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### ->+\$ Old Flooring \$++------

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As they widen, you wonder: What can I do? Here's help

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**Cover:** Wide-pine flooring in the Bates-Scofield House (c. 1736), Darien, Conn. Photo by Jeff Wilkinson, courtesy of the Darien Historical Society.

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### EDITOR'S PAGE



The other day, two dear friends of mine phoned, desperation in their voices, to ask me to meet them after work at an antique store. The purpose: to discuss the restoration job being done on their newly purchased Biedermeier bookcase, work that had stalled out on a disagreement about how *mucb* refinishing actually needed to be done.

Now I know a bit about early-19thcentury furniture, enough to recognize that the problem at hand wasn't so much the finish as the start: John and Jave hadn't expected to be confronted by so many imperfections in the piece itself - imperfections which I knew the intended highgloss finish would play up. And the limitations on how the restorer could improve things pleased them not. We discussed whether they should repaint the decorative black pilasters on each side of the bookcase (I voted for just a touch up) and whether a high-gloss finish was best. In the end, though, they realized that you can visually disguise that crack in the veneer (and even at that, only temporarily), but you can't undo it.

This was an important first step. Upon leaving the shop, I shared stories about my beloved Louis-Philippe armoire, which suffered visibly each winter in my overheated pre-war apartment, and which caused me to cringe late at night to hear the widening cracks creak ever so softly (but loudly enough to wake me up).

And that's just the beginning with old houses, I added half in jest, half in warning, knowing that my friends were contemplating the even bigger commitment to an old house. With an old house as with old furniture, the first thing you must learn is that you've got to love it but not too much. Otherwise, it can drive you to distraction with worry and hard work. Most important, I told them, you must have an appreciation for irony, because most of us become old-house owners because of our love of beautiful old things things that gleam with the patina of age, things that have character, things that have survived longer than we will. Yet we're forced to settle for the less than beautiful (perhaps less than perfect is the more accurate way to phrase it) in the course of the restoration work that we do.

In the case of my friends, tha, first close-up look at their bookcase after the cash exchanged hands was a frightening one. It implied responsibility, which I think is ultimately the scariest aspect of the whole old-house/old-furniture experience. It's the owner's call on how much so-called restoration is enough. And sometimes the issue is complicated by the question of not how far to go, but which way to go, as Gordon Bock makes clear in his article on the historical approaches to finishing floors (see page 22).

Don't over-restore was, unfortunately, the sum of my advice to John and Jave, as I reminded them that they liked the bookcase upon first seeing it in its somewhat care-worn state. And I left them



Photo courtesy of Victor Antiques, Ltd.,

NYC

Above: the beauty of a restored Biedermeier bookcase.

with a few parting words about "learning how to relax." But I hurried home in the winter twilight to check on my armoire — just in case.

... and New Babies

"New" isn't a word in common usage at the Old-House Journal. But there's no other way to describe the baby boy born to Patricia Poore (except maybe impossibly adorable or cute!). Our Publisher and Editor delivered William Carl Thomsen just days before we went to press with this issue and, I'm happy to report, a few weeks after Patty finished restoring the baby's room. Congratulations, Patty and Carl. Here's hoping the little one will be a source

of great joy in the years to come.

Editorial Director

4

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### LETTERS

Jacks For All Trades Dear OHJ,

We at Templeton, Kenly & Co. enjoyed reading Gordon Bock's article, "Heavy-Duty Jacks," in the July/August 1990 issue. We thought it was very well written and were particularly impressed with the part that dealt with the safe use of jacks.

We have one safety-related comment that your readers should be aware of concerning ratchet jacks. There are two distinct types of ratchet jacks manufactured: 1. A general-purpose jack that will ratchet a load up and ratchet a load down when the reversing lever is shifted. This type of ratchet jack finds widespread use in mines, railroads, utilities, industrial maintenance, house moving, and with heavy-equipment riggers. It is designed to accept round level bars, and is the appropriate jack for the applications your readers would encounter.

2. A ratchet jack that is designed specifically and only for railroad-trackwork use. This type of jack cannot gradually lower a load by the reverse-ratchet action. It is a quick-release jack that will drop a load instantly when it is tripped. These jacks can be readily identified by a socket that is designed to accept a square lever bar.

Unfortunately, the ratchet jack featured in two of the article's photos was of the second type, which would



A fantasy has come true within these stuccoed walls....

#### Rare Company

Dear OHJ,

A fantasy came true when I opened the May/June 1990 issue and found a photo of my home in the article on Arts and Crafts houses (and alongside Stickley's Craftsman Farms home — and that's rare company indeed).

We have been loyal *OHJ* subscribers for many years, back to the three-ring-binder days, and it's been a pleasure to watch the magazine grow. Keep up the good work. — William F. Reichenbach Madison, N.J. be inappropriate for your readers to use.

- Peter Coster President, Templeton, Kenly & Co. Broadview, Ill.

#### Gordon Bock replies:

'Your comments are well taken. The difference between the lowering mechanisms found in these two types of ratchet jacks — those that only lever down and those with a quick release or speed-trip mode - was one of the first safety points I mentioned in the article. However, this distinction cannot be overstressed. The extra margin of safety provided by jacks that only lever down makes them the only ratchet jacks that should be considered for old-house work, and these should have been shown in the photos as well. The identifying shape of the bar socket is also an important point."

### Spare the Lead

Dear OHJ,

Here's an item of interest to *OHJ* (and GARBAGE) readers: A U.S. Senate bill, #2637, now under consideration in the subcommittee, proposes to reduce the presence of lead in various building products, including paint, plumbing fixtures, and roofing and siding materials. Although the intent of the bill is laudable, it would have a devastating impact on the restoration field by eliminating lead came, solder, and enamel paints from use in the fabrication and repair of stained glass.

There is no acceptable substitute for lead came in stained-glass windows. Furthermore, stained-glass windows pose no known environmental danger, and the use of lead products necessary in their manufacture or repair is done with great care. Anyone concerned with preserving this material should write Sen. Harry Reid, Chairman of the *continued on page 8* 

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### LETTERS

#### continued from page 6



Avoid standing in your fireplace — unless it's as big as this one.

#### **One Big Fireplace** Dear OHI.

Inasmuch as your publication has run articles on historic kitchens, this photograph may be of interest. It was taken during the 1930s Historic American Buildings Survey, and depicts the cooking fireplace in the circa-1840 Borders-Blackman house near Anniston, Alabama. Note erdid it on their new 1840 house. that the lady in the photo is standing inside the fireplace, which measures about 5'3" high by 9'3" wide by 3'8" deep. Note the sunlight coming down on the fireplace brick: Even with a fire, this must have been a cold place in winter. Perhaps after the "Royal Baker"

Subcommittee on Toxic Substances. United States Senate, Committee on Environment & Public Works, 458 Dirkson Senate Building, Washington, DC 20510.

> - J. Randall Cotton Philadelphia, Penn.

### Back in Print

#### Dear OHJ,

On page 64 of the Sept/Oct issue ["Good Books"], you state that Codman and Wharton's The Decoration of Houses is out of print. In fact, a

stove was installed, the unused flue would be covered in the winter.

The Borders-Blackman house is not a mansion but a six-room, late-Federal farmhouse. There are no theories as to why the cooking fireplace for this average-size house is so large. Perhaps the Borders family previously had a small one, and ov-

The Borders-Blackman house is currently being restored by Dr. and Mrs. George Gibbins of Anniston, with a compatible addition to the rear, tenuously connected by a narrow glazed colonnade.

- Harvie P. Jones, FAIA Huntsville, Ala.

new edition, in both hardback (\$14.95) and paper (\$10.95), is available at The Mount, Wharton's home in Lenox, Massachusetts. (Wharton also wrote Italian Villas and Their Gardens, which they also sell at The Mount.)

I wanted to see this book for years and was delighted to find it when I last visited Wharton's home, which, according to her biographer, was not designed by Codman but by another architect, because Codman's asking price was too high. The historic

group which has taken over The Mount is doing a lot of restoration on the 1902 house, including a garden renovation.

> - Norma Davenport Maplewood, N.J.

#### New Bathroom Woes Dear OHI.

After reading Patricia Poore's editorial in the Sept/Oct OHI ["Old Bathroom Woes"], I just had to zip off a letter to you.

I also had those thoughts on how nice to have some of those "modern" things to enjoy. Well, this summer I had the chance when we visited my brother in his new, upscale house in a yuppie community. There was the spacious bathroom suite, just like a model home: walk-in tiled shower, sunken tub, double vanity, and full 12-foot-wide mirror - all with proper lighting and stained-glass window behind the garden tub. The only thing wrong with this "magazine picture" was that the bathroom desperately needed a good cleaning. My brother admitted he was glad I was there, as house cleaning just wasn't his area. So before we could enjoy these features, I went to work. Let me tell you, that 17-squarefoot room and floor of tile is a lot to clean. Then I proceeded to do the garden tub. Well, my arms aren't long enough to reach across, so I had to climb in to scrub it. But another thing no one tells you is that after these tubs are a few months old, their shiny finish seems to disappear; even with special cleansers it didn't look like it should for being only nine months old.

I was so grateful to that visit because now, when I see a magazine ad for an upscale bathroom, I can look at it more realistically - now all I see is work.

I was so glad to get home to our small 1920s bathroom with its porcecontinued on page 10



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### LETTERS

#### continued from page 8

lain footed tub. This is a bathroom I can clean in a minute and not be a slave to it. So Patricia, I hope this will help put your longings in perspective, as mine were.

> - Linda Coolich Flint, Mich.

### Another Opinion

Dear OHI.

This is in reference to your opinion ["Remuddling," July/August, p. 88]. We are the proud owners of the house depicted as having the victimized verandah. Since we did not ask for your opinion, personal or professional, we are sure you will grant us the same unsolicited opportunity to express ours, in print, so that our neighbors will know that you have a fair editorial policy.

First of all, we are a small island

community recovering from the major hurricane of the century, and what we don't need is non-constructive criticism and more personal duress. We are sure that Charles Kellner, the Island resident whom you allege submitted the pictures for whatever his reasons, and you, obviously a self-appointed "authority" to restoration enthusiasts, did not see that piece of worthless diatribe as an invasion of privacy, but we do.

Secondly, I don't know what the charter of your magazine is, but one would think that striving to educate and inform readers on restoration techniques using the products of your advertisers would be preferable to ridicule of those with a different view - certainly not the best business approach to increased sales or circulation. It certainly would be

more profitable to mind the business of suppliers instead of trashing customers. Even us "remuddlers" buy good stuff.

Lastly, included in what we view as a cheap attempt at tabloidism, are several incorrect assessments which causes one to question your supposed knowledge and subject-matter expertise. The scaffolding shown in the picture is misleading as exterior remodeling, including the porch, was done approximately 20 years ago probably long before Dr. Kellner even thought of living on the Island or analyzing people. Also, the house has vinyl - not aluminum - siding. And, so you no longer need to muse about the brick columns, the house withstood unprecedented winds. (Many did not.) The porches you

continued on page 12



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### LETTERS

#### continued from page 10

find exemplary in structure on the other house have been falling down for years and were declared unsafe after the storm. If this is your idea of preservation, one of us is mistaken.

For your further enlightenment, the historical district is in downtown Charleston, and people who want to live "preserved" follow the rules of BAR. Some individualists choose to live on barrier islands with standards that allow the freedom of diversity in taste. Until now, that has been part of its charm.

In closing, we would remind you that some people are "preservationists" simply because they cannot envision anything other than repairing and repainting something that someone else thought of and accomplished. Dear OHJ,

- The Harts Sullivans Island, S.C.

#### Correction

Dear OHI:

We very much appreciate the review of our book Park & Recreation Structures on page 64 of the Sept/Oct OHJ. The review is quite nice, but unfortunately you listed the wrong price for the book: The cost is not \$80.25 but \$59.50.

We are hoping that the \$80.25 price does not inhibit too many prospective buyers of this book. We would appreciate a correction in your next issue.

> - Carol Park-Hill Production Manager, Graybooks Boulder, Colo.

### Impatiens for the Facts

In your May/June 1990 article "Neo-Antique Hanging Baskets," the

impression is given that impatiens are not authentic to the old house. However, they were offered as a new plant in the 1888 Burpee's Farm Annual.

I am the gardener at the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site. and have done extensive research to find what would have been available to Mrs. Kohrs. Although a pioneer woman, she had both a conservatory and an elaborate outdoor flower garden.

Although I agree that a New Guinea impatiens would be less than authentic, a simple, old-time impatiens would be quite acceptable. I hope this has helped relieve any impatiens-lover's dilemma over choosing between authentic and aesthetic.

> - Lanette King Deer Lodge, Mont.







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### RESTORER'S NOTEBOOK

### More Bright Ideas

I would like to expand upon Roger Apted's suggestions on light-bulb replacement ("Restorer's Notebook," July/August 1990 *OHJ*).

Among the long-lasting bulbs on the market are compact fluorescent bulbs. They're usually rated for 10,000 hours — about 10 times longer than a standard incandescent bulb, which makes them perfect for hard-to-reach fixtures. These bulbs also use only about one-fourth the electricity of incandescent bulbs, which will not only help you save substantially on electric bills, but also makes the bulbs safer for use in old houses that need wiring improvements. I found them especially valuable when I moved into an old house in which most of the outlets and fixtures were run off a single, 60-year-old, 15-amp service.

The Alliance to Save Energy has

### Patching Anaglypta

The hallway in our 1901 Victorian originally had a wall-mounted gasheater fixture. When the defunct fixture was removed, the old Anaglypta pattern was dreadfully interrupted in a  $2 - \times -2\frac{1}{2}$ -foot area. I searched San Francisco's many res-

Below: Damaged Anaglypta (left) was patched and its pattern re-created with acrylic paint (right). Bottom: the completed repair.



toration-supply houses for a possible match, but with no luck. For months my husband and I pondered the various possibilities: a mini built-in bookshelf? a seethrough panel so we could have our very own lath-and-plaster exhibit? the application of new Ana-

> glypta on this one wall or throughout the entire hall? Then I devised a patching system that really did the job.

> I studded in the opening, drywalled it over. and mudded in the seams. After the mud dried, I primed it. Using a pencil, I then traced the original Anaglypta pattern directly onto the section. Next I drew in the design, using small tubes of acrylic paints (available at most craft stores for fabric painting). Afterwards, I topped the fake embossing with two heavy coats of primer and the final wall color. Up close, the patch is discernible, but from a distance, it's impossible to see. The total cost was \$20, plus a few Saturday mornings' labor.

> > — Suzanne Dumont San Francisco, Calif.

published a consumer brochure outlining different types of fluorescent bulbs; it also includes toll-free phone numbers for manufacturers, who can direct you to the stores that stock their bulbs. For further information, contact the Alliance at 1725 K Street, NW, Suite 914, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 857-0666.

> — Mary Beth Zimmerman Arlington, Va.

### Clean Up Made Easy

After making two huge messes in our yard, I've found a better way to clean up and preserve a lawn during an exterior restoration project: First, I lay down a large tarp to make sure all of the little stuff (bits of roofing and stucco, in our case) doesn't get into the lawn. I then put sheets of plywood over the tarp, which makes shovelling up the stuff a breeze. Don't leave the covering down for more than a couple of days, however, or it will kill the grass.

– Dan Miller Elgin, Ill.

### **Stripping Strategy**

When I found that my local "strip joint" wanted almost \$600 to strip the spindles on my wrap-around porch, desperation became the mother of invention. I discovered that the galvanized liner from a wicker planter (about  $8'' \times 28'' \times$ 7") was the perfect size for a dip tank. I was able to do eight or nine spindles at a time, loosely covering the top with a length of heavy-duty aluminum foil to avoid the more rapid evaporation of the relatively large surface area. This was much easier than the more traditional method of putting the spindles into a pail filled with stripper to half their height, and then turning them over to do the other half. With the porch restored, the planter has its liner back (at least until we tackle the interior stairs).

> — Alisa Bearov Landrum Norfolk, Va.



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OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

### ASK OHJ



#### Matching Concrete Block

I own a post-Victorian concreteblock home onto which I would like to build a garage where one previously stood. My problem is finding block to match that of the existing bouse. Can you put me in touch with a supplier for this?

> - Harvey E. Whitman II Haslett, Mich.

The concrete block with which A your house was built would have been cast on site, block by block, with a hand-operated machine (see "Ornamental Concrete-Block Houses," October 1984 OHI). Constructing your garage out of matching block is a laudable idea, but obtaining the materials won't be easy.

Finding an actual blockmaking machine or source for salvaged block would provide the most historically accurate results, but these are both long shots. Making moulds from exphoto at left highlights the rock-face and cobblestone-face blocks.

isting blocks and casting new ones has been done for spot repairs (see "Repairing Ornamental Concrete Block," November 1984 OHI), but would be a big job for an entire garage. A more practical - but by no means sure-fire or inexpensive -option would be to consult firms that manufacture cast stone or ornamental cast concrete (such as for garden statuary), in the hope that one may be willing to duplicate blocks for you. Another possibility would be to use a suitable variety of stock, modern concrete block with a patterned face (such as a brick design), which would be a nod to the "faux stone" nature of the original cast block.

#### The "Fainting Room"

We recently ran across an ad for an old house, which included a "fainting room." In this particular house, it was at the end of a ballway between two bedrooms,

with no access to either of them. Next to the door was a half wall and an open space where a window (transom?) had been mounted. This opening overlooked the stairs. Can you tell us anything about such a room? - Anthony C. Hill Yorba Linda, Calif.

We consulted Judy Snyder of the Victorian Society in America, and she explained that anterooms adjacent to second-floor bedrooms such as you describe existed in some upper- or upper-middle-class Victorian houses. These small antechambers were most common in the deep South (particularly New Orleans) up to the turn of the century, and were "a place where ladies could retire" on a day bed or an armless piece of furniture called a "fainting couch" or "swooning couch." (It was also known as a chaise longue, after the French.) In an era when one did not formally go back to bed until nightfall, these small rooms provided a spot for taking a nap without disarranging the big bed or having to disrobe.

If not a localism, the term "fainting room" may be more a product of

"Wilbemina bas succumbed! We must remove her to the fainting room!"



Victorian mythology, as we could find no primary source in which that name is used. Victorian women were reportedly big fainters, and indeed tight corsets made for shallow breathing, and physical exertion could cause one to blank out. Frequent births in rapid succession also left many women with generally frail constitutions, as did the use of laudanum, an opium preparation included in many patent medicines. It is doubtful, however, that these rooms actually were designed as a place for women to fall unconscious, as the name might suggest.

In Search of Parquet

O I am a wood-floor refinisher who's come across some very unique flooring in a two-storey bouse built in the 1930s. There, oak/ rosewood/maple parquet runs throughout the house, with a different pattern in each room. The construction and variety of designs seem to indicate a production-type of wood flooring, not something custom made.

Here's my question: Is there, or was



The intricate, interlocking patterns of this old parquet floor are still available for today's bomeowners.

there, any company that produced this type of wood flooring? If so, I would like to contact them.

> - Dean G. Glatting Sauver Creek Incorporated Oshkosh, Wis.

Manufactured ornamental hardwood floors grew steadily in intricacy and appeal throughout the 1800s; by the turn of the century, these floors rivalled carpeting as impressive floor coverings. Many were true, solid parquet, in which the wood is at least 7/8" thick and installed on a subfloor as primary flooring. Other products, such as parquet veneer or "wood carpet," how-



This parquet pattern was one of many offered by the Interior Hardwood Co. back in 1894.

ever, were only 5/16" or so thick and were applied over an existing plain floor for a decorative upgrade. Borders for true parquet were often shipped in preassembled lengths several feet long; the field came in blocks or sheets, especially if a strong mosaic pattern was used. Wood carpet, frequently the most elaborate of these floors, was at-

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tached to a cloth backing and arrived in a roll to be fitted and nailed to the old floor with small brads.

At one time, stock or custom ornamental wood floors could be ordered from catalogs or direct from the manufacturer — the

complex designs you found are by



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### WHO THEY WERE

by Jeff Wilkinson



George Palliser wrote or co-wrote over 20 books on architecture, and designed hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of buildings, yet he remains one of the 19th century's most obscure personalities. Very little is known of the man who created a systematic approach to mail-order architecture. Not even an accurate birthdate has survived. We only know that somewhere around 1849, Mr. Palliser was born at Thirsh, in Yorkshire, England.

Few traces are left of his life in England, and we do not hear of him until 1868, the year he arrived in Newark, New Jersey, where he worked as a master carpenter and later opened a millwork business. Newark at this time was a busy industrial center and full of competition. A better city for an ambitious young man was Bridgeport, Connecticut, which is where Palliser relocated in 1873.

Bridgeport was also the home of world-renowned entrepreneur Phineas Taylor Barnum. Barnum greatly appreciated the work of English architects, and he soon became Palliser's most important client. Today, from the windows of the commuter train, one can see the blocks and blocks of houses that Barnum and Palliser developed. We can only guess that between Palliser's millwork business and his move to Connecticut, he began to assume the title of architect. In those days, any person with a reasonable knowledge of building technique and the ability to draw could hang out a shingle. These skills Palliser possessed, and together with his brother Charles, who arrived in Bridgeport a few months after George, the firm of Palliser, Palliser & Co. was established.

Between the years 1873 and 1875, the two brothers designed scores of houses for Barnum. Quite possibly, it was Barnum's influence as an entrepreneur, together with Palliser's own knowledge of the millwork business, that led to Palliser's most original idea, that of conducting architectural design by mail. Architectural style books had been sold for some years by such people as A.J. Downing, Calvert Vaux, Gervase Wheeler, and A.J. Davis. What was unique to Palliser was his development of a mail-order architectural practice, providing not stock plans but design services. Palliser's method was simple and practical. Using a fairly comprehensive questionnaire that examined the client's site, budget, materials de-

Advertised in Palliser's American Cottage Homes (1878) as a Southern cottage, this \$1,500 design easily could be modified to look at bome in almost any part of the country. sired, and space

needs, an initial design would be drawn. The client would then make any revisions necessary, at which point the Pallisers would proceed with the final working drawings. Mail-order design may seem quite risky today, but amazingly the system worked very well, as attested by the thousands of Palliser houses erected across the country.

Palliser's designs were very much in the Victorian Gothic mode and drew stylistically from the work of Richard Norman Shaw, William Eden Nesfield, and other English architects working in the Queen Anne style. A typical Palliser house was built of wood with steeply pitched gables, outlined with bold chimneys and iron cresting; these differ from their English cousins built of brick. Decorative wood shingles often appeared on the second storey, with plain horizontal siding on the lower. Windows were almost always grouped in pairs or in threes. Bays were commonly used to highlight important rooms. And no home was complete without a porch or verandah.

The Pallisers' method for attracting clients was to publish books of de-

signs. Between 1876 and 1908, over 20 books appeared on a wide range of subjects, from *Palliser's Memorials and Headstones* to *Selected Details of Interior and Exterior Finish for Architects, Carpenters and Builders.* Their most popular book, *Useful Details*, is said to have sold over 50,000 copies. The Palliser brothers'





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continued from page 18 impact was tremendous, and for the first time architecture was being served to the middle class. Houses, however, made up only half of the firm's work; they also designed many schools,

churches, and public buildings.

The popularity of the firm grew, and in the summer of 1883 the brothers moved their offices to 42nd Street in New York City. This move also marks a divergence between the brothers. both professionally and personally,

with Charles

The Pallisers designed many urban and public buildings, as this city brick bouse (1887) demonstrates.

growing more interested in the area of building materials, publishing several works on concrete. Another possible source of friction may have been a mail-fraud charge against Charles, who enlisted the help of Connecticut postmasters to solicit new business. As a result, Charles was fined and spent a day in jail.

George Palliser has never been regarded as an important architect but rather as a disseminator of design. One point is certain: He produced buildable designs and raised the standard of house construction. His books with their worthy details and specifications are a commendable legacy. George Palliser died at his home in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., on April 3, 1903, survived by his wife and ten children.

Special thanks to Michael Tomlan of Cornell University.

20



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OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL



floor finish: varnish.

Cyclopedia of Architecture,

he question even-

offer this guidance: As with any project, it is important to first establish what the goals are. This means deciding how strongly your choice of new finish will influenced by 1) historical accuracy, and being true to the original floor finish (or what could have been the original finish), and 2) the practical service or level of maintenance you will expect to get from and give to the finish. Also, it never hurts to test several finishes on a piece of scrap flooring to aid with visualizing their look in an entire room. In the end, the choice is up to the restorer; in the beginning, it's helpful to know what the options are.

### Bare Wood

Prior to roughly the middle of the 19th century, the floors in many houses at all economic levels were bare wood. Occasionally hand-planed and matched boards, but usually wide planks, these floors were kept clean by frequent washings with sand and mild alkaline solutions (either lime- or lye-based). For those with colonial- and post-colonial-era houses who feel very strongly about being historically appropriate, no finish would be the way to go. High-traffic areas can be protected with runners, floor cloths, or carpets, which may be then removed when it's time to show off the floor.

### Paint

ontrary to some notions, paint has a noteworthy history as a floor finish. There are painted floors on record dating back to the mid 1700s in New England, and tongue-andgroove floors continued to be painted into the 20th century in the workaday rooms of simple or rural houses. Floors were likely to be painted in shades that hid dirt, such as brick or "Indian" red, grey, brown, or green. Light blue, yellow, ochre, and other light colors also were surprisingly popular in colonial America. Painting floors in decorative designs continued to be a fashionable — if somewhat "high end" — practice well into the mid 1800s. Stencilling was one technique that could be used to decorate just the border or the entire field of the floor. Geometric patterns such as checkerboards, diamonds, and zig-zags all had their heyday, as did floral motifs, marbleizing, and designs imitating carpet patterns.

Paint, of course, is a durable, low-maintenance finish, even under heavy traffic conditions. Oil-based paints specifically made for floor and deck use still stand up best; these should be applied in two or more coats. Their moderate gloss either equals or comes close to the look of earlier floor paint.

### Wax

Wax has always had a mixed appeal as the sole finish for wood floors. Although popular for centuries as one of the most beautiful, easy to maintain, and easily repaired finishes for woodwork, wax on floors wears quickly in traffic spots, and offers the wood little protection from abrasion. As hard finishes came into vogue in the latter half of the 19th century, wax frequently was applied over shellac and varnish, both to give an added, easily renewable lustre to the floor, and to protect the finish itself. Wax also was recommended to be applied over penetrating oils in the 1920s and '30s, to enhance their look and protect the wood.

In a modern household, wax alone is still a qualified choice for a floor finish. Though it has been popular for tongueand-groove hardwood floors off and on in the last 100 years, there is little indication that it was used in earlier decades on wide-plank floors. Still, wax may be an acceptable compromise between a hard finish and no finish at all. Though it builds up in low-wear areas and can be slippery under rugs, it does help flooring somewhat by repelling potential stains like spilled food long enough for them to be wiped up. Relatively hard paste waxes (such as Trewax or Butcher's wax) are used for floors, and can be cut with alum if a reduced shine is desired. Although dirty or built-up wax can be dissolved with turpentine or mineral spirits, once applied to bare wood it effectively closes the door to other finishes unless radical measures (such as sand-

Sheen or gloss — the reflective quality of a finish — is pictured here in three different kinds of oil varnishes (shown top to bottom): traditional spar varnish on fir flooring (very high gloss); tung-oil varnish on maple flooring (moderate gloss); satin tung-oil varnish on oak flooring (minimum gloss).



Photos: Gordon Bock

ing) are used. In addition, it is not compatible with every hard or oil finish (polyurethanes are often a problem).

Oils

ils create a finish by penetrating the wood rather than laying on top and hardening like paint. At the turn of the century, commercially sold floor oils made from crude petroleum, kerosine, or paraffin wax were available for use over varnished floors. Warmed paraffin or drying oils, such as linseed oil, which polymerize into a film when they react with oxygen, also were applied over bare wood. Penetrating sealers and finishes appeared later and are still popular for strip hardwood and parquet floors.

Oils have their own peculiarities as floor finishes. Generally, they require at least two coats for an adequate finish and sufficient drying time between coats (typically at least a week). Because they are not surface film-forming finishes, oils tend to hold dirt, making it imperative to keep an oiled floor clean. They also wear in traffic areas, with touch-ups usually being a fact of life, and give the wood only marginal protection from spills or abrasion. Most oils also significantly darken a floor and some (notably linseed oil) continue to darken as they age. Oils generally are not a reversible finish, but if a change of look is desired down the road, many will accept a traditional varnish over them once they have dried thoroughly. Still, penetrating oils are a favorite choice for many old floors because they are easy to apply and repair (new oil blends well with old), and,

The practice of decorative floor painting with the use of pattern stencils was a familiar one in the early 1800s, and is stylish again today for many floors.

particularly for soft woods, they are an attractive, low-gloss alternative to no finish at all. Penetrating oils are available as generic oils and proprietary products (Watco, Minwax, and Daly's are some national brands).

### Shellac

Shellac saw widespread use as a woodwork and floor finish in the Victorian era, when shine and a strong visual impression became a highly desirable quality in finishes. Shellac is a *spirit varnish* composed simply of a natural resin (secreted by the lac beetle) dissolved in a solvent: alcohol. Once the solvent evaporates, it leaves behind a coating of resin. Shellac gained early popularity because it is easy to work with, dries quickly, repairs well (touch-ups are almost invisible) and, when more sophisticated varnishes were still being perfected, it was reliable and fairly durable. Its natural amber color also gave wood a beautiful warm tone.

Shellac has several shortcomings that led to its decline as a floor finish and make it an unlikely choice for a modern home. First, water will spot and mar a shellacked surface by turning it white. Second, alcohol completely lifts the finish, causing it to be easily disfigured by accidents such as a spilled cocktail. Added to this, shellac is a relatively brittle finish that performs better on hardwoods (which are fairly stable) than softwoods. For those willing to put up with its limitations, shellac can be an attractive and authentic finish for a late-19th-century floor. Sold in either dry (to be mixed with alcohol) or liquid form, it should be purchased in the original orange (rather than bleachedwhite) versions. Shellac has a shelf life, and using the

Wax wears away fast on a floor that's subjected to beavy traffic, but it will add a subtle lustre (and limited protection for the wood) for as long as it lasts.



Photo: Gordon Bock

freshest product minimizes drying problems.

### Oil Varnishes

Like shellac, oil varnishes, with their incomparable "depth" and shine, came into their own as floor finishes in the latter half of the 19th century. Oil varnishes, however, differ from shellac (or some quick-drying varnishes sold today) in that they do not form a film simply through the evaporation of a solvent. Instead, these varnishes, which are made by cooking drying oils with hard resins, harden slowly into a film through oxidation. Oil varnishes are manufactured in different oil-to-resin ratios — referred to as long-, medium-, or short-oil — which also affect the drying time and eventual hardness of the finish. Medium-oil varnishes have been a favored floor finish because they remain relatively soft (like oil-based paint) and can flex and adapt to the movements of both hardwoods and softwoods, yet are hard enough to wear well.

Although regarded as obsolete by some, oil varnishes are still a very viable finish that protects and beautifies a floor. Besides being historically appropriate for many houses built in the last 100 years or so, these finishes bond well to older woods and do not show scratches as readily as some modern synthetic coatings. The common objections - that they require care to apply and 24 hours or more between coats to dry - may be overlooked if you regard the application problem as a one-time investment. Very soft oil varnishes, however, are vulnerable to embedded dirt, and none are as durable as their space-age counterparts. In the past, many oil varnishes were domestic versions of marine products (such as spar varnish) and produced a very reflective sheen. Modern versions are sold in a variety of sheens, although a glossy finish still resists dirt and scuffing the best.

### "Swedish" Finishes & Polyurethanes

hese recently developed, synthetic resin varnishes are not original to any pre-1940 houses. They are, however, popular for new floors and cannot be overlooked.

"Swedish" Finishes These coatings, based on urea-formaldehyde chemistry, share many traits with polyurethanes. They are easier than oil varnishes to apply and are noted for their scuff resistance. They are temperamental, though, when it comes to application on old floors, and work best on new or freshly sanded wood. (Consult manufacturer's recommendation for specific directions.) Also, "Swedish" finishes have a very high VOC (volatile organic compound) content which, coupled with their formaldehvde ingredient, makes them controversial for health and environmental reasons. Polyurethanes Of the several different classes of polyurethane coatings, three are commonly sold as floor finishes: Moisture-Cured: One of the first polyurethanes on the market, these varnishes cure through the action of water in the air. Moisture-cured polyurethanes are noted for their incredible toughness, and are often chosen for industrial

and heavy-traffic floors such as gymnasiums. They also contain a high percentage of solvents, making proper ventilation important when they are applied, and currently putting them under VOC restrictions in some areas.

Oil-Modified: These polyurethanes cure through the action of oxygen, much like traditional varnishes, largely due to the addition of drying oils. These oils also make it possible to produce them in a variety of sheens, while still retaining the advantages of polyurethane resins.

Water-Based: Also called *water-borne* polyurethanes, these finishes employ water as a major component of the coating, and are just starting to become regularly available. Developed in part to meet the increasing regulation of organic solvents in finishes, water-based polyurethanes have the added consumer advantage of cleaning up with water.

Polvurethanes are a dream finish for many homeowners, but they have proved less than ideal for some old-house restorers. First, they have a "plastic" look to some eves. which clashes with aged or traditional finishes in the same room. Second, polyurethanes are hard, un-supple coatings that have been known to delaminate from softwoods or floors that move a lot. They also do not bond well to poorly prepared



Photos: Gordon Bock

Some new water-based finishes brush on milky (top), but dry clear (above).

floors or those previously coated with wax, shellac, or the stearate compounds that are sometimes found in stains and fillers. They don't even bond well to themselves, which can cause difficulty in making repairs and touch-ups. Third, in some households, the hardness of polyurethanes also makes them highlight scratches in floors.

Some of these objections may be chalked up to the chemistry of this type of finish, and ruled out upon considering polyurethane's advantages. Self-leveling (for a smooth finish) and quick drying, it is easy to apply. Its legendary toughness also makes it easy to maintain — a boon in buildings where everything demands maintenance. It can even help hold splinter-prone floors together. Choosing the right product helps, too. Moisture-cured polyurethanes were often designed for a thick, "industrial" look, but oil-modified products, already akin in makeup to oil varnishes, are sold in satin and matte sheens. Applying these finishes in thin coats also minimizes the plastic look and improves their flexibility.



Throughout the 18th and early-19th centuries, painted or stencilled canvas floor cloths were a popular way to decorate a room in American homes of comfortable means. These cloths were less expensive than wool carpeting and, since they were washable, were more practical as well.

Perhaps the earliest record of a floor cloth was in the 1728 household inventory of the Governor of New York and Massachusetts, which listed "two old checkered canvas' to lay under a table." In addition to this early use as "crumb cloths," floor cloths commonly were placed in parlors as area rugs, where they were enjoyed for their beauty. In winter months, floor cloths were left in place and covered by wool carpets, thereby providing additional warmth and insulation. Records also show that in the mid 1800s, cloths were increasingly laid wall to wall in hallways and vestibules and up stairways, where their ability to withstand traffic and dirt was particularly appreciated; not surprisingly, heavy use caused a secondary industry of repainting and restoring worn cloths to crop up.

> loor cloths were fashioned in a variety of designs. The earliest cloths, manufactured in England, imitated fine flooring both simple and elaborate: marble, tile, parquetry, as well as the fashionable carpeting of the day. Also popular in the 18th century were geo-

metric patterns featuring diamonds, checks, and cubes, both plain and marbled. Sometimes, these designs were stencilled or painted free-hand, either by a housewife or by a decorative house painter. With the industrial age came mass production, and

Pictured left, a Good & Co. reproduction floor cloth in the Gold Parlor of the Bates-Scofield House in Darien, Connecticut, c. 1736.



wood-block printing (used for wallpapers) was adapted, thereby enabling 19th-century designs to become more elaborate, often mimicking the best Axminster and Wilton carpets. These factory-made floor cloths were stretched on enormous frames hung vertically from the ceiling, while men worked atop tiered scaffolding. Some floor cloths, however, continued to be fashioned by hand, either by

itinerant craftsmen or enterprising homemakers, for whom quilt patterns by now had great appeal.

> fter the arrival of linoleum in the 1870s, the popularity of floor cloths began to wane. Although a small market existed into the 20th century, by the first world

war floor cloths were all but gone. Today, manufacturers are again producing floor cloths due to renewed interest in them (see "Restoration Products," page 54). Finding the right cloth, however, may not be easy. One option is to make one yourself. Crafting your own can be an enjoyable way to create something of lasting beauty that's appropriate to your old house. Here's how to proceed.

#### Canvas

Start with a 15-ounce, closely woven, #10 canvas (or equivalent). This can be found at artists' supply stores in a variety of finishes. When selecting, remember: the finer the weave, the fewer the knots — and the less prep work. Another source for heavy canvas is marine outlets, which carry a great selection of widths. Awning, boat-cover, sailmaking, and tent compa-



1. Ironing is the first step in preparing a floor-cloth surface for painting. 2. Look to pull the canvas taut in the stapling process. 3, 4. The author primes small canvases using a paint brush, but for larger ones — this one bangs in a friend's garage — primer gets rolled on. At least four coats of primer are applied to the front and back.

nies may be able to outfit you with something similar; these firms can be located in the Yellow Pages under "canvas goods." Two firms to contact for canvas as well as other chased from an art supplier. Between coats, the canvas can be unstapled, rolled up, and stored until you are ready to move on to the next stage. Bear in mind, however, that

floor-cloth supplies:

• Olde Virginea Floorcloth & Trading Co., P.O. Box 438, Dept. OHJ, Williamsburg, VA 23185-0438, (804) 564-0600, catalog, \$2

• Dick Blick Art Materials, P.O. Box 26, Dept. OHJ, Allentown, PA 18105, (800) 447-8192.

To estimate yardage, decide on your finished dimen-

sions. For beginners, add 8" to both length and width - this should be enough material to cover any miscalculations in stretching. Purchase your material rolled and do not fold it. You may use piece goods, but avoid seaming if at all possible. Also be sure to specify a single piece of canvas when mail-ordering it; some firms ship large canvas in separate pieces that need to be sewn.

### Framing

Stretching canvas over a frame is not essential in creating a floor cloth, but it makes the priming and designing processes much easier, and you'll end up with professional results. Framing also prevents wrinkling and rucking as well as excess shrinkage, which can occur during the priming phase.

Roughly speaking, anything you can staple without feeling too much guilt qualifies as a frame: an old tabletop, a plywood sheet, an unfinished sheetrock wall, the attic floor, your neighbors' stockade fencing, even the backside of your own garage. (Some advocate pegging larger canvases out on the lawn, but I ain't no gambler.) Just look around and use your ingenuity. Of course, you can always make a frame out of stretcher strips pur-



the larger the project you're undertaking, the more problematic stretching becomes. For this reason, large cloths are perhaps best done in situ.

#### Stretching

• ust before stretching the canvas, eliminate creases with a steam iron and spray starch. Determine which

side is smoother; this will be the finish side of the floor cloth. Then begin by stretching the cloth with the underside facing up. The object of the stretching is to get the canvas taut and keep it square. First staple the edge of the middle of any side. Next, staple the middle of the opposite side, followed by the middle of an adjacent side, thus creating a triangle crease. Then staple the middle of the remaining side for a diamond crease. Proceed by tacking down the canvas approximately two inches over to one side, making certain to pull the fabric taut around the area being secured. Repeat at two-inch intervals, rotating around the frame until the procedure is complete.

### Priming

Priming will protect the canvas and level up the weave. This is most important on the topside, where you need a smooth painting surface. The steps are: **1.** Apply 2 coats primer; **2.** sand with 100-grit paper; **3.** apply 1 coat primer; **4.** sand with 150-grit paper; **5.** apply 1 coat primer; **6.** apply a final topcoat.

Traditionally, size was applied to protect the cotton fibers from oil-based paints. Today, watersynthetic gesso (Liquitex Acrylic Gesso, for example).

Gesso is quite thick and will give you the most build per coat. If you're planning to marbleize the cloth and wish to cover the weave entirely, gesso is recommended. It is, however, rather expensive and generally unnecessary for the underside. Acrylic primer is thicker and adheres better than regular latex primer, but it costs slightly more.

> The recommended number of primer coats and subsequent sandings largely depends on the grade of your canvas. For the underside, you'll mainly want to smooth over the knots; an uneven underside will make sanding the topside more difficult. The final topcoat can be any leftover paint you have sitting around, either water- or solventbased.

When the canvas has dried, remove the staples, flip over the canvas, then stretch and staple as before. Prep the finish side as follows: **1**. Apply 3 coats primer or gesso; **2**. sand with 100-grit paper; **3**. apply 1 coat primer or gesso; **4**. sand with 150grit paper; **5**. finish with another coat of primer or gesso.

Use your judgment to determine the exact number of coats to apply; you may need an additional coat or two. The primed canvas should feel stiff and the surface smooth. After the canvas dries, you can remove it from its frame to begin decorating. The fibers now are well protected and will no longer shrink.

#### Decorate

No complete book of floor-cloth designs is currently available. Appropriate patterns can be copied from history and art books, which often

1, 2. A simple two-color square pattern is created by first painting all of the squares of one color. For precision in applying the second color, the author masks off the unpainted row of squares. 3. A single acetate stencil is all that's needed to create this traditional cube design. 4. A steel rule positioned inside the border protects the floor cloth during trimming.

based products are used in lieu of size. Your choices include a latex primer with PVA (such as Muralo Ultra), an acrylic primer (such as Benjamin Moore Aquagrip), or a feature period paintings in which floor cloths are visible. Stencilling was the most common method for decorating a cloth. You can make your own stencils (see "A Stenciller's





Tools & Techniques," Nov/Dec 1989 *OHJ*). Dover Publications offers over 20 stencil-design books. Some pre-cut wall stencils can be adapted to decorate floor cloths. Sources for stencils in period patterns include:

• AD-LIB, 517 East Paces Ferry Rd., Dept. OHJ, Atlanta, GA 30305; (404) 266-2425

• Hand Stenciled Interiors, 590 King St., Dept. OHJ, Hanover, MA 02339; (617)

878-7596 • *Stencil World*, Box 175, Dept. OHJ, 1456 Second Ave., New York, NY 10021; (212) 517-7164.

The cube pattern pictured on page 28 is easy to reproduce with a stencil of a single cube. Three colors are required to create the three-dimensional effect; typically, these are black, white, and an optional third color, with the white sometimes marbleized. Even simpler to fashion are stencils for geometric patterns of squares or diamond shapes.

Once you've decided upon a design to either stencil or paint free-hand, the next step is to mark the center of your cloth using a pencil or piece of chalk. To position and plot the design, it's best to start from this center point and proceed outward. I always design the border last, adjusting the depth to fit the remaining space. Next, paint the canvas, always applying one color over the entire floor cloth before moving on to the next.

### Hemming vs. Trimming

Traditionally, homemade floor cloths were hemmed at the edges by turning under one or two inches of excess material, mitering the corners, and gluing the fabric down.



**1.** By using masking tape, the freshly painted cloth is protected while its border is decorated. **2, 3.** After having varnished the body of the floor cloth — apply at least four coats for this job — finish the edges with a brush of varnish as well. **4.** This marbleized floor cloth looks resplendent once it's in place in an entry ball.

Heavy cloths, however, lie better if the edges are trimmed with a sharp knife rather than turned under.

I also find trimming much easier. Proceed carefully if

Clean cloths with mild soap and water. A coating of floor paste wax gives added protection and a soft luster. If the varnish one day wears thin, apply a fresh coat.

do this, so you've got only one shot at it. One option is to initially place tape along the outside dimensions, so there is no paint where you will make the crease, but this involves a lot more preplanning. Trimming should be done before you apply border

Trimming should be done before you apply border paint. This final layer of paint can then extend over the

you decide to turn the hem. The paint will crack as you

edges and cover the exposed fibers.

### Sealing

Even though many paints are fast-drying, the chemical interaction between some sealers and paints poses a possibility of bleeding. Play it safe and let the decoration dry a few days before moving on to the sealing phase.

Varnish the underside at least twice and the top side at least four times. Be sure to coat the edges. Your choices of varnish include the following: **1**. polyurethane varnish durable but not very flexible; **2**. oil varnish — flexible but not as durable; **3**. acrylic floor urethane varnish — casts the least tint, is fast-drying, but most expensive.

### Cloth Care

o prevent cracking, make sure not to place your floor cloth over carpeting. Secure it to hard flooring, using double-sided carpet tape to keep it from sliding. Nailing or tacking is inadvisable, as is the use of a rubber mat, which can cause the canvas to crack due to its thickness. On uneven surfaces, you may want to underlay a second piece of canvas. When removing or storing, roll the floor cloth like a poster.





### How to remove and replace tongue-&-groove floorboards

**BY JOHN LEEKE** 

ate in the 19th century, narrow hardwood flooring came into popular use. Its limited width and interlocking tongue-&-groove (T&G) joints made it a stable and strong flooring system — and difficult to repair.

This case history was a rather complex repair (see Figure 1). A wall between two rooms had been removed, leaving an oak floor (top of photo) on one side that was slightly higher than the adjacent birch floor (bottom of photo). Both floors met up with a new quarry tile hearth. The goal here was to fill in the missing flooring so that a neat finished appearance was produced; under other circumstances, the task could be to replace damaged boards.

I deal with the complexity of this kind of flooring project by dividing it into smaller repairs, in this case: a section of birch flooring  $2' \times 3'$ ; a section of oak flooring  $3' \times$ 4'; and a single wide board, 7' long, to join the two repair areas. To accomplish each phase, however, I used the same basic steps.



### **Plan the Work**

Always plan a flooring project to fit in with other restoration work. Typically, flooring is done after the bulk of the interior finish work on walls and ceilings is complete. It also



must wait until any work involving water is finished. An accident during roofing or plumbing could cause a leak that would spoil newly laid flooring. Even moisture evaporating out of fresh plaster may cup or swell and buckle new floorboards.

### **Select the Materials**

Preparation begins with the job of rounding up the necessary wood and nails. When I have to match the surrounding flooring, I consider the following criteria (here listed in order of importance).

**Size:** I try to duplicate dimensions of the existing boards, remembering that width and fit of the T&G joints are most important.

**Moisture content:** If the new flooring wood is too wet, it could shrink, cup, or leave cracks in between the boards when it dries. If the wood in the new boards is too dry, it could swell in width during the next wet season and buckle, widening cracks between boards of the adjacent original flooring. (Cracks in the new flooring will close, but because the new wood is tied into the old wood and expanding at a greater rate, cracks will open up in the old flooring.) To head off these problems, match the moisture content of the repair stock to that of the existing flooring before installation. Measuring the wood with a moisture meter is one way. The most often-used method, however, is to allow the repair stock to adjust to the ambient moisture level of the room. To do this, it is simply stacked and stickered (separated by layers with sticks) and left in the room as long as possible (at least two weeks) before it's installed.

**Species:** Starting with the same kind of wood as the surrounding floor will do the most to match its appearance. Then look for the same "cut." Flat-cut (flat-grain) boards have annual growth rings that usually run parallel to the face of the board (see Figure 2) and a characteristic grain pattern. Rift-cut (quarter-sawn, vertical-grain) boards have annual rings that are vertical to the face of the board, and are much more uniform in grain.

Careful selection will help you go even further in matching the appearance. Color variation and "tightness of the grain" (number of annual rings per inch) play a part here. Look to duplicate special "figures in the grain," such as the "flash" of quarter-sawn oak and "bird's eye" maple. In this project, I was able to match both the grain of quarter-sawn white oak and the characteristic wave pattern of red birch (see Figure 10).

**Buy it or make it:** Narrow hardwood flooring has been milled to standard sizes for many decades. It's sometimes worth checking local suppliers to see if their stock sizes match your flooring. Wood-flooring specialists will have a line on regional and national suppliers with a wider selection. Salvage yards may also be a source of flooring, especially if what you're looking for is made from desirable or hard-to-find wood.

An alternative is to mill your own floorboards or have it done at a local woodworking shop. After planing rough boards to thickness, rip them to width, allowing extra for the tongue on one edge. Then cut the T&G joints. For a small number of boards, this may be done with a dado blade on a table saw. Large amounts would justify the setup costs of a router or shaper.

For small repairs like this one, I find it's more economical just to go ahead and mill the wood rather than spend time looking for stock flooring to match. (But then, I have a woodworking shop set up and ready to go.) If matching wood grain and color are important, you probably will prefer to go with custom milling — and pay a premium for it.

**Nails:** I usually use cut nails to avoid splitting the flooring and for their superior holding power. Tremont Nail Co. (P.O. Box 111, Wareham, MA 02571; (508) 295-0038) makes thin, hardened-steel cut nails especially for narrow hardwood flooring. (Ask for the N-3 Floor Nail.)

### **Subfloor Repairs**

Preparation continues with repairs to the subfloor which provides structural support for the finish floor. The wood must be sound so the finish floor nails will hold. If the subfloor is weakened by decay, replace a whole section back to the nearest joist (see Figure 3). Often hardwood flooring is laid right over the earlier wide softwood flooring. In this situation, the old finish floor becomes part of the subfloor.

It's best to shim up the subfloor so it provides a flat, even surface for the new boards. In the real world, how-



ever, you often end up shimming between the sub- and finish floor. The thin taper of sawn cedar shingles makes them ideal for this purpose (see Figure 9). If you don't have any on hand, ask for a small bundle of shim stock at your building suppliers. These are low-grade shingles sold especially for this purpose.

A layer of rosin building paper or Tyvek<sup>®</sup> over the subfloor blocks air infiltration. One project I worked on had specifications calling for a vapor barrier between the subfloor and the finish flooring, intended to protect the hardwood flooring from the high moisture content of the crawl space below. The crawl space was unheated, so I was concerned that the vapor barrier actually would trap moisture condensing from above and cause problems. We decided to solve the moisture question with other methods, and skipped using a vapor barrier entirely. Every situation is different, but insulation and vapor barriers deserve careful consideration when you're laying new flooring.





### **Replacement**, Step-by-Step

he following cut-and-fit procedure simplifies the process of removing old floorboards and replacing them with new stock. During the work you may need to repeat some steps, skip others, or backtrack be-

fore you're actually done. It's a good idea to wait before nailing down any of the new boards until they have all been cut and fit into place. Once you have several floor repairs under your belt, you'll know when it's all right to nail as you go along.

**Layout and drill:** (See Figure 4.) Narrow hardwood flooring gets its strength and integrity from the interlocking T&G joints along its edges. Some flooring even has T&G joints at the ends of each board. Maintain this interlocking system by staggering replacement boards into the surrounding flooring. This usually means cutting back every other board in the existing floor a short length. Lay out



marks for a minimum cutback of 9 to 12", enough for the joint to share stresses with several inches of uninterrupted flooring on each side. This way, the joint won't split if, say, a piano is rolled across the floor.

Consider, too, the amount and lengths of your replacement boards at this stage. You don't want to end up an inch short on your last board, so prevent this from happening while it's an easy matter of redrawing a line. If your supply of replacement boards is limited, assign each a specific location and number.

Drill a <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" hole in each board on the waste side of the line. Center the hole in the board to avoid hitting a nail and dulling your bit. Start the bit tangent to the line and keep it vertical.

**Cut out relief strip:** (See Figures 5, 6.) Cutting a strip from the center of the board makes it possible to remove the sides of the board with less damage to the adjacent T&G joints. Prepare to make the cut by shortening the blade of your saber saw to the thickness of the new flooring.



With the saw unplugged and the blade fully extended, mark the thickness of the flooring on the blade. Remove the blade and, wearing eye protection, grip it with two pairs of pliers and snap it in two. With the excess length of the blade now gone, you can cut through the finish floor without cutting the subfloor beneath. Blind cuts such as these put more of a demand on the saw, so work slowly and carefully. If the saw chatters on the floor, check the length of the blade.

Begin the cut across the grain of the hardwood board in the  $\frac{3}{4}$ " hole and continue right up to the adjacent board. Then cut along the grain with a circular skill saw, which is more efficient at ripping than a saber saw. If the soles of your saws scratch the finish, polish them with 300-grit sandpaper or apply duct tape. Pry out the relief strip with a bar.

**Clean out waste:** Pry out the side waste pieces. Take special care not to break off the top shoulder of the groove on the adjacent board. Use a sharp chisel and mallet to



clean up the end cut. Protect adjacent flooring with a soft pine scrap when pulling nails. The ideal result is square end cuts and all tongues and grooves intact (see Figure 7). Minor damage to a tongue is not important, but glue any cracked groove shoulders with yellow carpenter's glue (aliphatic resin type).

**Cut to fit:** (See Figure 8.) If you haven't already done so, decide where each replacement board will go and give it a number. I get accurate end cuts by marking each board in place rather than using a tape measure. A miter box will help you get square cuts.

In this project, the hearth was not perfectly square with the flooring. To lay out a flush joint with a good fit, I used an adjustable bevel gauge to copy the slight angle and transfer it to the board.

As you fill in the flooring, some sections of new boards will wind up bound on both edges with a T&G joint, so that you cannot simply slide them into place. Here, you'll



have to cut off the bottom shoulder of the joint so it can slip past the tongue of the next joint (see Figure 2). Cut off the whole shoulder, but only as far along the groove as is needed to avoid the adjacent tongue. Then bevel the meeting edges to loosen the fit. You will need every fraction of an inch you can get as you gently tap the board into place with a hammer.

**Nail in place:** (See Figure 9.) Blind nailing within the T&G joint hides the nail from view on the finish surface. It also leaves about  $\frac{1}{4}$ " of wood for future sanding before you hit nails that can rip the paper off the machine.

For small repairs, I use a hammer and nail set. Predrilling helps prevent splitting off the tongue and is a must if you're not using hardened nails. On larger repairs, I rent a nailing machine that takes a cartridge of special slim hardened nails. The device holds the nails at the correct angle, and you whack it with an oversize hammer that drives the nail home in one blow.

Nail about every 12" along the corner of the tongue. To



avoid putting hammer prints in the edge of the flooring, use a nail set for the last couple of blows — either in the conventional manner (like a punch) or by laying it horizontally in the corner. Where you have cut off the shoulder, you'll have to fasten down the board another way. One possibility is to glue just the shoulder where it laps onto the other board's tongue; another option is face nailing straight down from the top of the board. If your flooring has tongue-&-groove joints on the ends and the length of the cutback is less than 12", there's no need for you to fasten it at all.

**Complete repair:** (See Figure 10.) Here the first repair phase of the whole project is complete. Note how the wavy grain of the new boards matches the grain of the existing boards to the right. From this point, I went on to do the oak-floor repair in the same way. I finished by installing a single wide board on a slight slope between the two sections in order to provide a transition between the different floor levels.

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injury, and so when its moisture content drops, the floorboard is left slightly smaller than its original width. After repeated cycles (perhaps over decades), compacting stops because boards have been shrunk and no longer expand enough to suffer compression again — but they do show cracks when the wood is dry.

Compression shrinkage in new strip hardwood floors is very often the product of poor installation practices (such as working in a damp, unheated building) that allow newly laid boards to pick up too much moisture. However, it also can occur in old floors for the same reason, i.e., when a building is left unoccupied for a long period of time or when humidity is very high or flooding

occurs. In some old floors, foreign matter such as dirt is the culprit. As dirt builds up in dry-weather cracks, it occupies the expansion space needed by swelling wood, and starts a compacting cycle that continues as the boards are compressed. Plank floors are prone to this because the normal heating-season shrinkage of the wide wood is greater per board than that of strip flooring.



Compression shrinkage takes place when flooring that just meets under normal conditions (#1) absorbs additional moisture. Expanding boards press against each other (#2), crushing or compressing the wood along board edges, which shows up as cracks (#3) when flooring returns to its earlier moisture level. illustrations: Jeff Wilkinson

Other crack causes can be more straightforward, but just as bothersome. Flooring that had a very high moisture content when it was first installed will shrink in a normal house environment and leave cracks that never close. In

racks between floorboards are a part of old-house living. Some "gappage" between boards occurs naturally, particularly during the heating season, because wood is a hygroscopic material that shrinks and swells with the moisture cycles inside the house. However, when these spaces reach the point of being unsightly, dirty, or dangerous (especially when they splinter off or trap high heels), one gets the urge to do something about them.

Unfortunately, there are no magic fixes for floor cracks. The obvious approach, wood putty or similar rigid filler, tends to be short-lived, because these materials loosen or dislodge when the flooring recedes and are crushed when it expands. What to do? Understanding why some floor cracks appear is a big help, as is knowing the pros and cons of solutions that have been tried in the past.

### Causes

Wood floors can develop cracks from a phenomenon called *compression sbrinkage*, or *compression set*. Here, floorboards swelling beyond their normal range are stopped short by neighboring boards, which are also expanding. As the moisture content of the wood rises, the edges of the flooring are put into compression, compacting the wood fiber. The wood never completely recovers from this

**BY GORDON BOCK**
The cracks in this tongue-andgroove floor are actually dryweather fissures in compacted dirt, which have opened to catch debris.

tion or the gluing effect of finishes can cause some floors to "panelize," so that the combined movement of several boards produces a single large crack.

#### Remedies

In most cases, the best "cure" for floor cracks is to leave them alone, especially if they do close acceptably during the humid months. In the heating season, it's not abnormal for narrow hardwood floors to exhibit cracks up to the thickness of a dime; plank floors might move 21/2 times this distance. For those tempted to take action, though, here's all of the crack-improving ideas we have heard about. Moisture: Sometimes, just raising the humidity level in the house - say, by run-

ning a humidifier — will improve floor cracks. Where excessive moisture is at fault, the use of a dehumidifier or vapor barrier (such as placing sheet plastic in an underfloor crawl space) may be called for.

the same way, keeping a house drier than its typical humid-

ity level may cause the flooring to "draw up," especially

near forced-air heating sources. Settling of the building

can open up cracks that never go away. Uneven construc-

**Paste fillers:** Floor cracks are not a new problem, and in decades past homemade fillers, such as sawdust mixed with varnish, shellac, or white glue as a binder, were popular. Another period concoction (with no recorded track record) is this 1909 formula from *American Carpenter and Builder Magazine:* "Make a pulp of paper, tissue paper being the best, though any paper will do, and add to it glue size and calcined magnesia until you have a mass like putty. Press this into the cracks with a putty knife, make the surface smooth and level with the floor. The filler may be colored as desired."

**Fibrous fillers:** Fibrous materials such as cloth strips soaked in linseed oil or glue often have been utilized to fill large cracks because they give and take with the move-

ment of the flooring. Hemp rope strands also have been tried. The strands are packed in the crack like ship caulking, using a large screwdriver or putty knife (or a caulking iron), and applied two layers deep if one does not fill the crack. The hemp can be stained to match the floor either before or after it is installed, and

Beside being good for nail boles and rough surfaces, this commercially made crack filler from 1907 was also "antiseptic and moth preventive." then varnished over if desired. The result is unobtrusive, and will stop high heels from entering the crack from above or drafts from below. Felt weatherstripping also has been used the same way, and although not as stainable, it's resilient and barely noticeable.

**Elastic caulks:** Caulks that cure to rubber have been used for years on boat decks, and may also work for large cracks in house floors. Silicone products are sold widely and adhere well to wood; marine caulks may have longer curing times (particularly if they are polysulfide-based), but are usually available in several wood tones. With any caulk, careful masking off of the crack is essential to ensure a clean job (especially for unvarnished floors). Caulk is usually gunned or squeezed in when cracks are at mid-cycle (say, in spring or fall). Very wide cracks should be first partially filled with some sort of pliable backing material. This saves caulk and limits its adhesion to the sides of the floorboards, producing a more flexible seal.

**Wood strips:** Wood fillets or cant strips would seem to be a logical choice for taking up large gaps between squareedged, wide-plank floor boards, but this approach is less than ideal. Over and above the pitfalls of trying to match the look of existing boards, adding more wood to the floor may only reintroduce compression problems by making the boards touch again in the wet season. However, in cases where the floor shows large cracks that border on

dangerous throughout the year, wood strips may be the only choice short of relaying the floor. Before installing the strips, cracks have to be cleaned completely of all dirt, wax, and debris. (Following a screwdriver, putty knife, or coathanger with a vacuum cleaner is a fairly efficient method.) Wood is then cut and fitted to the existing flooring as closely as possible, and either glued and toenailed with brads to one board or (when large enough) facenailed to the joists or subfloor below.

**Relaying:** Relaying a floor is a drastic option and, gen-

erally speaking, a last resort. Besides being a







plank floor because the cracks

were a menace to high heels.

Widening the cracks to high-

light the strips was preferred

over attempting a subtle repair.

by James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell

hat a miracle the mail-order catalog must have seemed to small-town Americans at the end of the 19th century! There, right at their fingertips, were all the riches of the great urban emporia, from clothing and household goods to jewelry and farm equipment. And finally — it was bound to happen — mail-order houses. Pre-cut (or, in the marketing lingo of the times, "ready-cut") houses flourished from about 1900 until 1940. These were ready-to-build houses in kit form — complete to the last windowpane and can of paint — that were shipped by rail and truck to their new addresses.

#### "The Value of Your Dollar"

Mail-order houses were a giant step beyond the house plans and house parts that had been available since the middle of the 19th century from plan companies such as Palliser and Palliser (see "Who They Were," p. 18), George Barber, and Robert W. Shoppell. After the Civil War, there was intensified interest in distributing prefabricated sectional farm buildings, such as small barns and sheds, to settlement areas. And Barber was said to supply partially fabricated houses from his lumberyard in the late 1880s. Generally, however, when it came to erecting the dream house, local builders adapted standard plans to fit their own ideas of practicality and quality. The drawbacks were that labor costs were hard to estimate, and miscalculations could be fatal to the homeowner's purse.

Catalog Homes"

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USES

The pre-cut housing industry had a novel solution: Cut the lumber in advance and cut out the middlemen. This way, there were no private architects, no lumberyards, no carpenters to deal with — and no unhappy surprises when the bills came in. "Hang Your Saw Upon a Nail All Day!"



Pacific Ready-Cut Homes, Inc. (1922)

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1990

Top: The 'Westly'' (1913-29) was one of Sears's most popular models. This one is in Arlington, Virginia. Bottom: Even a substantial-looking Tudor bome could be shipped. This one was called 'The Stratford,'' offered by Lewis Homes.

advertised one company, stressing the savings to be gained by doing away with on-site carpentry and wasteful, piecemeal cutting of lumber.

#### "Built in a Day"

The pre-cut house also emphasized fast construction and comfort. Pre-cut houses were erected on the building site from lumber that had been cut to size and carefully fitted at the catalog company's mills. Everything from nails to paint, shingles, and mantelpieces (except, generally, those of masonry) was shipped from the catalog company's mills and storehouses. All the parts were numbered, and detailed instructions accompanied each order. In areas that were close enough to a supplier's offices, it was even possible to import a construction manager, but homeowners were encouraged to do the construction themselves, alone or with a local builder, carefully (ever so carefully!) following directions and blueprints. And, when the house was finished, some companies, like Sears and Montgomery Ward, stood ready to provide the appliances and furniture, even the china and linens, needed to make the pre-cut house totally livable. It was an irresistible idea for an expanding, house-hungry population in economic boom times.







The pre-cut movement appealed particularly to the firsttime, small-house buyer. Where that buyer wanted to build his dream house was, of course, on his own bit of land, no matter how tiny. His plot of paradise was usually situated far from the crush of the city, where it was safe and healthful for his growing family, but still convenient to his work.

Like the catalog industry itself, selling houses by mail was made possible by the need of this homeowner and the development of mass-production methods, mass advertising, and vastly improved transportation systems. Trains and trucks hauled the materials needed to build homes anywhere in the United States. Materials were reliably scheduled to arrive in time to meet the various de-

"Ready-cut" meant exactly that: Every stud, plate, brick, and sheathing board was pre-cut and numbered.

among the many pre-cut homes companies in the east were Bennett Homes and Lumber Co. (North Tonawanda, New York) and Baker Lumber Co. (Worcester, Massachusetts).

In the deep South, the A.C. Tuxbury Co. (Charleston,

South Carolina) contributed its economy-line Quickbilt Bungalow to the Florida land boom of the early '20s.

mands of every phase of home construction.

As the 1919 Aladdin Homes catalog trumpeted, the "wonderful simplicity" of the scheme was immediately recognized. It was especially fruitful in the Midwest, the cradle of American mail-order merchandising as well as a prime source of lumber. Sears, Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward, both based in Chicago, and Aladdin Home Company in Bay City, Michigan, were the most active precut house suppliers on a national level, but there were scores of other smaller, regional or local companies all over the country. Bay City, which had a previous history of prefabricated boat construction, contributed at least two other names to the list — Lewis Manufacturing Company (Liberty Homes) and Sterling Homes.

Although Sears eventually became the biggest of the precut house suppliers, boasting that

### "Satisfaction or Your Money Back!"

Homeowner response to the well-built little houses was enthusiastic. And no wonder: The savings in building costs seems to have been substantial, and the building materials came with ironclad guarantees of quality. Sears claimed a savings in labor costs of \$500 on a \$1,650 house, and guaranteed its lumber as knot-free. Aladdin offered "a dollar a knot" for any flaws that could be found in its building lumber.

The federal and state governments also recognized the value of the fast, economical, and comfortable dwellings offered by the pre-cut companies. Sears displayed its prize-winning "Avondale" model at the 1911 Illinois State Fair, and Aladdin's model cottage was awarded a medal at the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915.

"Built by the Golden Rule" was the motto of the Aladdin Homes Co. (which only recently went out of business).

it had sold 100,000 houses (from 447 designs) by 1939, it was neither the first nor, for many years, the most popular in the field. After testing the idea in its regular merchandise catalog, Sears issued its first pre-cut house catalog in 1907 or 1908, lagging two or three years behind Aladdin Home Company, which began catalog sales in 1905. Montgomery Ward's WardWay outsold Sears until the 1920s. Gordon-Van Tine, of Davenport, Iowa, specialized in farm houses



and outbuildings, as did the early Montgomery Ward catalogs. In the southwest, Pacific Homes in Los Angeles seized a healthy portion of the bungalow market, shared with Ernest Hodgson and Frank Hodgson's Practical Bungalows. Pacific Homes claimed sales of 19,000 by 1923. Prominent Although the catalogs sold a number of substantial, solidly middle-class homes (Sears' Magnolia, a Southern-style "mansion," comes to mind), it was their impact on working-class housing that was most pronounced. Catalog houses — whether pre-cut, prefab, or merely pre-planned

laddin Homes Catalog No.

33 (1922

— helped to bring unprecedented luxuries to modest houses in newly developing areas: indoor bathrooms; efficient kitchens with modern gas or electric stoves, continuous countertops, built-in cabinets, and shiny linoleum floors; and a feeling of roominess, all in houses that usually contained far less than a thousand square feet of floor space.

#### "Pick Out Your Plan"

This wasn't avant-garde architecture, although much of it was highly competent. Pre-cut houses, like ready-made house plans, were adapted from the most familiar - the most "homey" - of the academic architectural trends of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Some of the most popular models remained available (and sought after) for many years. There were a few basic house types - bungalows, cottages, Foursquares, and Homestead houses - built in a limited range of broadly interpreted decorative styles: Colonial Revival (mostly English in feeling, but often Dutch); Craftsman (sometimes with a Prairie touch); and a few historical European styles, such as English Tudor cottages or French farmhouses or Spanish missions. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Queen Anne homesteads (with gable roofs) and Foursquare houses (with hipped roofs) predominated. The Foursquare and the bungalow, with Craftsman or Colonial Revival details, were popular in the 1910s, and the Colonial Revival cottage, far and away the most enduring and the best loved of middle-class American houses, eventually triumphed.

As much as the pre-cut house pleased the American public, it enraged professional architects (except, presumably, those who worked for the catalog companies) — not to mention local lumberyard and hardware-store owners, who stood to lose with every pre-cut shipment that came to their town. The architects' complaint that public taste would be subverted by "tasteless" little houses was hardly justified. Mail-order houses may have seemed hopelessly tacky to the architectural community, but they were surely the best designed and most comfortable housing that had ever been offered to the working man — who wasn't likely to hire an architect in any case. These houses were designed for internal

Top: A Sears "Modern Colonial" in Ann Arbor, Michigan (1925). Middle & Bottom: Two Aladdin Homes in Bay City, Michigan: a Foursquare named "The Rochester" and the home of William Sovereign, president of Aladdin, built as a spec model.





function. There were no high-falutin' academic notions of symmetry (or non-symmetry, for that matter); windows and doors were placed where windows and doors were needed to provide light and easy movement between rooms; and stock sizes and standard designs were used for cabinets and woodwork. Although there were many two-storey versions, the one-storey bungalow or cottage acquired new



popularity for convenience and modernity. Often a matching garage was added at the rear of the lot to accommodate the increasingly important family automobile.

Sears suggested that its designs could be used for "One House or a Hundred," while Aladdin claimed they could take on "A Complete Home or a Complete City." And, sure enough, whole towns of these houses sprang up, ordered

by speculative builders, subdivision developers, and large-scale employers. Sears supplied Indiana Standard Oil Company with 150 pre-cut homes for coalminers, which were erected in the Standard Addition of Carlinville, Illinois. (All but a few of them are still around.) Aladdin Home's 1919 catalog boasted that, "whole streets and whole subdivisions" of Aladdin houses, including virtually every house shown in the catalog, could be seen in Bay City, Michigan, the catalog company's hometown. Readers were invited to tour the company's mills and inspect nearby Aladdin homes.

#### "This May Be Your Home"

Enormous numbers of pre-cut houses still stand. The county of Arlington, Virginia, for instance, thinks it may have identified as many as 800 within its borders. Although a good number have been considerably altered and enlarged over the years (they were, after all, generally very small houses), they are mostly in great shape, thanks to a good start. Today, there is a brisk demand for these sturdy little houses, and some real-estate agents have even taken to advertising their mail-order provenance. Aside from an ever-increasing nostalgic interest and a growing respect for their historic value in the development of early-20th-century communities (a few Sears houses have even been listed in the National Register of Historic

Top: Double-clipped gables identify this Pasadena home as a Pacific Ready-Cut. Bottom: This Sears "Hamilton" (1925-29) in Cheverly, Maryland, is a small hipped-roof cottage with jerkin-bead dormers. Places), they offer a level of quality in construction methods and materials that would be hard to duplicate. Now that urban growth has made their modest suburban settings less remote and even more desirable, they sometimes command prices that would stun the early owners. (A recently remodeled Sears house that cost a few thousand dollars when it was built — in what is now a

pricey suburb of Washington, D.C. — hit the market at \$800,000 last year.)

Unlike most of the pre-cut catalogs, which required substantial down payments upon placing the order and full payment before shipment, Sears provided mortgage financing and, for a time during the Depression, even made small cash loans to get construction going. A popular idea while it lasted, the mortgage program ran into trouble as the Depression dragged on, with many foreclosures and a sagging resale market. In 1938, Sears left the mortgage business briefly, then re-entered just as briefly, and, in 1940, finally closed its Modern Homes division.

So how can you tell whether yours is a Sears (or an Aladdin, WardWay, Liberty, or Pacific) home? Tracing provenance is not always easy, given the number of similar designs sold. What looks like an Aladdin house might well have been supplied by Sears, or vice versa. Furthermore, buyers were encouraged to make minor changes in their plans, particularly to reverse floorplans and to add porches and extra rooms. However, many of these relatively recent houses are still in the hands of the original owners or their

families, so it's sometimes possible to find copies of plans, specifications, or purchase or mortgage papers, or at least

to locate neighbors who remember when and how their neighborhood was built. Some building parts are marked with the company name and may turn up in the course of restoration. Building permits and utility-company records (particularly those relating to water and sewer installations) may also provide evidence. Who knows? You may be as lucky as Raymond Bellamy, whose father built a Sears house in Cheverly, Maryland, in 1925. Following a paper trail through family and community records, Mr. Bellamy located mortgage agreements, working plans, correspondence, and developer's promotional literature that documented not only his own house, but also a large portion of his early-20th-century neighborhood.



Key: The pre-cut, or ready-cut, house came in almost any style, from Queen Anne to Cape Cod. Here, a simple Cape is given an English cottage or Norman look by adding a cross gable with a long, sloping roof line. By 1923, *Pacific Ready-Cut Homes* had sold 19,000 homes in the Pacific Southwest.

Source: 125 Pacific Homes — Ready-Cut — California's Choicest Designs, Los Angeles, Calif., 1923.



illustrations by Jeff Faria

#### by Bill Houghton

e all know the questions. "Still working on this living room?" "Doesn't it get cold taking a bath with the walls open?" "How does your mail get delivered with the porch steps off?" But the question we ask ourselves may be worse: Why does it always take so much longer than we expect to finish our old-house projects?

OHJ has pioneered the exploration of this subject, and regular readers will be familiar with its discussion of the Mushroom Factor, the universal force that causes any oldhouse project to expand endlessly until the limits of time and budget are exceeded. But that alone isn't enough to explain our experiences. One must take into account the Everything Breaks Simultaneously ("EBS") Rule.

The EBS Rule has two parts: 1) As soon as any major project has reached the point of no return, the rest of your

household will begin developing ailments that require immediate, time-consuming attention, and 2) the number and intensity of crises will increase in direct proportion to the degree of inconvenience the project causes you and your family.

Let me offer a personal example. We moved into our 1890s California Queen Anne 15 years ago, and for a long time put up with the existing 110-volt, 20-amp electrical service — the equivalent of one circuit. We tried to enjoy the television picture bobbing in time to the washing-machine cycle (at least we knew the

washer was running), and we convinced ourselves that not being able to si-

multaneously operate the toaster and iron was part of old-house life. Even after a severe winter storm snapped off the utility-company wires from the porcelain

tube that carried them into our house, we performed emergency surgery but put off the problem. Finally, though, it was time to accept that our house needed rewiring.

The first few months went uneventfully, if slowly, as I installed a main service panel, which involved cutting a hole in the siding at the side of the house. I also created an opening in the roof in order to reroute those utility-company wires, which previously had entered our Queen Anne at a gable dormer. Still all went well. It was in January, though, after disconnecting the outlet in the bathroom from which my wife Arlene ran her hair dryer, and cutting

holes in the walls all over the house to start running circuits (and incidentally letting in the cold wind), that the EBS Rule kicked in. Since then, the following events have occurred, among dozens of smaller crises:

• The roof in one of the bedrooms leaked terribly (and mysteriously, as leaks are wont to do).

• The only kitchen outlet stopped working because a mouse had crawled into the outlet box and electrocuted itself. (Don't worry, the little critter had dried up by the time we discovered what was wrong.)

• A window was shattered by a BB gun (owner unknown), which needed to be immediately replaced.

• The bathroom sink stopped up for the second time in 14 years, which

turned out to be a whole day's project, involving a trip to the roof to clear the vent pipe as well as disassembling the trap. • Our ancient central heater failed on us mid-winter, and had to be pulled apart, puzzled over, and then repaired.

• The kitchen-sink trap cracked when I touched it (even brass, I discovered, corrodes) and water spilled everywhere.

But it wasn't just mechanical objects that went bad. Last winter was one of our worst ever for flu-'n-things, so a lot of weekends went by when no work got done either because I was sick or because one of us was asleep and Not to be Disturbed. During this time, it also seemed that my sons had more than their share of teenage crises. Even the animals got into the act. Pushkin, the cat who sleeps (with great reluctance) in the back bathroom, decided to try escaping through the hole left by the outlet, tearing up the sheetrock in the process, which required that we

The old main service (top) was a collection of open fuse blocks. Our bathroom (above): colder than it looks.

stop and patch it (as well as make a cover to stop him). *Then* he learned how to open the back door. This started me on a series of fixes, including replacing the hinges, repairing the latch, and adjusting the latchplate. (He still gets out when we don't lock the door.) And we spent one weekend trying to corner belligerent baby possums with mason jars — they'd crawled into our ground-floor bedrooms — in order to set them free.

The latest incident, which happened as I write this the following summer, is that the vent pipe on the truck's fuel tank has plugged up. It's one of those complicated, post-

os by Bill Houghton

emissions-control trucks, so I'm approaching the project with foreboding, knowing that it's going to be an all-weekend affair.

What I'm really dreading, though, is the point in the electrical project, approaching at about the same rate as the darkness of winter, when we start rewiring the lighting circuits and have to live with floor and pin-up lamps everywhere, even in the kitchen. Please don't let the car's motor blow up. How about just the barn falling down? But of course we don't get to choose what goes wrong.

You will, without doubt, be able to identify occurrences

of the EBS Rule in your own life. But ( why does it exist? OHJ readers, knowledgeable about mechanical systems, will have noticed that there is no apparent connection between the

electrical system of our house and these other devices and systems that broke all at once. It seems that there must be some mysterious interdependence among them all. What is this connection? Let me offer some possible explanations:

• The Ecological Theory: One of the basic principles of ecology is that the disturbance of one element of an ecological sys-

tem will affect the rest of the system. Thus, if you reduce the wolves, the deer pop-

ulation will increase. Deer will over-graze their range, causing the bare soil to erode, leading to starvation, river silting, etc. According to this theory, dis-

turbances of a major element in the ecosystem of an old house will affect other parts of the system. It seems mysterious to us only because we, poor innocents, don't understand how the parts of the house are related.

• The Jealousy Theory: When guests look askance at your old house in its evolutionary state — nothing like those prettified house-magazine photos — do you respond by describing the personality of your house? Sure you do. We all know, whether we publicly admit it or not, that an old house isn't just an inanimate collection of materials, a place to hide from the rain. A house has a personality. And if it does, why not a heater? the plumbing? your car? So

maybe those components get jealous of the time and attention that you lavish on your restoration: the weekends, evenings, and spare minutes at work spent telephoning to find house parts, for instance. According to the Jealousy Theory, the breakdowns are a cry for attention from other parts of your house, which feel neglected because you're passionately involved with one particular project. It explains why, when you've returned to normal (spreading your attention equally over, say, five or six different areas of the house per weekend), the breakdowns and disasters stop.

• The Hubris Theory: Hubris is a Greek word meaning "overweening pride." Old-house owners all hope to someday finish their houses. The gods, in this theory, view this

hope as hubris, and punish the old-house owners by showing the futility of trying to finish anything.

Regardless of why the EBS Rule exists, we must somehow cope with it. What are the ways to do this?

• Don't Do Anything: Oh, and since you'll have all that free time, why not lose a little weight by not eating for the next six months or so? We all know this won't work ... we wouldn't own old houses in the first place if we weren't hooked on our "little fix-ups."

• Don't Take on Big Projects Until Everything's in Good Shape: If you had the money to have everything working, would you have read

this far into the article? Would you even

be read-

ing this magazine? Besides, this method is a delusion. The very nature of the EBS Rule is that breakdowns WILL occur when you've reached maximum mess.

A few minutes of actual work (top) while things are not breaking. Our Queen Anne (above) has been modified over the years in the local, West County tradition.

• Allow Plenty of Time for Large Projects: Sometimes I allow so much time, I hesitate even to start — and it still takes longer. Once the EBS Rule and the Mushroom Factor are at work, schedules make good light fiction.

• Accept It: You knew this would be the answer all along, didn't you? When asked "Don't you get tired of living with this mess?," just respond with one of the following statements (depending on which of the above theories you prefer):

"This is just part of keeping the ecosystem stable." "I feel it's very important that the house be happy." "It keeps me humble."





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### **OLD-HOUSE MECHANIC**

For most wood-flooring projects, good-quality, allaround carpentry tools get the bulk of the work done, but there are specialized floor tools worth knowing about.

Chief among them these days are nailing machines designed to make nailing tongue-and-groove floors faster and easier. These tools look something like mammoth staple guns and are hand-operated (or, in some cases, hand- and pneumatically-operated) by driving a ram with blows from a heavy hammer. Nailing machines are very practical for doing production work (from large repairs on up) because they 1) keep

flooring joints snug while nailing, 2) drive nails accurately through difficult woods, and 3) allow the installer to stand while working. Nailing machines are expensive to buy for oneshot use (over \$200), but they usually can be rented on a daily basis. There are several nailing-machine designs on the market (each requiring its own special nails), and some also can be used to put up wall panelling.

Less sophisticated floor tools have been around for years. Flooring saws are crosscut saws with crescentshaped blades adapted for making blind cuts in flooring. They are very hard to come by in recent years (having been outmoded by power



Floor chisel

# FLOOR TOOLS



ing machines are very practical for doing production work (from large repairs on the lever pushes floorboards up tight.

tools), but are occasionally available at flea markets or through tool collectors. Floor chisels, however, are still made by some forged-tool manufacturers, and can be worth keeping around for many types of work. These are large tools (10" to 12" long), similar to a brickmason's chisel, which are used more for prying and lifting floorboards than for actually cutting wood. Incidentally, the heavy, rubber-faced hammers used to drive nailing machines are useful floor tools: They make great "persuaders" for coaxing floorboards into place without damaging the wood.

Unless there are special conditions, tongue-and-groove floors especially strip hardwoods — should be laid and nailed up tight when they are installed, both for looks and integrity (loose-fitting tongues are one of many floor-squeak sources). This usually is not difficult when working with good materials in the field of a floor. However, when crooked floorboards turn up, or work space is cramped (say, when starting a floor), it becomes much

#### by Gordon Bock

harder to drive the boards up tight and nail them at the same time. Clamping floorboards together is the way out of this dilemma, and in the "age of invention" (which happened to coincide with T&G flooring's first swell of popularity in the late 1800s), there was no lack of patented gizmos to help with this task.

One way to accomplish this same end today is with a clever device cooked up by the folks at the Oak Flooring Institute (an industry association in Memphis, Tennessee). The tool is a lever made on the job from  $2 \times 4$  scraps, a hinge, and a soda-can opener (see photos). Dimensions are all to

Photos: Gordon Bock

taste, as is the type of hinge employed. In use, the can opener is dug into the subfloor at a position that leaves the lever somewhere short of being completely flat. Then, straightening out the lever as much as possible with either a foot or knee will squeeze the flooring together, leaving hands free to nail. Try it — it works!



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### GOOD BOOKS



#### **Preserving Porches**

If you've ever needed to look, you know there's precious little in print on the subject of period porches. Finally, there's an entire book. Frequent *OHJ* contributor Renee Kahn and her associate Ellen Meagher have put together an informative guide to identifying and maintaining American porches built in the century from 1830 to 1920. Originally published as a neighborhood preservation handbook, the current edition is expanded and enhanced with more information and an enlightening variety of historic photos and drawings.

As the title promises, this book offers advice for preserving porches, not an armchair tour of them. In the first half, Kahn analyzes each porch style and notes their characteristic elements and designs - valuable data when one is faced with the "missing pieces" syndrome. In the second half. Meagher looks at the common restoration issues (historical research, maintenance and repair, water problems, paint colors, and the like), and provides general insights about how to proceed in each of these areas. "Well-maintained porches," the authors observe early on, "gave a clear signal of neighborhood well-being." This book is a useful tool toward that end. Available for 18.95 ppd. from Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 115 West 18th St., Dept. OHJ, New York, NY 10011; (212) 886-9200.

- Gordon Bock

#### Worth Mentioning:

Modern Practical Stairbuilding & Handrailing

This valuable book is a reprint of George Ellis's study, originally published in 1932. \$22.95 ppd. from Linden Publishing, 3845 N. Blackstone, Dept. OHJ, Fresno, CA 93726; (800) 345-4447.

 Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800-1850
 Great details and drawings of early California houses circa 1800 to 1850. \$22.50 plus UPS shipping costs from Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 268 Dogwood Lane, Dept. OHJ, Stamford, CT 06903; (203) 322-1460.

■ Victorian Brick and Terra-Cotta Architecture in Full Color 160 plates reprinted from a rare portfolio by 19th-century French architect Pierre Chabat. \$24.95 ppd. from Dover Publications, Inc., 31 East 2nd St., Dept. OHJ, Mineola, NY 11501; (516) 294-7000.

■ Landmark Yellow Pages A complete directory of preservation information. \$19.45 ppd. from The Preservation Press Bookstore, 1600 H St., NW, Dept. OHJ, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 673-4200.

Fanlights: A Visual History Opening this small book was an unexpected pleasure. More than a picture-perfect coffee-table book, not a weighty text, *Fanlights* is a readable, informative, and beautifully illustrated study of a single architectural element that developed and flourished for a mere 50 years.

Authors Alexander Stuart Gray and John Sambrook begin their history of the fanlight, or overdoor, with its roots in Palladian windows. Installed to provide light for narrow entrance halls, this practical window became inseparable from Georgian architecture of the 18th century. Over 200 fanlights are discussed, chiefly British, with the largest concentration being in London. Fanlights of Edinburgh, Bath, and Dublin also are included, as well as those of Boston and Salem, Massachusetts.

One of the book's highlights is an 11-page chapter entitled "Construction and Repair of Fanlights." Also of interest is the background information on 18th-century glassmaking. Available for \$25.95 ppd., from the American Institute of Architects Press, P.O. Box 1886, 9 Jay Gould Court, Dept. OHJ, Waldorf, MD 20604; (800) 242-4140.

Jeff Wilkinson



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Noteworthy Newletters

A variety of newletters focusing on restoration and preservation come across our desks at *OHJ*. These special-interest publications complement the information we provide. Here are a few worth recommending: •*Craftsman Homeowner Club Newsletter* aims to promote the lifestyle of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The newsletter reprints excerpts from original Arts and Crafts literature, and features articles on interiors, the decorative doorknob buffs, with articles about the best ways to display your doorknob collection and a section on identifying unusual knobs. Published six times per year, an annual subscription costs \$20 and brings you membership in the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America. The Doorknob Collector, P.O. Box 126, Dept. OHJ, Eola, IL 60519-0126; (708) 357-2381.

•*Light Revival*'s articles review various types of antique lighting, and offers advice on how to identify genuine pieces and their availablity. The yearly price guide for early-20th-century lighting is a great asset for collectors. The newsletter is published quarterly for \$12 per year. Light Revival, c/o Tom Barnard, 35 W. Elm Ave., Dept. OHJ, Quincy, MA 02170; (617) 773-3255. •*Preservation Action Alert* is published by a non-profit organization committed to lobbying for preserva-

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the newsletter, published four to six times per year. An annual individual membership costs \$35. Preservation Action Alert, 1350 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 401, Dept. OHJ, Washington, DC 20030; (202) 659-0915. •PSG Restoration Report contains useful information for the owners of stained-glass windows. The articles, presented in layman's terms, examine the latest technical solutions for restoring damaged stained glass in private, public, and religious buildings. Published quarterly, a subscription is \$15 per year. PSG Restoration Report, Tonetta Lake Rd., P.O. Box 69, Dept. OHJ, Brewster, NY 10509; (800) 421-8142.

•Vernacular Architecture Newsletter is dedicated to studying all aspects of vernacular architecture and landscape. The quarterly newsletter contains current news in the field of vernacular architecture, book re-

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arts, and landscaping. It is published

quarterly for \$25 per year. The Craftsman Homeowner Club Newsletter, 31 South Grove Street, Dept. OHJ, East Aurora, NY 14052; (716) 655-0562.

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OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL



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

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

For the houses shown in this issue, blueprints include:

- Foundation plan for basement or crawlspace. (Crawlspace plans can easily be adapted for full basements by your builder.)
- Detailed floor plans showing all dimensions for framing, plus detailed layout and location of electrical and plumbing components.
- Interior elevations are included in some plans, showing interior views of kitchen, bath, fireplace, built-ins, and cabinet designs.
- A window and door schedule.
- Building cross sections: cornice, fireplace, and cabinet sections when needed to help your builder understand major interior details.

5

- Framing diagrams that show layouts of framing pieces and their locations for roof, first and second floors.
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Why order multiple sets? If you're serious about building, you'll need a set each for the general contractor, mortgage lender, electrician, plumber, heating/ventilating contractor, building permit department, other township use or interior designer, and one for yourself. Ordering the 8-set plan saves money and additional shipping charges.

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

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ou don't have to be frustrated in your search for better quality and authenticity. Since 1973, we've been collecting information on who makes the right stuff for your old house. And everything we know is in one book: The OHJ Catalog. It lists close to 1500 companies nationwide which will sell to you by mail-order or through distributors.

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The Old-House Journal

# Good Books -To Give or

to Get

VICTORIAN

oger Moss and Gail Winkler show us how the Victorians decorated their homes. Floors and floor coverings, ceilings, woodwork, window treatments, and wallpaper receive equal treatment. Many color illustrations. 144 pages. Hardbound. \$37.50.



STYLE TRADITIONS — Stephen Calloway and Stephen Jones. All the essential style elements for faithfully restoring a period look to your old house, whether it's Arts & Crafts, Art Deco, Georgian, or early Victorian. This book is a lavishly illustrated sourcebook of interior-design ideas. 224 pages. Hardbound. \$38.95.



VICTORIAN EXTERIOR DEC-ORATION — Roger Moss and Gail Caskey Winkler. The editors of OHJ are always being asked, "What color should I paint my house?" If your house was built in the latter half of the 19th century, this book is the first place to look. Generously illustrated with over 120 plates. 117 pages. Hardbound. \$37.50.





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

Whether you want to replace ten feet of missing cornice, or replaster an entire wall, this guide shows you how. (Casting in plaster is not covered.) 543 pages. Softbound. \$24.95. OLD-HOUSE WOODWORK RESTORATION — Ed Johnson. Expert do-it-yourself guidelines for restoring doors, windows, walls, stairs, and decorative trim to their original beauty. Included are tips for stripping specific finishes, and repairing or replacing rotting parts. Well illustrated. 200 pages. Softbound. \$18.95.



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ear OHJ," the letter began, "I followed up on an offer of OHJ back issues, which was listed in your Emporium sec-

tion — but alas, they'd already been sold. Do you know of anyone else who might have some? Or could you sell me any old issues you have lying around?"

We can do better than that! Unlike other 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.

This year we're offering a full set of 1980s Yearbooks — ten volumes that include every article, every source, every tip published in OHJ from 1980 through 1989 — for \$109. That's \$81 off the cost of the Yearbooks purchased separately, and it includes a free Cumulative Index.

And now you can keep your Yearbooks Set readily available for reference with our custom-designed slipcases. Sized to hold the 10volume 1980s Yearbook Set, plus the Index, our burgundy slipcases imprinted in gold are also V-notched for easy access. They may be ordered separately for \$18.95, or at a discount with the Yearbooks Set.

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e can't count the number of times we've been asked which method is *really* best for removing paint. Well, we've seen "miracle" paint removers come and go. We've watched chemical paint strippers almost triple in price in the past 15 years. We've tried just about every heat tool on the market. In our opinion, the Heavy-Duty HG-501 Heat Gun and the Warner Heat

Plate are the best tools for the job.

Strip

Heat is a fast method because all the paint bubbles and lifts as you go along. There's no waiting for chemicals to soak in, no multiple recoatings, and far less clean-up. And because these tools are long-lasting products, their initial expense is more than made up in savings on the \$18- to \$22-per-gallon stripper you're no longer buying in quantity.

The Heat Gun is the most efficient paint-removal tool for painted porch parts, mouldings, or other ornamental woodwork, but it's not recommended for use on hollow partitions or for stripping entire exteriors.

That's where the Heat Plate comes in handy. It's the most easy-to-use tool for stripping paint from broad, flat surfaces: doors, panelling, baseboards, and exterior wooden clapboards. And it's safer for use on hollow partitions and exterior cornices because there's no blown hot air that could ignite hidden dust. (Neither heat tool is recommended for removing varnish.)

Both the Heat Gun and the Heat Plate come with complete operating and safety instructions, and are backed by the OHJ Guarantee: If your unit should malfunction within two months of purchase, we'll replace it.

To purchase either or both heat tools, use the envelope order-form. The HG-501 Heat Gun costs \$77.95 ppd.; the Heat Plate, \$47.95 ppd.

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### **RESTORATION SERVICES**

Architectural Services - Architectural and preservation problem-solving for old buildings and their owners: Architectural services include restoration, conservation, replication and additions, building evaluation, analysis, technical assistance and troubleshooting. Research and consultation are also available. Award winning specialists in residences, churches, and history museums. The Office of Allen Charles Hill, AIA, Historic Preservation & Architecture, 25 Englewood Road, Winchester, MA 01890. (617) 729-0748.

Stone Work & Repair --- Morning Star Stone Masons have stone hammer will travel - all types of restoration stone work, matching existing fabric exactly is our specialty! Architectural and archaeological information available. Provide consultation and work. Twenty years serving the historic Philadelphia area. Phone for information and brochure: (800) 469-0182. Mr. Ken Fisher, Prop., Morning Star Stone Masons, RD 1 Seminary Hall, Spring City, PA 19475.

Cast & Wrought Iron Services -This company specializes in the restoration of large scale cast and wrought iron projects for institutional and commercial properties. They also provide troubleshooting and consultation services. For more information, contact: Architectural Iron Company Inc., Box 126. Schocopee Road, Milford PA 18337. (717) 296-5548, FAX: (717) 296-IRON. Catalog and brochure available, \$4.00.

Floor Refinishing - This company will restore your wood floors to their original lustre. All types of old and new wood can be sanded and refinished. Serving the North Shore of Massachusetts. Vincent P. Orlando, Fernald St., Gloucester, MA 01930. Free estimate: (508) 281-0491.

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cialties include custom slate, tile and copper roofing. Contact the Midland Engineering Company Inc., 52369 U.S. 33 North, South Bend, IN 46624. (219) 272-0200.

Woodworking Services - DHM Cabinetmakers Inc., is a full service, made-to-order woodworking company. Our products range from fine furniture to custom millwork such as moulding, T&G flooring, libraries, etc. All made in native or exotic woods to the individuals specifications. Color furniture catalog - \$4.00. For further information contact: DHM Cabinetmakers, Route 4 Box 173, Floyd, VA 24091. (703) 745-3825.

Building Inspection — Pope Associates Inc., specializes in mechanical and structural inspection of pre-1940 buildings in eastern Massachusetts. All inspections reflect sensitivity to architectural style & historic construction techniques and are performed in accordance with the Standards of the American Society of Home Inspectors. Pope Associates, Inc., Gloucester, MA 01930. (508) 281-2624.

Chimney Restoration — Chimney Savers, recently featured on "This Old House," restores and then relines your chimney with Solid/Flue pumped masonry chimney lining. They also offer and install the complete line of ornate Fourth Bay Victorian fireplaces to ensure an accurate and complete restoration of your chimney. Contact: Chimney Savers, 9-14 Ilene Court, Belle Mead, NJ 08502. (201) 359-7798.

This special classified section is available to designers, consultants, contractors and craftspeople offering hard-to-find restoration services for the old-house owner. Rates are \$200 for the first 40 words, \$4.00 for each additional word. Logos, when supplied, will be printed on a space-available basis. Deadline for inclusion in Restoration Services is the 1st of the month, two months prior to publication. For example, January 1st for the March/April issue. Sorry, we cannot accept ads over the phone. All submissions must be in writing and accompanied by a check.

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OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

### THE EMPORIUM

#### WANTED

OLD HOUSE IN PRINCETON, NJ — We are sadly leaving our Queen Anne house and relocating to Princeton because of a job move. Please help us find a Victorian era or older home needing work in a quiet location. Reasonably priced please. Call (914) 332-6638.

CRAFTSMAN FURNITURE & LIGHTING — Just bought 1,400 sq. ft., 2-storey home in West Hollywood CA and am restoring. Dianna, PO Box 951, Beverly Hills CA 90210, (213) 859-6929.

HOME TO RESTORE — Phelps-Seneca Falls, NY area. Want to restore a home with large yard or acreage. Kevin or Ann Calkins (315) 568-9802.

PRE-1900S HOUSE — In Virginia or North Carolina. Must be in a rural area or small town. Handyman's special would be great. Leslie Duren, 66 Otis St., Sunbury OH 43074, (614) 965-4012.

CABINET HINGES, TILE & SCONCE — Depression-era cabinet hinges. 3/8" offset with stain step design in corners and 2 vertical parallel grooves connecting corners 2-1/2" high. 3" x 6" glazed white antique bathroom tile, and Deco porcelain sconce. Mike McMillian, 912 S. Chestnut St., Henderson NC 27536, (919) 430-1050.

CATALINA ISLAND POTTERY TILE — Made between 1927-37 on Catalina Isl. Hundreds of shapes with bright colors, geometric designs, birds, sea life, missions, etc. For tables or wall plaques. Pottery may have wrought iron holders. Collector; will pay top prices. Call Walter collect at (213) 434-7253.

LARGE HOUSE — Between Columbus, MS and Dallas, TX. For retired couple with lots of relatives and grand children. Must have working plumbing and electricity. No leaks please. 10 rooms or more would be perfect. Call Dessie Parks, (618) 243-5256.

GAS STOVE KNOBS — For 1940s Robert Shaw Detroit Jewel, model CP. 4 knobs are needed. Existing knobs have R3550 imprinted on back. Any other parts? Contact Kathryn Williams, 41 Milton Ave., Suite 203, Alpharetta GA 30201, (404) 475-5482.

ARCHITECTURE-ENGINEERING STUDENT — Help is needed to move a 1904 carpenter gothic in Los Angeles area to new lot. Maybe you need a project for graduate work. Call Ellen or Greg at (213) 281-7722.

GARAGE PLANS — Plans for 2- to 4-car garage with guest quarters on 2nd storey. Must be consistent with 1904 carpenter Gothic house located in Los Angeles. Must meet stringent neighborhood association guidelines for preservation neighborhood. Call Ellen or Greg at (213) 281-7722.

TRANSOM WINDOW PARTS — Especially opening/closing rods. Please contact Lloyd Longenecker, 405 S. Spruce St., Annville PA 17003, (717) 867-1365.

MECHANICAL DOORBELL MECHANISM — Original or reproduction. Wall mounted pull knob style (the kind used in Laurel and Hardy gags) mechanical doorbell mechanism. Working or restorable. S. Harrod, 26 Vernon St., Hartford CT 06106, or call (203) 527-2799. EXCHANGE CARPENTRY FOR LIVING QUAR-TERS — San Francisco Bay area for 6 months or longer. College instructor relocating. Over 6 years exp. in cabinetry and restoration/remodeling, rough and finish carpentry. Has own tools. Knowledgeable, conscientious, dependable. Professional references. Doug Temkin, (415) 848-4672.

#### **REAL ESTATE**

HOLLIS, NH — Circa 1750 rambling Cape. Charm and history galore. Restored with many updates. 3250 sq. ft. 3-5 bedrooms, 2-1/2 baths, wide pine floors, fireplace, woodstoves, huge family room, oversized 2-car garage, barn, fenced paddocks. In-law, income apartment, or master suite. 3-1/2 acres. Walk to schools and shopping. 50 minutes to Boston. Must sell. reduced to \$219,900. Call (603) 465-2720.

TEXAS CITY, TX — Stately 2-storey home located in coastal community. Circa 1910. 4 bedrooms, 2 full and 2 half baths, sunroom, sleeping porch, huge dining and living rooms, butler's pantry. 1/2 acre shaded lot. 4-square with Greek Revival and Prairie elements. Ready to live in. \$95,000. Call (501) 332-8507.

TAUNTON, MA — 3-family Victorian. All separate utilities. Owners apartment has 2 full baths. 45 minutes to Cape Cod or Boston. Private, fenced-in yard. New roof, paint, plumbing, etc. Quiet, low-traffic area of owner occupied homes. Priced below fair market value. \$159,000. Call (508) 823-2802.



OSWEGO, NY — College town and Great Lakes fishing resort. Gracious home on 6 acres. Oversized rooms. 8 bedrooms, 2-1/2 baths, living room with fireplace, dining room, family room, country kitchen, library, beautiful entry hall. 18 rooms in all with 2 staircases. Fabulous B&B potential. Call (201) 444-5383.

SANTA ANA, CA — Colonial Revival/transitional built in 1911. Located in Heninger Park historic district. Light, airy rooms with large, doublehung windows. Double parlor with fireplace, 5 bedrooms, den, 2 baths, large kitchen, 4-car garage, full basement. 2,750 sq. ft. \$295,000. Principals only. Call (714) 541-6707 weekends.

BROOKLYN, NY — Located in the Fort Greene landmark district. 1872 4-storey brownstone in historically preserved area. High-income garden rental. Triplex: three or four bedrooms, 2 full baths, 7 carved marble mantels, 2 working fireplaces, plaster mouldings, 4 tier mirrors, pocket doors, deck and garden. Security system. Systems updated. \$368,000. For further information, call (718) 230-5956.

FORT PLAIN, NY — 1870 brick Italianate Victorian. 4 bedrooms, 1-1/2 baths, W/D, large kitchen. 3/4 acre hilltop setting. 200 miles to New York City. New plumbing, septic, electric, insulation, roof, and walls. Original spruce floors, mouldings, arched windows. Must sell. \$60,000 or best offer. For further information call Richard Gombar at (212) 679-2362.

WEST HEMPSTEAD, NY — 1897 house and large barn. 8 rooms, 2 baths, recent roof, furnace, electric service, dry basement. Dogwood neighborhood. Large, fenced lot. Grape vines, raspberry and currant patches, and organic garden beds. \$186,000. Call (516) 483-8380.



COLDWATER, MI — Immaculate 1887 Queen Anne style. 12+ rooms: 5 bedrooms, 1-1/2 baths. 3 natural fireplaces, leaded and stained glass ornamental windows, beautiful natural woodwork and hardwood floors, 2 staircases. 200 amp electric, city sewer and gas. All on over 2 acres with 32 x 16 heated pool. \$129,000. Call Tom Plater at (517) 639-7361.

STATEN ISLAND, NY — Circa 1850 center hall Colonial. Quiet park-like setting on fenced 20,200 sq. ft. lot. 3 bedrooms, back porch, enclosed front porch, large eat-in kitchen with fireplace, formal dining room with fireplace, living room with fireplace, and wide board floors throughout. Updated plumbing and electric. Detached 4-car garage and 2 large storage sheds. Available with or without some period antiques. \$298,000 includes 1937 Cadillac which is registered, inspected, and running. Owner will pay closing costs for buyer. Call (718) 356-9811.



WINDER, GA — 1902 Victorian, completely restored with 5,430 square feet. Heart of pine, crystal chandeliers, stained glass, custom drapes, central heat and air. 1 acre. This is a downtown lot located in the historic district, National Historic Register. Excellent Bed & Breadfast potential. Atlanta/Athens commute. \$248,000. For further information call (404) 867-8251 between 11am-6pm., est.



### THE EMPORIUM



CROSSWICKS, NJ — Federal style homestead, circa 1830. Used in the "underground railroad" and 2 time winner of New Jersey Homestead Award. Located on 3-1/2 rolling acres with 4 barns just outside of this historic town. 5,000 sq. ft. offering 5 bedrooms, 3 baths, 6 fireplaces, fully rebuilt kitchen wing with skylights, and a formal foyer leading into the 3rd floor master suite which includes sitting room, dressing room, and full bath with jacuzzi and bidet. 12 foot ceilings, ornamental plasterwork, exotic tigerwood millwork, and new gas furnace. 50 minutes from New York City and Philadelphia. \$475,000. Call Daniel Burke at (609) 587-2707.

BEREA, OH — 1870 Italianate brick home on National Register. 25 minutes from downtown Cleveland. 13 rooms including 5 bedrooms and 2-1/2 baths. 7 marble mantels, and 2 staircases. Woodwork walls. Almost all original early electric lighting fixtures. 1-3/4 acre lot with barn. Call (216) 234-0604.

NORTHERN NECK, VA — Beautiful waterfront peninsula. 3.78 acres, 1400 ft. frontage. Italianatestyle, mid-1800s home awaiting restoration. 4 bedrooms, 6 fireplaces, plaster walls, pine floors, dock, architect's plans available. 2-1/2 hours from D.C. \$639,000. Barnes Real Estate, Hague VA 22469, (804) 472-2486.

MIDDLEBURG, MD — Circa 1815 stone house. 2 units; each with 2 bedrooms, 1 bath, livingroom, kitchen. Could be large single family or B&B. Renovation started. Formerly a hotel and stable, currently a working horse farm with 2-year-old 20-stall barn and indoor arena, 6 paddocks, and outdoor fenced arena. Convenient to Baltimore/ Washington metro area. Call (301) 848-1777.



WEST CHICAGO, IL — 1891 parsonage. Completely redone, from new foundation to new roof. 3 bedrooms; master bedroom has sitting room. 2 baths, fully remodeled kitchen, wood floors, tin ceiling, original mouldings, beveled glass. A small town, in a neighborhood setting, located approximately thirty-five miles from the Chicago loop. \$150,000. For more information please call (708) 293-0405 after 6pm.

HAVERHILL, MA — Desirable Bradford area. Historic Colonial, circa 1690. This is one of the oldest homes in New England. 6 large bedrooms, 6 fireplaces, beehive oven, beamed and tin ceilings, French doors, solar hot water, and gazebo. Only 45 minutes from Boston. Reduced to \$159,900. For more information please call (508) 373-0807.

WARREN, RI — Circa 1830 center-chimney Federal/Greek Revival in waterfront National Register District. Excellent original trim and hardware meticulously restored. 3 bedrooms, 1-1/2 baths, sensitively designed modern kitchen, rebuilt chimney and fireboxes. New systems. In lovely garden on 1/4-acre corner lot, 1 block from water. \$155,000. For further information call (401) 245-6935.

DELAND, FL — Homestead house, built 1907, under arching live oaks on 1/2 acre in historic university neighborhood. Original family photos. 2,100 sq. ft. plus finished attic room. 4 bedrooms, 2 baths, central heat and a.c. Cypress siding, heart pine floors. Custom cypress kitchen. Fully and sensitively restored. \$123,500. Call (904) 738-0493.



B&B'S FOR SALE — Free flyer with 45 affordable Great Lake State inns listed, including Lake Michigan and inns along the trail. Free video. Aspiring innkeeper seminars and B&B conferences offered in Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Florida. The Inn Broker, (800) 926-INNS, 24 hours.

ADDISON, ME — Early 19th-century Cape with Victorian additions on 2 acres in classic downeast fishing village. Saltwater views, walking distance to deepwater mooring. Many original features have been preserved such as hardware, woodwork, windows, tin ceilings, lighting fixtures, soapstone sink, and more. Careful restoration is underway, structurally sound and very comfortable. \$70,000. Call (207) 483-2333.

PLAINFIELD, NJ — Authentic 1926 sunny English Tudor. 3 or 4 bedrooms, 2-1/2 baths (one with original 6 nozzel shower). 25 foot living room has 14 foot domed ceiling and marble fireplace. Some floors are mahogany. Freshly painted interior. Updated plumbing and wiring. Professional area just 5 minutes to NYC trains. City has 5 historic districts. \$190,000. Call (908) 753-6190.

LOMBARD, IL — 2500 sq. ft. turn-of-the-century home. 4 bedrooms, 2 baths, family room, and den. All are large rooms. Oak crown mouldings, open staircase, French and pocket doors. Tin ceiling, stained glass windows. Many original features, new boiler and a/c. \$161,500. Call for more information: (708) 953-0369.

#### FOR SALE

DUTCH FARM HOUSE — Dismantled and labeled. Circa 1745. Original Dutch door, floors, some woodwork, warming cupboard, and fireplace mantel. Blue prints, video, and photos available. Asking \$30,000. Leave message at (518) 853-4286.

TUB, CORBELS & FRETWORK — Footed 4' tub with no faucets, but in good condition: \$70. Eight matching big fancy corbels with peeling paint. 2' x 3', approximately 6" thick: \$300. Large, painted, squared off fretwork. 36" x 81". Missing some simple spindles: \$75. Call (718) 948-3626.

ORNATE STEAM RADIATORS — 9 in all, from 1870s Victorian home. Shell and ribbon motif. Manufactured by American Radiator Company. Various sizes, 4-18 ribs and 22-1/2" x 38-1/2" high. Also 3 standard radiators. \$500 or best offer. Nassau County, Long Island, N.Y. Call (516) 747-2318.

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FIREPLACE MANTEL — Late 19th century. Rectangular black faux marble, slate. Cast iron frame (Graff & Co.). 8 pieces including wings and mantel with splash. Diamond incised design. \$750. Pictures available. Located in South Central PA. Call (717) 426-2230 evenings.

ORNATE VICTORIAN BED — American Renaissance bed, unusual mixture of rare chestnut with hand-carved walnut detailing. Excellent condition. Headboard, 98"; foot board, 48"; Max. mattress size, 58" x 76". This bed is an exquisite one-of-a-kind piece, with recessed arches on both the head and foot board. \$300 or best offer. Call (815) 939-4308.

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RADIATOR COVER —  $40^{\circ}h \ge 13^{\circ}d \ge 43^{\circ}w$ . In excellent condition (new). It has a baked-on antique white finish. Please make an offer. Call (804) 625-7787.

DAVID LITTLE TAVERN — 1773. Dismantled for highway construction. Gambrel roof raised 1830 to create full 2nd storey; buyer can reconstruct either state. \$17,500 for oak frame, sheathing, many floorboards, paneled wainscot, and staircase, all documented for reassembly. For more information contact the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, 940 Whitney Ave., Hamden CT 06517, Call for information: (203) 562-6312.



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#### **MEETINGS & EVENTS**

THE KENTUCKY MUSEUM — "A Change of Style: Furniture From The Kentucky Museum". November 15, 1990 through November 14, 1991. Exhibited are examples of styles popular in the United States from 1740 to 1920, including some Shaker furniture from South Union, KY. For more information, call (502) 745-5263.

5TH BI-ANNUAL HISTORIC DISTRICT TOUR — Middletown, Ohio. December 9, 1990. Walking tour highlighted by horse and carriage rides, Christmas decorations raising holiday spirits, and beautiful architectural details of the homes themselves. Contact Debbie Suver, 218 S. Main St., Middletown OH 45044, (513) 424-5717.

HOLIDAY HOME TOUR — December 8 and 9, 1990. New Orleans, LA. Homes will be open from 1-4pm. Mansions will be festively decorated for the holiday season. Musicians and school groups will fill each home with the sounds of holiday music. Call The Preservation Resource Center at (504) 581-7032.

A VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS — The Historic General Dodge House of Council Bluffs, Iowa will be celebrate its Victorian Christmas November 20 through December 30, 1990. The entire house will be decorated with old-world charm. For more information call (712) 322-2406.



CRAFTS IN NOVEMBER — Saturday, November 3, 10am-5pm. Convention Hall, Cape May, New Jersey. 45 craftspeople will display and sell their handmade quilts, needlework, and clothing. Admission is \$2.50 per person. For more information, call Andrew Cripps at (609) 884-5404.

12TH ANNUAL TOUR OF HOMES — Springfield Preservation and Restoration Tour of Homes November 3-4; Jacksonville, FL. Restored turnof-the-century homes featured along with antiques and collectibles, craftsman seminars, and restoration how-to's. For further information call (904) 353-7727.

MUSEUM ANTIQUES SHOW & SALE — November 16 through 18, 1990 at the Atlanta Apparel Mart, Atlanta Georgia. The Preview Party is November 15, 7pm-10pm. It's a benefit for the High Museum. For more information, call (404) 898-1152.

OLD HOME TOUR — Pomona, CA. December 2, 1990. Six private residences will be open to visitors. Various architectural styles will be featured. 11am-5pm. Crafts, collectibles, restoration, and reproduction items will be sold. Antique cars will be displayed. For further information call (714) 623-7150. FLORISSANT BY CANDLELIGHT HOUSE TOUR — November 25, 1990 in St. Louis Missouri. This tour opens 5 or 6 private homes and several businesses from 3-7pm. Several homes are on the National Register of Historic Places. Refreshments served in each home. For more information, call (314) 837-3903.

CHRISTMAS HOUSE TOUR — Riverview Historic District Inc. Sunday, December 2, 1pm-5pm in Kankakee, Illinois, just 1 hour south of Chicago. 7 private homes which will be decorated for Christmas are to be featured. Refreshments will be served. A tax-deductible contribution of \$10 per person. For further information, call (815) 935-5596.

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS — Museum open house and Victorian house tour. December 15-17, 1990. Searsport, ME. Tour 1800s sea captains homes in festive holiday decoration. Sponsored by the Penobscot Marine Museum and the Searsport Area Bed & Breakfast Assn. For further information, please call (207) 548-6510 or (207) 548-2529.

CHRISTMAS HOME TOUR — December 16; 1990 in Smithville, Texas from 2-5pm. Tour includes 4 houses from the 1890s and early 1900s, as well as a 1924 high school building scheduled for restoration. Tickets are \$5. For more information, contact Smithville Heritage Society, PO Box 332, Smithville TX 78957, (512) 237-4826.

THE ART OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GERMANS — A 4-day seminar for professionals and collectors in Lancaster PA November 1-4, 1990. Features lectures and visits to museums and private collections. The program is part of the semiannual Regional Heritage Series. For registration information, call the Center for Historic Houses at (202) 673-4025.

HOME RENOVATION WORKSHOP — Home renovations taught in classroom and hands-on workshops. An old house, used only for the course, provides on-site experience. For more information, call (412) 658-7002, or write to Home Renovation Workshop, 315 E. Northview Ave., New Castle PA 16105,

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# Additions mar Subtract

REMUDDLING

ometimes a fate worse than destruction befalls old houses: They are converted into student rooms and small apartments. The location of this unfortunate house, just five blocks from the University of Iowa campus, almost ensured its remuddled fate.

"The earliest photographs of it are from around 1935 *[right top]*, just before its conversion to multiple use. Fifty years old, it was already in less-than-pristine condition, with a two-storey sleeping porch that was almost certainly an early-20th-century addition. Yet most of its original charm remained: the complex roof line and shingled gables, the varied windowpane patterns, the spindle-



work, turned support posts, and Chippendale fretwork on the porch.

"By 1941, the approximate date of the second photo *[left middle]*, most of that original detailing had disappeared, either ripped off or buried beneath siding.

"What can you say about its current appearance *[left bottom]*? It

> looks like it was built by a committee without a chairperson: The roof has exploded with small square additions; its sides and rear elevations swell with similar expansions. Yet amid it all, there remains the small second-storey gabled porch with its turned posts and eave decoration — the only hint of what was." — Jan R. Nash Iowa City, Iowa



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### Vernacular Houses



Board-frame construction remained a viable, and often preferred, building technique in White County through the 1930s. Pictured above is the Ike Wood House (circa 1890).

Shown at the upper right are details of board-frame construction: Builders began with hewn  $6 \cdot \times \cdot 8$  or  $8 \cdot \times \cdot 8$  sills that were placed on rock or brick piers. Two boards were first attached to each corner. After the four corners were erected, a  $2 \cdot \times \cdot 6$  plate connected the corners. Wide boards called "boxing" were then

nailed to the sill and plate to secure the walls. These structural boards served as a surface for both interior and exterior sheathing. Window openings were framed with  $2 \times 4s$ .

The typical early board-frame house was a "single-pen" structure, with a full-length porch supported by plain posts. Later, rooms were created with the addition of simple nonbearing partitions (see plan drawing, right).



# Arkansas Board-Frame Houses

Derived from the more elaborate plank-wall or plank-frame houses in New England, board-frame houses can be found throughout Arkansas, as well as in the area from the Appalachian mountains into Missouri and west Texas. In Arkansas, the houses date from as early as the 1870s to well into the 20th century.

Sometimes called "board shanties," boardframe houses were built as dwellings for seasonal labor and tenant farmers in rural communities or sometimes as temporary first houses on new farms. Later, the building method began to be used for the homes of more affluent farmers, and in White County, for instance, examples of these houses can be found with special features such as cutstone chimneys, attached and recessed porches, and door, window, and eave trim.

The basic construction technique consisted of erecting a light wood frame of sills and joists. Vertical boards were nailed over this, creating a semi-rigid structure. In New England, 2"-thick planks were rabbeted into the sill, but the Arkansas houses frequently had only ¾"-thick boards held together with nails. Horizontal siding was finally nailed over the vertical boards, making the structure a sound one. This three-board construction is remarkably similar to the sandwich-board system of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses. — David Brown, Steve Mitchell, & Michael Swanda Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Little Rock, Arkansas