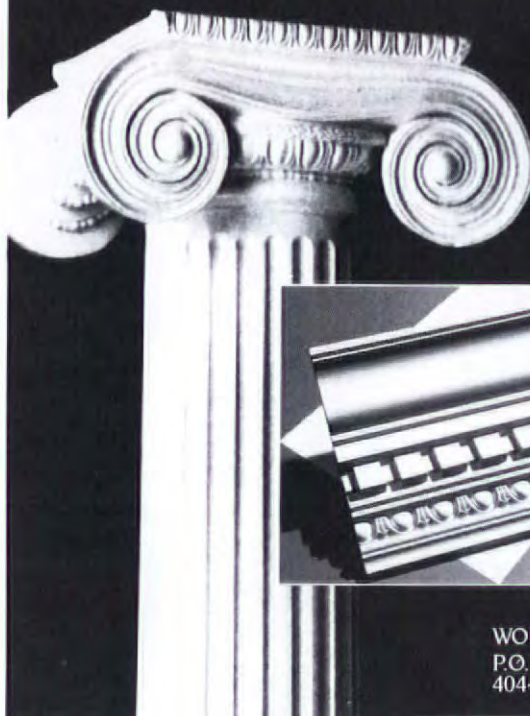
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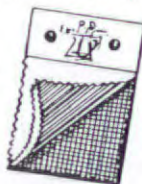
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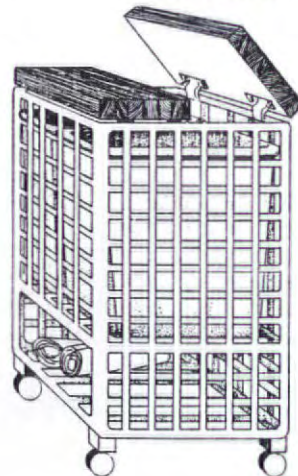
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If Scott G. Kunst's article on page 18 inspires you to buy cast-iron garden ornaments, you may want to check out these companies.



To create a romantic 19th-century garden, Robinson Iron has many classic cast-iron garden ornaments. The Mediterranean Fountain's pattern (see photo above) — with three dragons standing back-to-back — is a variation of an ancient Etruscan design found by 18th-century archaeologists. A unique item also offered is a cast-iron birdhouse. The fountain costs \$3,140 and the birdhouse is \$220. Both are available in black matte, black or white gloss, and a double process finish that makes an antique effect of verdigris, Pompeian green, or bronzing. Robinson Iron, P.O. Box 1119, Dept. OHJ, Alexander City, Alabama 35010; (205) 329-8486.

Unable to find the specific garden ornament you want? New England Tool Company does custom cast-iron work as well as forging. If you send an explanation of the desired piece and a picture of the site, a shop drawing will be provided for your approval. Stock items of chairs, settees, tables, and outdoor planters are also offered. Over seventy styles are available, including Grecian, Fern, Baroque, and Gothic. Chairs start at \$88 and settees at \$120. New

England Tool Co., Ltd., P.O. Box 30, Dept. OHJ, Chester, NY 10918; (914) 782-5332. Catalog, \$1.



Fluted basins with flaring rims were the rage for 19th-century garden urns. Two companies that carry a varied selection of cast-aluminum urns are Park Place and Moultrie Manufacturing. Park Place's Handled urn, which is reminiscent of the "Palo Alto" style, costs \$129. Moultrie specializes in Victorian urns (such as the one shown above). They range in price from \$290 to \$617. Contact: Park Place, 2251 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Dept. OHJ, Washington, D.C.

20007; (202) 342-6292 and Moultrie Manufacturing Co., P.O. Drawer 1179, Dept. OHJ, Moultrie, GA 31776; (800) 841-8674.



Typical Victorian garden furniture had botanical motifs of vine leaves, rustic branches, or fern fronds. Tennessee Fabricating Company offers this classical theme in many of its garden settees. One of the most popular is the Vineyard set (above), derived from the Vine and Olive Colony in Plantation, Alabama. Settees range in price from \$199 to \$499 and are available in cast iron or cast aluminum. For more information, contact: Tennessee Fabricating Company, 1822 Latham St., Dept. OHJ, Memphis, Tennessee 38106; (901) 948-3354. Catalog, \$2.

A rarer and more simplified version of the fern style is the Mountain Fern settee (shown below) by Irreplaceable Artifacts. Originally made in the 1850s by leading cast-iron manufacturer J.W. Fiske, the set is available in cast aluminum and can be finished in white, black, or antique verdigris. The settee and chair cost \$460 and \$285 respectively or \$700 as a set. Irreplaceable Artifacts, 14 Second Avenue, Dept. OHJ, New York, NY 10003; (212) 777-2900. Catalog, \$3.





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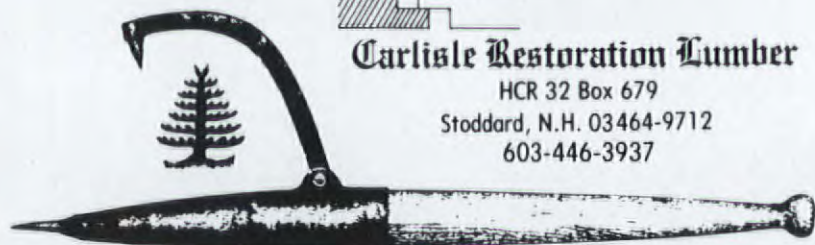


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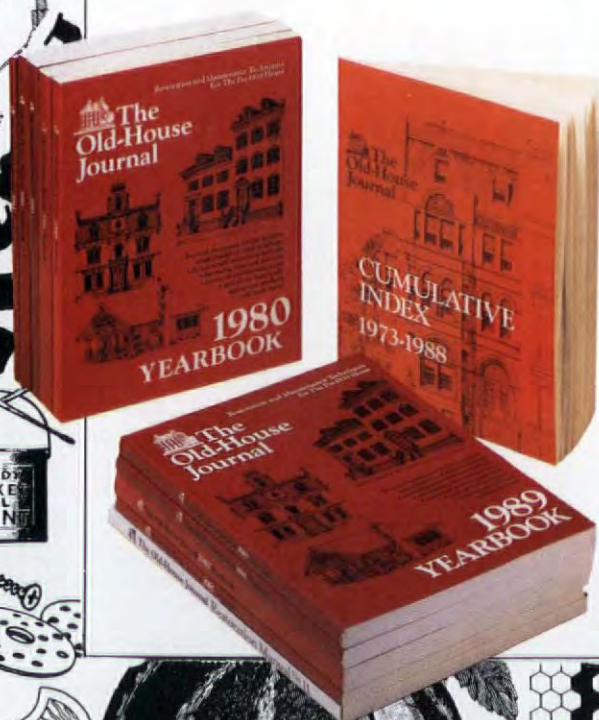
magazines, our back issues aren't "collector's items" with premium price tags. We keep back issues in print, bound into handsome books that we call OHJ Yearbooks.

Over the years, as new readers signed up, they worried about what they'd missed. They knew that the how-to information already published in OHJ wasn't out of date — and that topics covered recently probably wouldn't appear again for years. The demand for single-copy back issues became so great that we invented the Yearbooks: sturdy bound volumes meticulously indexed for easy use.

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We're also offering a five-volume set of the most recent OHJ editorial, 1985-1989, for \$59 — \$31 off the cost of the volumes purchased one by one. And our Cumulative Index is available, too — for \$9.95.

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- **Building cross sections:** cornice, fireplace, and cabinet sections when needed to help your builder understand major interior details.

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**M**ail-order plans have a long history in shaping the residential architecture of the country. Of the thousands of house plans available today, few exhibit good design and a grasp of historical proportion and detail. So, in response to requests from OHJ readers, the editors have "done the homework": We've hand-picked plans. In each issue, we offer the most attractive, authentic, and buildable of the historical designs, from all periods of American architectural history. Let us know what plans you're looking for. You can order actual blueprints for all the houses featured. Plans conform to national building-code standards — however, *modifications are usually necessary for your site and local requirements, so you'll probably need the assistance of a professional designer (your builder may qualify) or an architect.*

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

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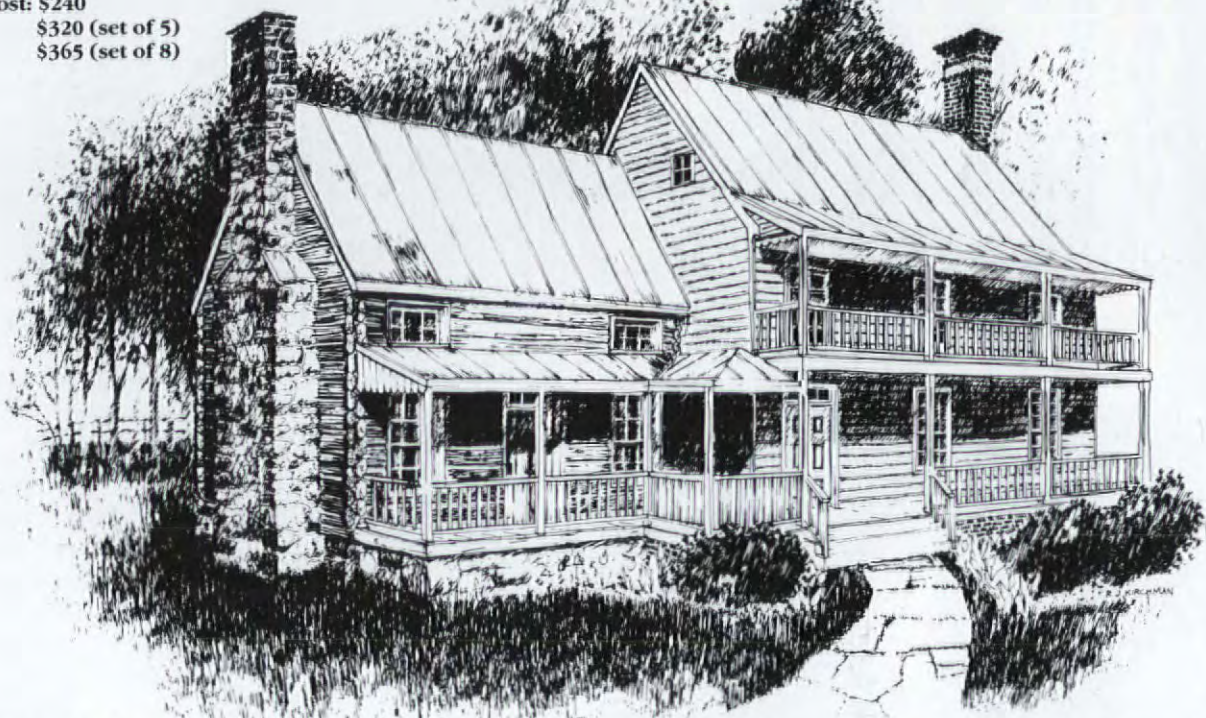
# JAMES RIVER LOG-&-FRAME

Plan #E-03A-TA

Cost: \$240

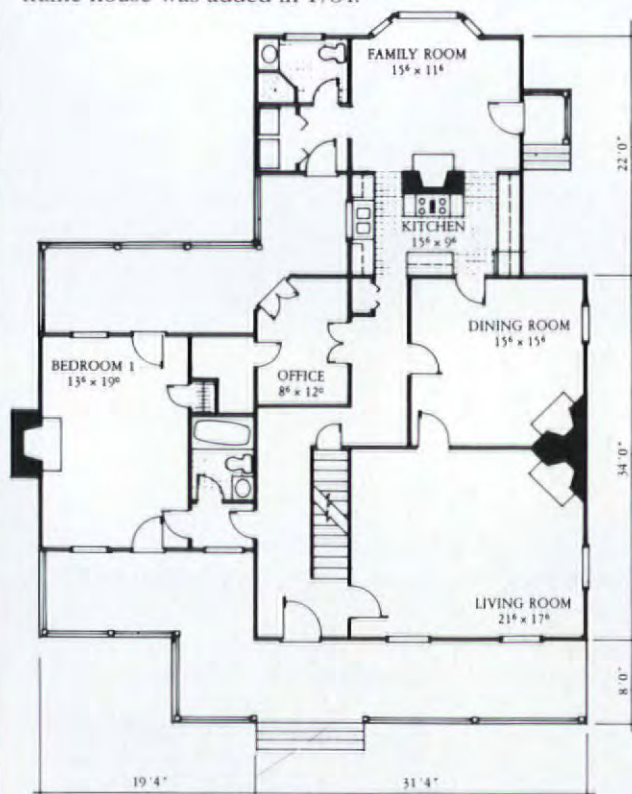
\$320 (set of 5)

\$365 (set of 8)

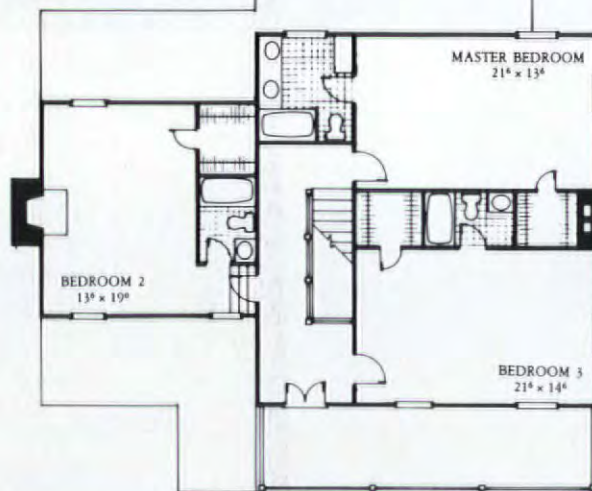


The original of this house stands near the river at Chiptank Creek in Tidewater, Virginia. Local legend has it that the log portion, from cypress, predates the Revolutionary War; the frame house was added in 1784.

Updated plans are available for a two-storey house of 3430 square feet. Room layout is comfortable — note the bedrooms, up and down, tucked into the log portion, each with a private bath.



SQUARE FOOTAGE	3430
FIRST FLOOR	1943
SECOND FLOOR	1485
CEILING HEIGHT	
FIRST FLOOR	11
UPPER FLOORS	8
OVERALL DIMENSIONS	
WIDTH	50-8
DEPTH	64





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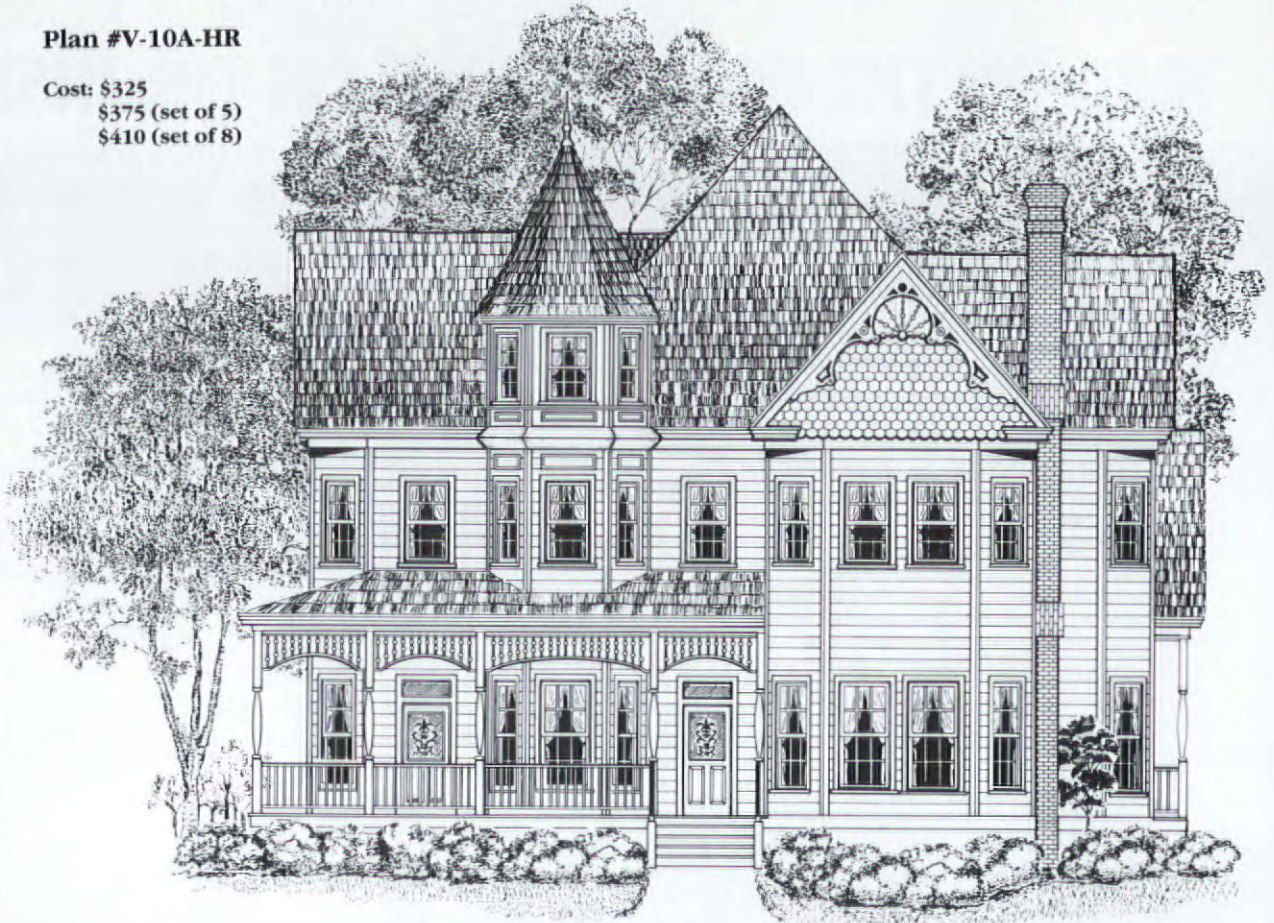




# BARBER HOUSE WITH TOWER

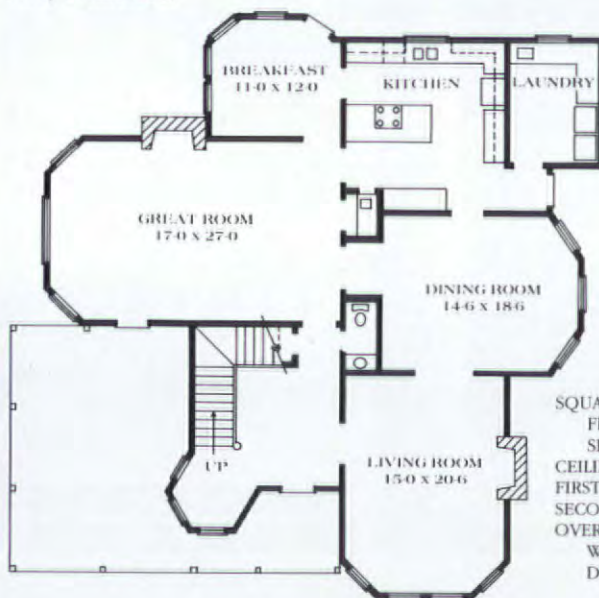
Plan #V-10A-HR

Cost: \$325  
 \$375 (set of 5)  
 \$410 (set of 8)

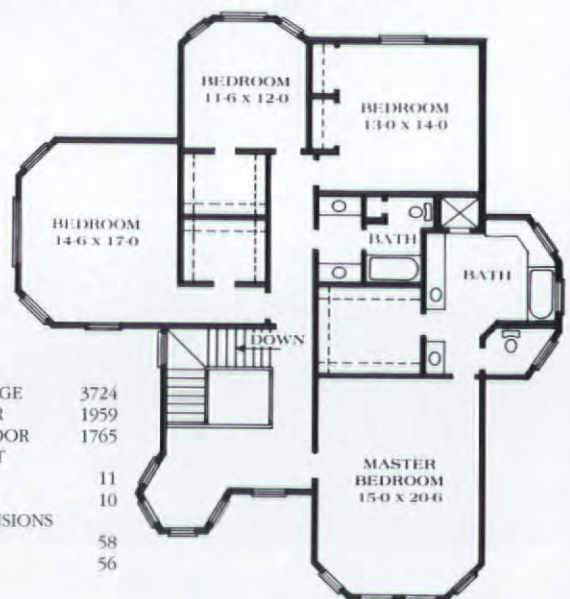


We featured a house plan adapted from a George Barber design in the last issue. Here is a bigger, more ornate house from that same late-Victorian mail-order architect of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Adapted from a number in Barber's *Cottage Souvenir* #2, this house with its bays and turret, wrap-around verandah and spindlework, is from the period 1883-1895. The breakfast area is a multi-windowed conservatory.



SQUARE FOOTAGE	3724
FIRST FLOOR	1959
SECOND FLOOR	1765
CEILING HEIGHT	
FIRST FLOOR	11
SECOND FLOOR	10
OVERALL DIMENSIONS	
WIDTH	58
DEPTH	56





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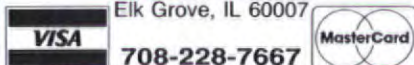
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two-sum



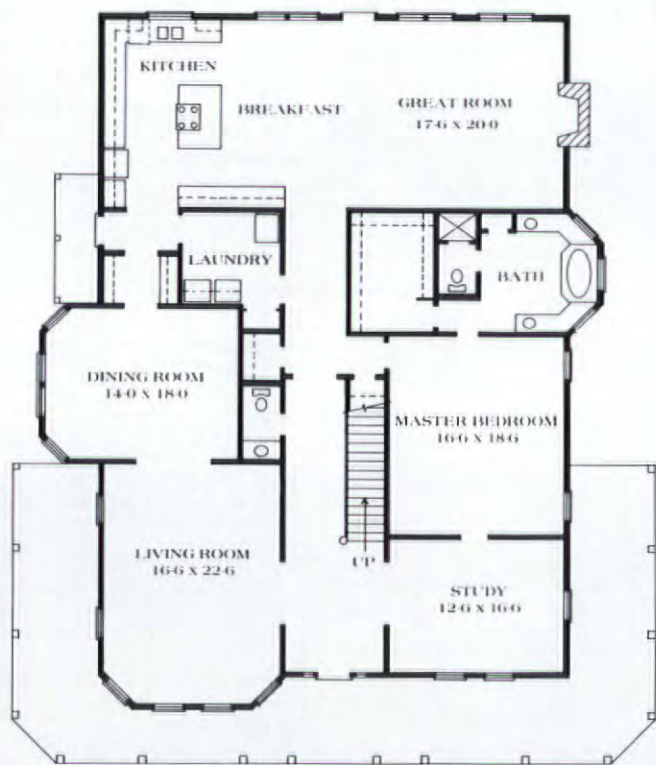
# FAMILY FARMHOUSE



Last year, readers were asking for plans under 2000 square feet. Now people are hollerin' for something big.

If the Barber house on the previous page isn't big enough, maybe this rambling 19th-century farmhouse is. Over 4500

square feet give you a giant kitchen/family area and five bedrooms. There's a study off the master bedroom, a small butler's pantry ... and a laundry chute.



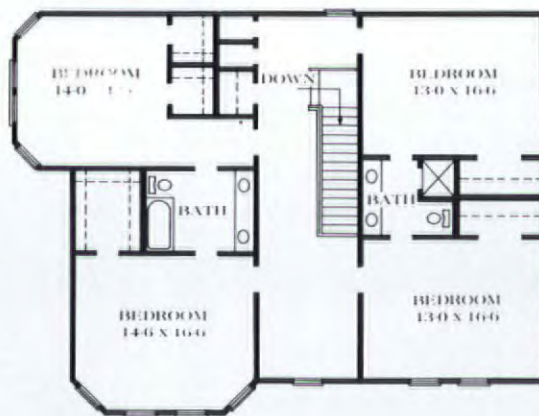
SQUARE FOOTAGE	4590
FIRST FLOOR	2910
SECOND FLOOR	1680
CEILING HEIGHT	
FIRST FLOOR	10
SECOND FLOOR	10
OVERALL DIMENSIONS	
WIDTH	60
DEPTH	70

**Plan #V-11A-HR**

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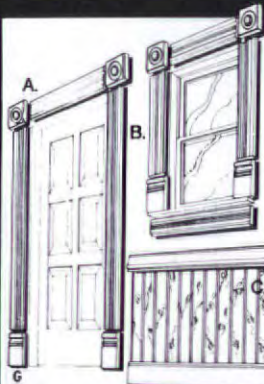


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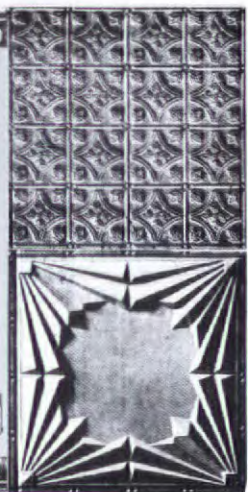
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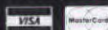
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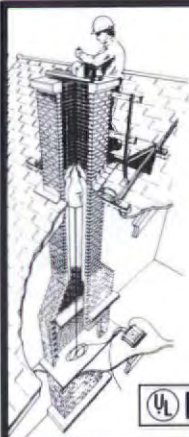
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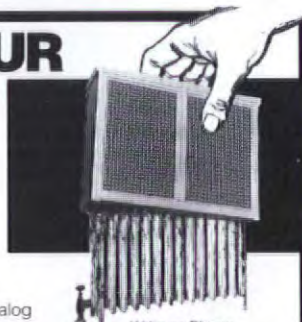
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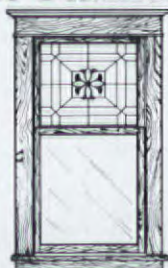
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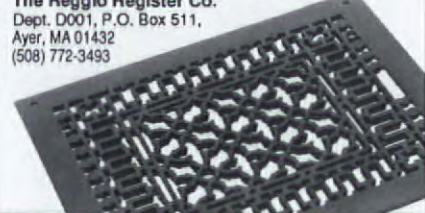
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**PRESERVATION INSTITUTE FOR THE BUILDING CRAFTS** in Windsor, VT has announced workshops to be held in January and February, 1990. Sessions include American Building Design and Technology, An Introduction to Architectural Woodworking, Advanced Architectural Woodworking, and An Introduction to Fire Safety and Historic Preservation. For more information and registration contact Preservation Institute for the Building Crafts, PO Box 1777, Windsor VT 05089. (802) 674-6752.

**36th ANNUAL WINTER ANTIQUES SHOW** — Sixty-seven dealers will offer a spectacular array of furniture, porcelains, paintings, jewelry, carpets, tapestries, and objets d'art. The show runs from January 19th through January 28th at the Seventh Regiment Armory, Park Avenue and 67th Street, New York City. General admission is \$10. For more information call (212) 665-5250.

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**THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS** is having a national celebration of design excellence called Accent on Architecture in Washington, DC, February 18-25. The celebration will feature a gala awards dinner and audio-visual presentation; symposia with award recipients held in conjunction with the Smithsonian Institution; and events on Capitol Hill will focus public attention on historic preservation issues. For more information call AIA



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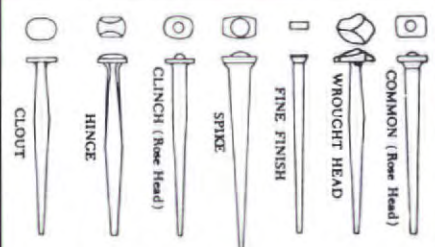
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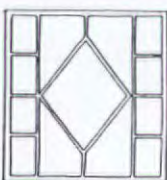
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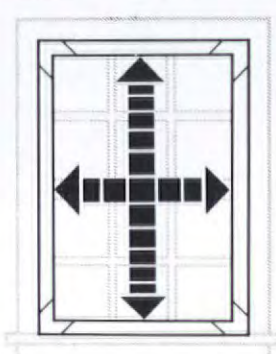
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1. A. Title of publication: Old-House Journal. B. Publication #: 00940178. 2. Date of filing: October 1, 1989. Frequency of issue: Bi-monthly. A. Number of issues published annually: 6. B. Annual subscription price: \$21. 4. Location of known office of publication: 435 Ninth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215-4101. 5. Location of the headquarters of general business offices of the publisher: 435 Ninth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215-4101. 6. Names and addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher and Editor, Patricia Poore, 435 Ninth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215-4101. Managing Editor, None. Owner (if owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock): Old-House Journal Corporation, 435 Ninth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215. William J. O'Donnell, 123 Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930. 8. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None. 10. Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: A. Total number of copies (Net Press Run): 161,447. B. Paid circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales: 13,856. 2. Mail subscription: 115,883. C. Total paid circulation: 129,739. D. Free distribution by mail, carrier or other means, samples, complimentary, and other free copies: 3,628. E. Total distribution (sum of C and D): 133,367. F. Copies not distributed: 1. Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: 2,473. 2. Return from News Agents: 25,607. G. Total (sum of E, F-1 and F-2 should equal Net Press Run shown in A): 161,447. 10. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: A. Total number copies (Net Press Run): 161,898. B. Paid circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales: 13,212. 2. Mail subscription: 113,498. C. Total paid circulation: 126,710. D. Free distribution by mail, carrier or other means, samples, complimentary, and other free copies: 3,260. E. Total distribution (sum of C and D): 129,970. F. Copies not distributed: 1. Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: 1,655. 2. Return from News agents: 30,273. G. Total (sum of E, F-1 and F-2 should equal Net Press Run shown in A): 161,898. 11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Patricia Poore, Publisher.

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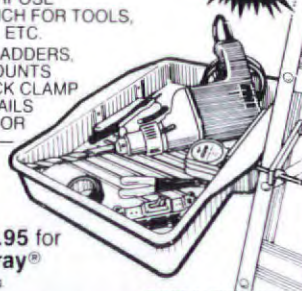
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# ADVERTISER'S INDEX

Product Network No.	Page No.		
431 A. Scott Williams & Company .....	12	Crawford's Old House Store .....	75
20 AA Abbingdon Affiliates .....	69	101 Devenco Products .....	17
31 Abatron .....	11	Elmira Stoveworks .....	72
Addikson Hardware .....	75	373 Entrances .....	60
23 Ahren's Chimney Technique .....	71	55 Erie Landmark Co. ....	12
83 Allied Windows .....	8	221 The Fan Man .....	73
304 Americlean Mobile Power Wash ..	71	Fastenation .....	74
320 The Antique Catalog .....	69	294 Fischer & Jirouch .....	13
443 The Architectural Cataloguer .....	9	412 Foley-Belsaw Company .....	12
176 Architectural Originals .....	9	350 Fourth Bay .....	53
450 Aristocast Originals .....	72	Goodwin Lumber Company .....	75
206 Armor Plus Coatings .....	11	317 Grand Era Reproductions .....	71
353 ARSCO Manufacturing .....	71	449 Heritage Brass Company .....	75
340 Arvid's Historic Woods .....	69	Historic Lighting Restoration .....	69
Ayer Company Publishers .....	71	62 Historical Replications .....	59
18 Ball & Ball .....	12	Insider Magazine .....	55
425 The Bank Architectural Antiques ..	7	448 International Coins & Currency ...	59
193 Bathroom Machineries .....	57	309 JB Products .....	9
444 Better Environment, Inc. ....	57	2 The Joinery .....	9
388 Bio-Pack Associates .....	67	377 Linden Publishing .....	6
442 Blue Ox Millworks .....	67	110 Mac The Antique Plumber .....	7
27 Bradbury & Bradbury .....	59	173 Mad River Woodworks .....	61
248 Brasslight, Inc. ....	10	9 Marvin Windows .....	65
408 Buckley Rumford Fireplace .....	6	410 Maurer & Shepherd Joyners .....	11
91 Carlisle Restoration Lumber .....	60	16 Midwest Wood Products .....	73
192 Carter Canopies .....	61	423 Mon-Ray Windows .....	69
35 Charles Street Supply .....	60	Monarch Radiator Enclosures .....	75
47 Chelsea Decorative Metal Company .....	5	332 National Energy Corporation .....	73
Chicago Old Telephone Co. ....	71	113 National Supaflu Systems .....	53
440 The Chimney Company .....	73	Never Look Back Productions .....	71
26 Classic Accents .....	5	New England Tool .....	69
159 Conant Custom Brass .....	67	5 Nixalite .....	61
42 Country Curtains .....	57	128 W.F. Norman Corp. ....	67, 69
307 The Country Iron Foundry .....	60	435 Northway Enterprises .....	75
Coy Hill Construction .....	74	56 Oak Crest Manufacturing .....	17
		375 Old South Company .....	53
		32 Old Wagon Factory .....	53
		303 Ole Fashion Things .....	10
		238 Pagliacco Turning & Milling .....	5
		61 Pasternak's Emporium .....	15
		114 Perma Ceram .....	73
		285 ProPrep .....	59
		38 Protech .....	60
		Ravenglass PTY .....	71
		Reggio Register .....	72
		445 Reliable Finishing Products .....	67
		118 Robinson Iron .....	17
		1 Schwerd Manufacturing .....	3
		Shaker Workshops .....	75
		Shuttercraft .....	73
		30 Smith-Cornell .....	73
		209 Southampton Antiques .....	60
		297 States Industries .....	7
		Steptoe & Wife .....	75
		122 Stewart Iron Works .....	13
		446 Sweet Antiques Gallery .....	14
		389 Sylvan Brandt .....	13
		Tremont Nail Co. ....	73
		Turtle Creek Software .....	75
		125 Vande Hey Raleigh ..... Inside Back Cover	
		252 Vermont Soapstone .....	13
		4 Victorian Lighting Works .....	61
		13 Vintage Wood Works .....	17
		451 J.P. Weaver ..... Inside Front Cover	
		447 Wisconsin Log Homes .....	11
		The Wood Factory .....	75
		Wooden Windows of Oregon .....	72
		409 Woodstock Soapstone Co. ....	61
		71 Worthington Group .....	57
		417 Yuenger Wood Mouldings .....	75

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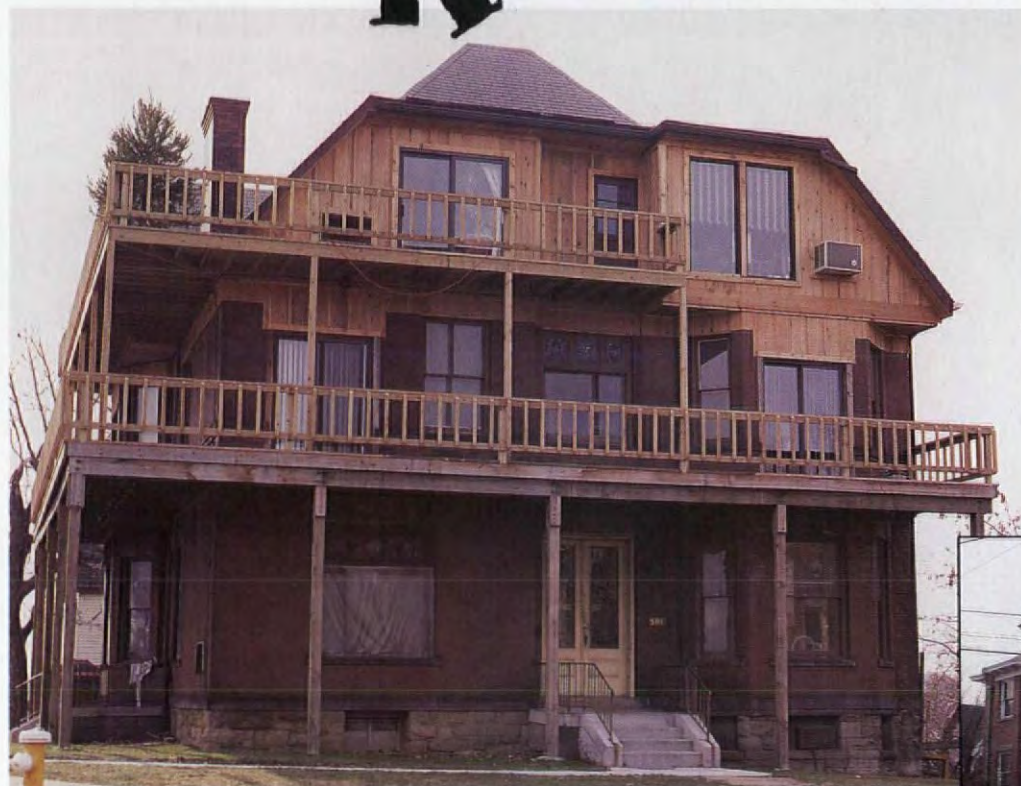
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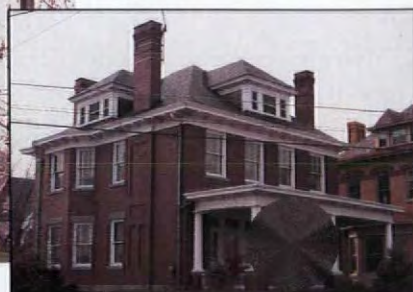
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# opinion... Remuddling



The brick Foursquare is in Pennsylvania; the smaller photo shows its unremuddled counterpart. (Photos were submitted by Katbryn Anderson and Stan Shepberd.)



## Forlorn Foursquares

**T**he ruling principle of the Craftsman house is simplicity," proclaimed a 1911 edition of Gustav Stickley's magazine, *The Craftsman*. He might have been talking about the clear lines of the American Foursquare — perhaps the most popular of post-Victorian house styles. Today, simplicity in architecture is all too often regarded as a blank canvas for a remodeler's inspiration.

The stately brick Foursquare above, in its conversion to apartment house, has become a hybrid "contemporary." Pictured right is a once-classic Foursquare hidden behind an expanse of glass. Simplicity plus complication does not equal imagination; it only equals remuddling...



This Foursquare in Wisconsin once had clapboard and shingle siding. (Thanks to Jane Wilcox for the photo.) Inset, above: The quintessential American Foursquare in its heyday, from Bennett Homes ready-cut house catalog, 1920.



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# OZARK GIRAFFES



Houses pictured are near Tahlequah, Oklahoma, at the westernmost border of the Ozark Mountains.

**T**hese houses with painted mortar stand out among the many buildings of native stone common in the Ozark Mountains. Giraffe houses — an unforgettable term known but not in common use in the region — are found in Arkansas, Missouri, and eastern Oklahoma.

Most of them were built between 1920 and 1940. They are generally of simple gable construction, and it's rare to see one larger than 1000 square feet, or more than a single storey. Hundreds of them still stand in both rural areas and in the poorer sections of many towns — enough of them that locals find them unremarkable.

The brown/ochre-colored sandstone is indigenous to the Ozarks. It is readily available along creek beds and in ravines; one could actually build a house without having to purchase a quarried material. By attaching the stone as a veneer with the bedding plane perpendicular to the ground, the builder was able to cover the most area with each stone, resulting in a savings of material — and in the odd patterns of the walls.

Nobody is sure why the mortar was first decorated. In the vernacular tradition, locals claim it's because "it's always been done that way." In this case, they're right: People who grew up here during the 'teens, '20s, and '30s all agree that the mortar was painted as soon as the houses were built. Those who own the houses today still do it as a decorative technique.

In the 1940s and '50s, the availability of inexpensive brick veneer and asbestos-shingle siding led to a phasing out of stone veneer. There has been a recent return to the use of stone, but the stones are not positioned in this manner and the mortar is not painted.

— submitted by Stephen B. Jordan  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and Cornell University