

# Old-House Journal

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1991

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English Revival Houses  
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# Old-House Journal

Vol. XIX No. 5

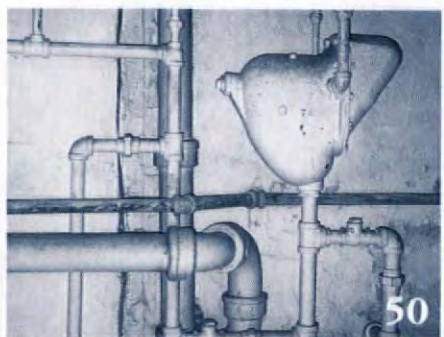
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# Why restore old houses?

This question is worth asking at least once, if only because not everyone you meet understands the special rewards of all the effort. *Restore* is the key word, as I see it. Restoring an old house goes beyond just "fixing up" the structure so that it's a serviceable place to live, with plumbing that runs and a roof that doesn't leak. Restoring means trying to recapture or preserve the original concept of the design with a sensitivity to the nature of the materials. Asphalt shingles, for instance, are as weather-proof as any roofing, but they can hardly duplicate the eye-catching undulations of Spanish tile. Paint protects woodwork as well as varnish, but it doesn't show off

*After restoration, it's more than an heirloom house — it's also a home.*

the beauty of the grain. Taken to its limit, house restoration can come close to the concept of "cherried out" or "minted out," which antique-auto restorers use, where every nut and bolt is in pristine condition — much more than is necessary just to make it run.

If restoring a house, then, goes way beyond the ordinary or necessary, why get in so deep? I'm sure everybody has their own reasons, but I'd like to share three of mine. As I chip away at my family homestead in Pennsylvania, I stop from

time to time to remember why I stay involved. I don't get too scientific about it, just a little inspirational.

**\* You don't know what you've got until you lose it** — My c. 1880 old house is one of the first in a neighborhood that is changing rapidly. I like to think that by keeping my old

house up, I'm not only maintaining for my use, but preserving a bit of what makes the area unique for others who live there.

**\* I get a thrill being around craftsmanship from other eras** — It's like traveling in time. You can see not only the handiwork of people who went before you, but often what they were thinking as well. And it's heartening to see creations from an earlier time continuing to function just as they were in-



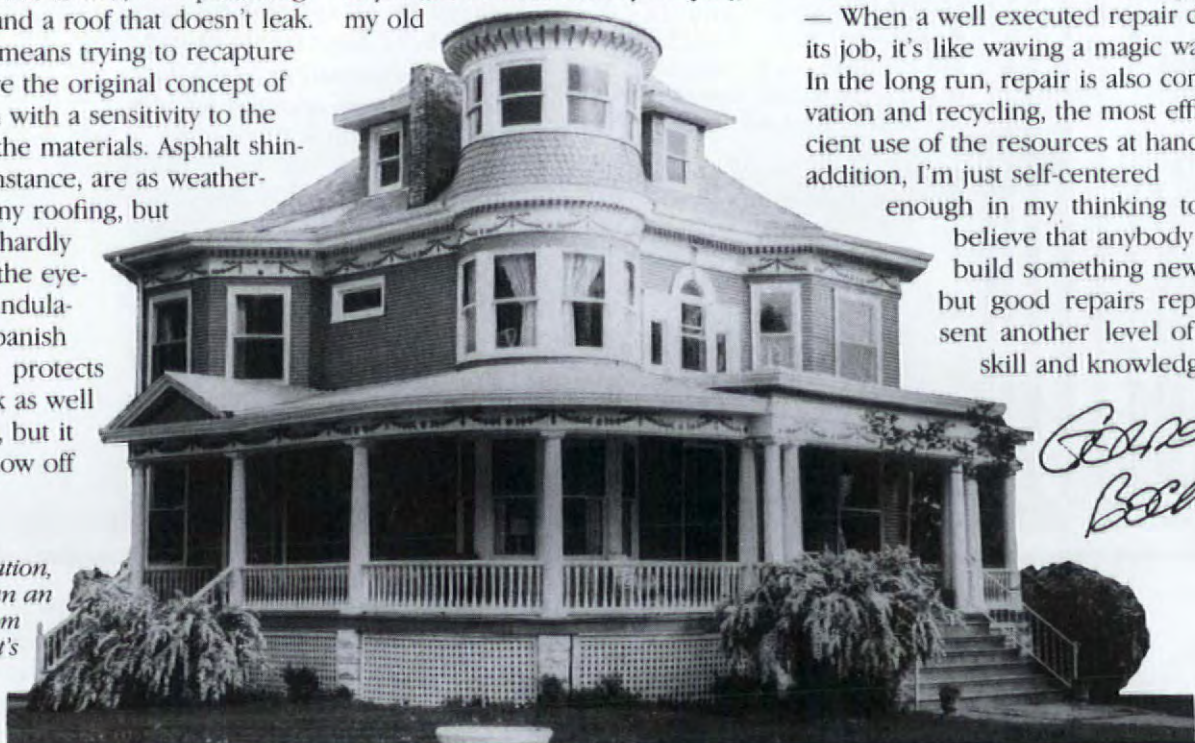
*Unrestored, this outstanding Queen Anne offers neither shelter nor beauty.*

tended. We all like to think our work will survive us.

**\* I believe in the value of repair** — When a well executed repair does its job, it's like waving a magic wand. In the long run, repair is also conservation and recycling, the most efficient use of the resources at hand. In addition, I'm just self-centered

enough in my thinking to believe that anybody can build something new, but good repairs represent another level of skill and knowledge.

*Garrett Beck*





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## Tales of the Half Chimney

Dear OHJ,

I would like to add a little further insight on the subject of docked chimneys [*"Mystery Chimney," May/June 1991, page 14*]. Living in the Midwest where there were many farms and coal-mine communities, such chimneys were common. The company houses for miners were usually four or five rooms. Four rooms had one chimney; five rooms,

two. These had half (docked) chimneys because when the mine ran out and was closed, the house was jacked up and moved to a new mine site. The chimney didn't have to be rebuilt — it just rode along.

The half chimney was common in the large kitchens which were often an extension of the house. It made space between the cookstove and the wall, which was often used to dry clothes in winter, shelter newborn

lambs and piglets abandoned by their mothers, or warm feed for chickens in winter. It was an excellent place for young schoolboys to dress for school on sub-zero winter mornings.

The chimney was usually plastered and the rack that held it was lathed and plastered.

— William A. Johnson  
Des Moines, Iowa  
*continued on page 8*

## Tired & Depressed

Dear OHJ,

I'm tired of "Remuddling." It's depressing. I would like to see instead "Unmuddling of the Month." In my own city, I have seen several exteriors changed from remuddled to restored. I'm sure this wonderful phenomenon is occurring across the country. Examples of unmuddling could provide your readers with inspirational and educational information. Please consider it.

— Sally Levinson  
Berkeley, Cal.

## Awake & in Love

Dear OHJ,

I love the "Remuddling" section of your magazine. With each new issue, I can't wait to get to the last page — I read the magazine from front to back — to see the latest "Remuddling" picture(s). The "Half-way House" in the May/June issue takes the cake! I'm glad I'm not the owner of the left half and have to live with my modernized twin! Keep up the good work!

— Janice K. Drinkwater  
Cutchogue, N.Y.

## Grimthorped!

Dear OHJ,

Instead of "remuddling" the English language, why don't you use instead a grand word that has been around since 1905 as the headline for your last page? *Grimthorpe* (ac-

cording to Webster's Third): "to remodel (an ancient building) without proper knowledge or care to retain its original quality and character." Derived from Sir Edmund Beckett, first Baron Grimthorpe, whose restoration of St. Albans cathedral was severely criticized.

— Schuyler Bishop  
Newburgh, N.Y.

## Overboard?

Dear OHJ,

While I appreciate your commitment to preservation very much, I wonder if you don't occasionally go a bit overboard in praising the old, just because it is old.

The remuddled bungalows in the July/August issue strike me as rather lacking in architectural character originally. I agree with you that the "Photo Service" house is rather abhorrent and that the windows on the second storey of the other

house are far too small. Still, I'm inclined to think that the added living space gained by the owners of the house with the second-storey addition is probably well worth the loss of a rather unimpressive original design.

"Hill Street Blues" [*January/February '91*], in contrast, demonstrates the true horror of remuddling. In this situation, one or two remuddled houses can destroy the historical character of a whole neighborhood.

— M.W. Wood  
Buffalo, N.Y.



*Is the added living space of the addition (top) worth the loss of this house style's original design (right)?*



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## Spanish in North Carolina

Dear OHJ,

Your article "Mediterranean Traditions" [July/August '91] by James Massey and Shirley Maxwell was well written, informative, and brought into full public view an old tradition in the history of American architecture which is little known and under

appreciated. Our congratulations on a job well done.

I would like to offer one important correction: The house shown on at the bottom of page 47 is incorrectly listed as being in Camden, South Carolina. This property, the Fletcher Smith house, is one of Salisbury, North Carolina's finest examples of

the Spanish Mission style and should be properly credited to our historic community. Presently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Greg

*Contrary to any rumors, this exquisite Spanish Mission house is in Salisbury, N.C.*

Freeman, the Fletcher Smith house has undergone extensive restoration in the past several years and is one of the pre-eminent landmarks in the city's West Square Historic District.

— Frederick W. Lyman  
Executive Director,  
Historic Salisbury Foundation  
Salisbury, N.C.



## An Eternal Subscriber

Dear OHJ,

I want to thank you for analyzing the type of home which I purchased some time ago ["Builder-Style Tudor," July/August 1991, page 18]. I was utterly astounded that you were able to find in the *Home Builder's Catalog* of 1928 the design called the DeKalb. The floor plan for the DeKalb is exactly the floor plan in my home, with the exception of one or  
*continued on page 10*



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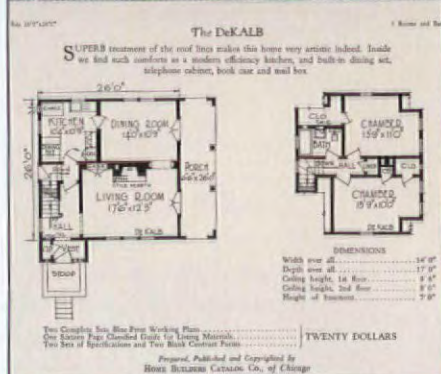
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For buyers of 1928, this house plan cost only \$20.

two doors.

You people are truly amazing in your ability to research homes, particularly in light of the fact that this is not what one would call a palatial residence. I am very pleased and you have made me an eternal *Old-House Journal* subscriber.

— Dan Hampton  
Galesville, Wis.

## DIY Rug Restoration

Dear OHJ,

Having recently inherited just over two dozen oriental carpets, some of which have been in our family for three generations, I was very interested in Ms. Johnston's article in your May/June issue [*"An Oriental Rug Restoration"*]. (If I wasn't rebuilding our entire house, I would be trying the re-sewing techniques on two of the hall carpets right now.) There is, however, one point that should be

brought up.

Ms. Johnston states, in part, that fading is one type of damage which cannot be reversed. Although this may be true of the more-valuable antiques, we were advised by a gentleman from whom we bought several rugs that there is a simple remedy: your standard felt-tip pen, available from any art-supply store. (Not a Walgreen's-quality magic marker — they're neither indelible nor particularly well regulated in color density.) If you look on the back of your rug, you can usually tell the original colors; by painting over the wool, rather like a paint-by-numbers landscape, it is possible to come up with a rug that looks very close to its original. This may not be the purist's answer, but it is an easy remedy.

— Allison Hartman  
Chicago, Ill.

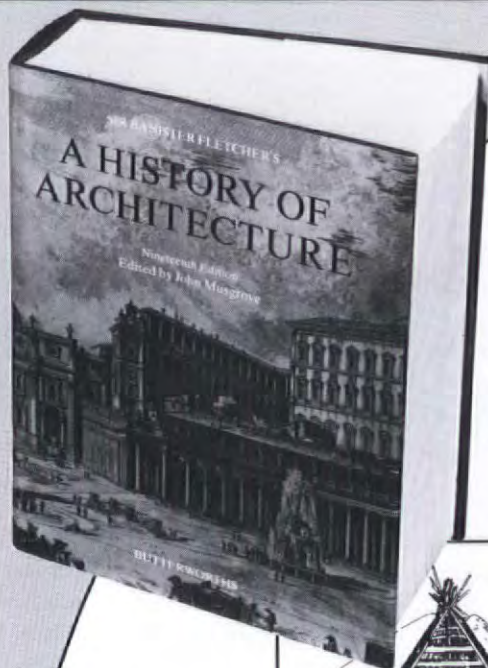
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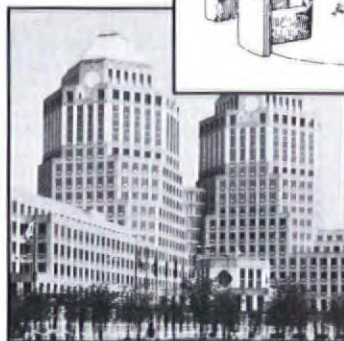
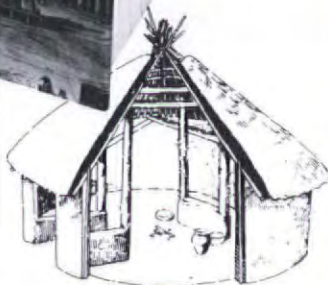
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## Wings in the House

Dear OHJ,

I'm a new old-house owner, and when I received my July/August issue I had to write. Your article "Wings in the Dark" was just what we needed.



I knew to expect some problems with an old house, but I didn't expect bats. Our house had been empty for several years and there were some outside repairs to be done. One such job was rescreening the back porch. Little did we know at the time that bats had moved into

the attic area of the porch.

Our first contact with them was when I heard my husband downstairs talking. I thought our neighbor had come over to introduce himself, so I went down to meet him. My husband yelled at me to bring two

sheets and not to go into the kitchen. Thoroughly confused and wondering what type of company needed sheets over windows, I headed on down. The chaos that one small bat can cause is unbelievable.

In all, it turned out we had eight bats that got into our house over a

period of several days before we found out where they were coming from. I'm an animal lover and did not want any of the bats to be killed and my poor husband obliged me unwillingly. It was hard to keep him calm, especially when one woke us up in the middle of the night when it flew into our ceiling fan and was knocked unconscious. Needless to say, there was very little sleep that night.

We know of only one bat that lost its life: That poor innocent bat found its way into our washing machine. (Luckily my husband was the one to get that particular load of clothes out, or I'm afraid both washing machine and bat would have been thrown out the back door.) When we found out that they were on our back porch, we opened our screen door and let

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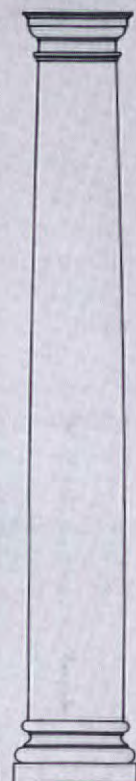
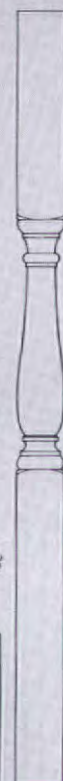
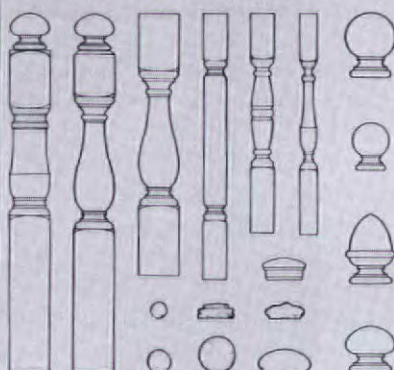
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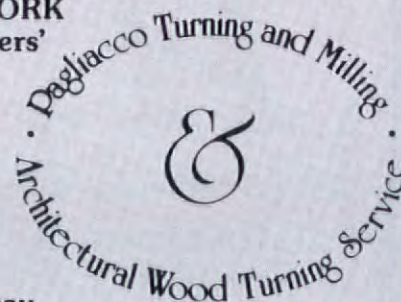
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*continued from page 12*

them out. Once they flew off the porch, we shut the screen. This process was repeated for several days until we no longer found any bats flying around on the porch.

I was glad your article backed up my belief that they are good for the environment — and that we solved our problem with no harm except for a few hours of lost sleep.

— Donna May  
Pelzer, S.C.

## Benign & Malignant

Dear OHJ,

Just thought your readers might be interested in first-hand observations as to *why* old houses owned by wealthy people end up in disrepair.

My husband was a full-time, live-in groundskeeper for a year. I became a 2-days-a-week housekeeper as part of a package deal. Through word of

mouth, I was requested to clean other homes.

There are two general types of "wealth neglect": benign and malignant (as in cancer). The general symptoms of benign neglect are characterized by *very* busy professionals who use the old house as their primary residence but spend practically no time there except to sleep — all their mail, phone calls, and faxes go to their offices anyway. They rarely entertain at home (they take clients out to eat and kibitz) and they have summer homes in New England to escape the heat as well as homes in Arizona or Florida for the winter. They just don't *notice*!

Malignant neglect, on the other hand, is caused by an over-full checking account coupled with a Scrooge-like determination to sell every project to the lowest possible bidder.

These people, the incredibly rich, do not bother with maintenance — they literally have enough money to buy another anything, even another house, if it "breaks." Imagine going through life never worrying about your clothes, furniture, car, appearance, or *anything*, because there's always time to get another. It makes for a frightening outlook on old houses, especially in tandem with the "lowest-bidder" syndrome, which invariably puts up sheetrock instead of plastering; replaces slate roofs with cheap shingles, and paints latex finishes over old alkyd without priming.

Now remember, old-house lovers, when you win the Lottery or inherit all of Aunt Rebecca's blue-chip portfolio, stay just as committed to quality as ever!

— Marcia Walls  
Tinicum, Penn.

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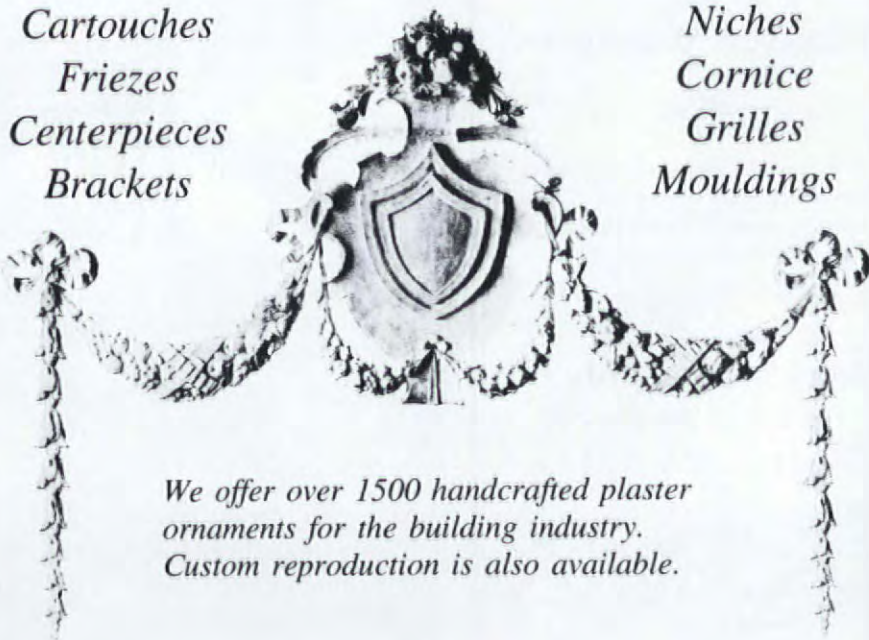
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## "Portable" House

**Q** When I was asked by a friend to renovate the interior of her late-1920s home, I discovered that the house was not just prefabricated but was once portable. The walls are not traditionally framed but are constructed of 6'0" x 7'6" wood-frame panels, 3/4" thick. The hip roofs are also constructed of similar panels. All the panels are held together with a "bolt and wedge" system. This system makes it theoretically possible to take the panels apart, thereby making the house "portable."

A small tag on each panel identifies its placement (such as "RIGHT HIP 3"). Some panels also have delivery tags noting the destination of the shipment and the maker of the house as "E.F. Hodgson Co.; Dover, Mass.; 'HODG-

SON'S PORTABLE HOUSES.'" I would appreciate any information you might have to offer.

— George B. Schramm III  
Bethpage, N.Y.



A 1915 Hodgson ad pictured their "Portable Sun-Parlor" (above) — an antecedent of their portable house (left).

**A** Although there isn't a wealth of information on the E.F. Hodgson Company of Dover, Massachusetts, they appear to have been mass producing prefabricated houses as early as 1892, a date that makes them one of the originators of this industry. Hodgson products were small buildings, from cottages and playhouses to garages and chicken coops to, literally, dog kennels

and bird houses. They were marketed as "portables" and built in sections to be assembled quickly on site with bolts by unskilled labor. The largest building in their 1915 advertisement is a 36' x 16' two-room cottage, but it would not be surprising to learn that they were selling slightly larger houses, such as the one you describe, by the boom years of the 1920s.

## Craftsman Closet

**Q** Our sorta-Craftsman house was built around 1905 and originally had a china closet built into the wall of the dining room. The closet was not very deep, as the stairway upstairs is on the other side of this wall. We discovered this fact when the son of the former owner gave us three beautiful doors from the original closet, believing they should stay with the house.

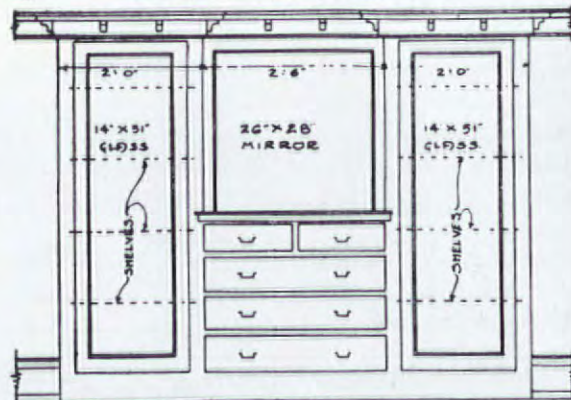
Our problem is that several people who can remember the closet cannot quite agree on how it looked. The best consensus I have is that the center area was the upper small door, a shelf with a bevelled mirror at the back, then three small drawers below. Does anyone have a closet similar to this who could give me dimensions

or send a picture so we may replicate ours?

— Tomi Fay Forbes  
Cedarburg, Wis.

**A** The 1912 edition of *Radford's Details of Building Construction* turned up this buffet design (right) which comes close to the china cabinet you describe. It incorporates not only the two large doors bordering a mirror and drawers, but also the bracketed plate rail widely seen in Arts and Crafts-inspired interiors. The Radford Architectural

Company was probably the top purveyor of mass-market house plans and building publications in the early decades of this century, and many of their designs are typical of — if not the actual source for — popular housebuilding fashions throughout the 'teens and 'twenties.



A post-Victorian buffet for a "sorta-Craftsman house."



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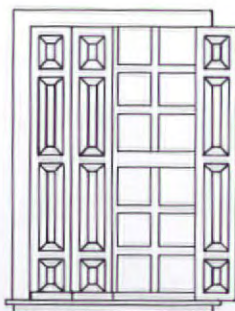
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continued from page 18

## What Date Wallpaper?

**Q** Help, quick! You've been wonderful in the past and are the only people I really trust with preservation questions. Enclosed are photos of wallpaper in the front and rear parlors of a house we are moving into next month, which is on the eastern shore of Maryland. The owners have told us that the paper dates to the Civil War. Do you think it is that old? Looks more like late-19th century to me.

— Mrs. L. Knudsen  
Snow Hill, Md.

**A** Dating wallpaper without any hard evidence (such as manufacturers' names or production numbers) is a difficult task, so we passed your photos along to Bruce Bradbury of Bradbury & Bradbury Wallpapers in Benicia, California, for his com-



ments. Bruce reports, "The room is hung with a machine-printed, turn-of-the-century 'roomset,' a coordinated set of patterns for walls and ceilings. Given the Art Nouveau influence in the pattern, I'd guess it was produced in the 1890s, though this type of coordinated set was popular from the late 1880s until the early-20th century."

The pattern of the Knudsens' wallpaper dates it in the late-19th century.



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*Terne* must be painted immediately after application, according to very strict specifications. The first coat is to be *Terne Cote I* primer, followed by a finish coat of *Terne Cote II*. Follansbee manufactures *Terne Cote* and it is available in 11 standard colors. It can be purchased through your local distributor or from Follansbee Steel.



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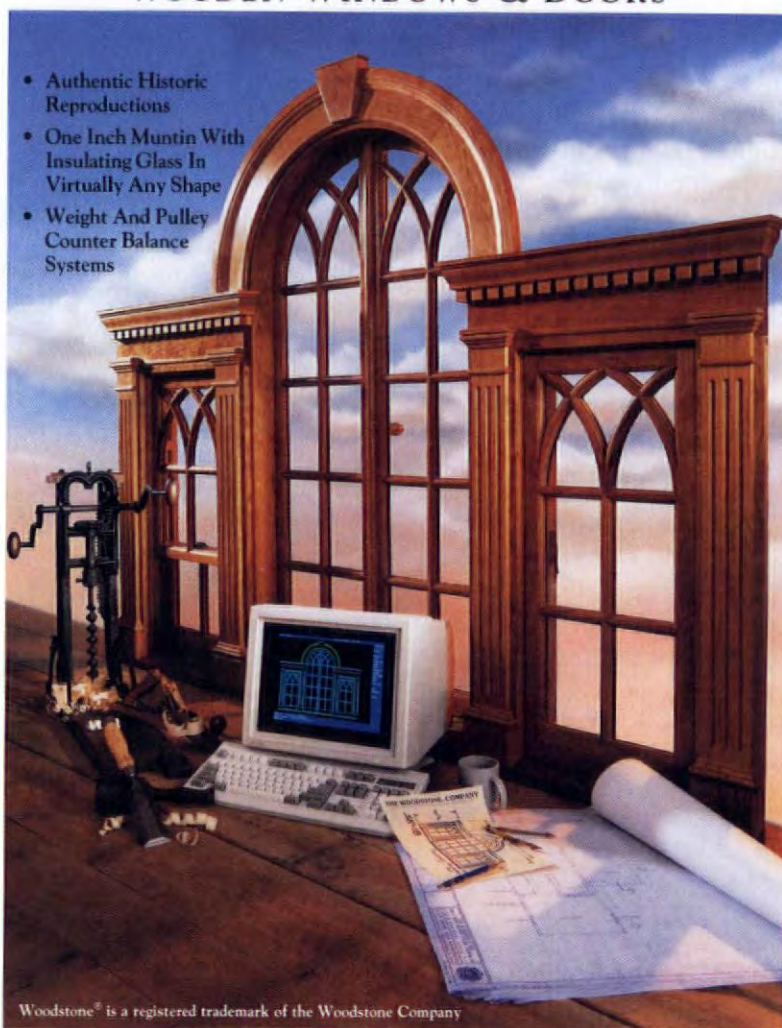
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## Pass the Vaseline

Late one Saturday night, shortly after we moved into our old house, I realized that the sound dragging me from sleep was that of running water coming from an old toilet in the upstairs bath. Upon investigation, I discovered that the rubber bulb which covers the outlet on the bottom of the tank was old, cracked, and dried out. The sides were collapsing from the weight of the water in the tank, and water was escaping between the outlet and the bulb. Of course, this toilet had no shut-off valve, so I couldn't just turn off the water. Casting about for a makeshift repair that would hold until I could get the required esoteric plumbing parts, I noticed a jar of petroleum jelly on the shelf next to me. I thought that if I could slather enough jelly on the ball, it would seal the collapsing part enough to slow, if not shut off, the running water. It worked, so I went back to bed and promptly forgot about it.

About a year later, when I was repairing another toilet in the house, I remembered the ailing bulb and went to investigate its size and type so it could be replaced. I was surprised to discover that the bulb felt and looked practically new: It must have absorbed the petroleum jelly and been restored by it. Now, more than three years later, the bulb still feels new and hasn't given me any problems. I assume that petroleum jelly would rejuvenate many rubber parts (like washers) in an emergency, as well as renew dried parts in toilet tanks which have had no water for some time, as was the case with ours.

— Elizabeth Ann Brown  
Montgomery, Ala.

## Dispersing Dust

I found the tip about using a bicycle-tire pump to remove dust from drilled holes interesting [*Restorer's Notebook*, May/June 1991]. But I think you'll also find my tip most useful and handy.

In my occupation as a marble setter, I find it necessary to drill holes for anchors (lead anchors, plastic anchors, toggle bolts, etc.) on both vertical and horizontal surfaces. The average drill motor blows out a considerable amount of air from its housing, so I operate it alongside the drilled holes: The blast of air created by the motor is more than sufficient to clean out the holes.

— Joseph Cimarosti  
Detroit, Mich.

## A Colorful Idea

We were trying to decide on a color scheme for our 1875 farmhouse when we came up with this idea for visualizing the results before we even bought the paint. I shot some slides of the house, which gave a good, uncluttered outline of the faces and details we were most concerned with, and projected them at close range onto sheets of drawing paper taped to a wall. I traced the basic lines of the projection onto the paper, making line drawings of these views of the house. Then I photocopied them, got out my crayons and colored pencils, and experimented with color schemes. These "coloring-book pictures" of the house made it obvious to us which color scheme looked best. We went ahead and did the paint job, confident in our choices.

— Barbara A. Smith  
Raymond, Maine

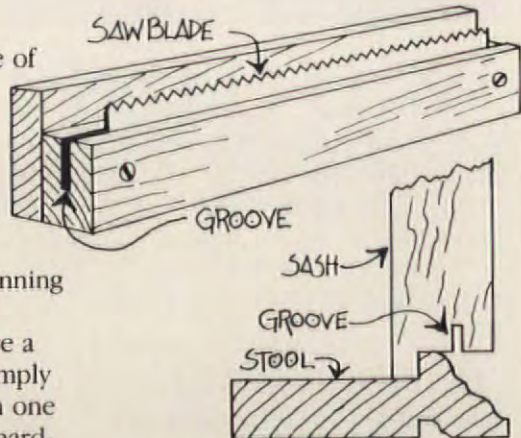
## Pulling Up Plywood

We wanted to remove the wall-to-wall carpeting in our 1863 Italianate home and restore the original random-width pine flooring below. But the carpeting rested on an underlayment of quarter-inch plywood boards that simply splintered under the pressure of a crowbar, making their removal literally an inch-by-inch process. Our solution to this problem was to run a circular saw, set to a

*continued on page 24*

## Grooving

The somewhat unusual shape of my casement windows resulted in a lot of leaks everytime it rained. My solution was to cut a water-drip groove into the bottom edge of the sash, which would keep the rain from running along the edge and into the house. But I really didn't have a tool that could do this job simply and easily, so I came up with one of my own. I took a 7"-long hardwood block,  $\frac{3}{4}" \times 1\frac{1}{4}"$ , and cut a saw kerf 1" deep into the  $\frac{3}{4}"$  edge, about  $\frac{1}{4}"$  from one side. Then I set a second block,  $\frac{1}{4}" \times 1\frac{3}{4}"$ , to serve as a guide. I made two screw holes in the first block, positioning them just beyond the 5" length of the saw blade — an old compass saw blade, inserted so it



projects about  $\frac{3}{16}"$ . (A piece of thick hacksaw blade will also work.) After I tightened the screws, I had a tool I could use like a plane, with the guide sliding along the outside of the sash and the blade cutting a narrow groove.

— T.G. Howell  
San Antonio, Texas



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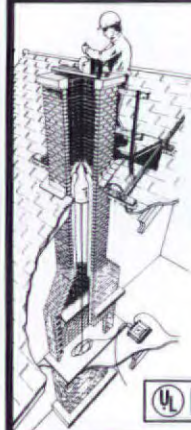
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*continued from page 22*

depth just less than the thickness of the plywood, across the underlayment (taking special care to mark off and avoid all nails and staples). Then the plywood was simply snapped off in rows. An additional benefit to this method was that it allows more of the nails to come up with the plywood instead of our having to pull them up individually afterward.

— David Fields  
Philadelphia, Penn.

## Disguising an Odor

In our first old house, we had an 18-year-old cat who often missed the litter box. Eventually the urine soaked through the vinyl flooring and into the subfloor. After removing the vinyl, we treated the stains with Odormute (an enzyme-based odor remover we got at the pet store). But a slight odor remained. I remem-

bered reading that shellac could be used to prevent the offgassing of formaldehyde from particleboard, so I figured it might work on other "fumes" as well. Two coats of shellac later, no smell.

We used the same technique on our present house where raccoons had been living in the roof of the porch (and using it as a litter box). After trapping the raccoons, we took the porch apart, put several applications of Odormute on everything, and then coated the entire inside of the porch with shellac. Now it no longer smells like the zoo.

— Jane Powell  
Berkeley, Calif.

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— Stewart Dempsey  
Milwaukee, Wis.

**TIPS TO SHARE?** Do you have any hints or shortcuts that might help other old-house owners? We'll pay \$25 for any how-to items used in this "Restorer's Notebook" column. Write to Notebook Editor, The Old-House Journal, 435 Ninth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215.

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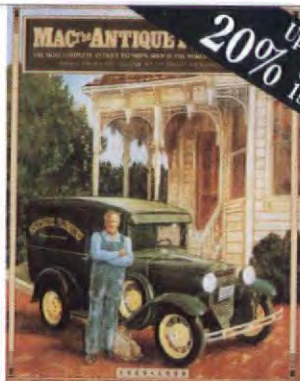
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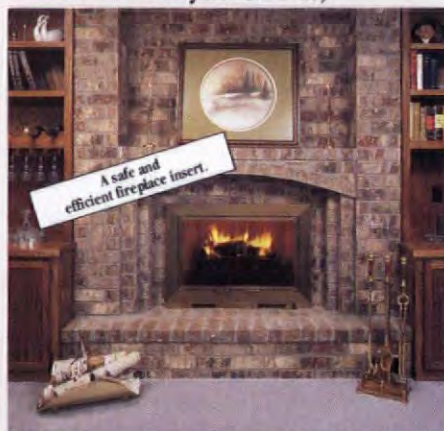
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# BOOKS GROUPS

...for old-house gardeners

What many old-house gardeners need more than a new shovel or a hot soak in the tub is information. Books and organizations are among the best sources (along with *OHJ*, of course).

The essential text for historic gardening is Rudy and Joy Favretti's *Landscapes and Gardens for Historic Buildings*, which includes history, how-to, and plant lists. A long-awaited revised edition has just been published. Less comprehensive but also fine is the Favretti's *For Every*

(on 17th-century New England) and *American Gardens in the 18th Century*. For Victorian gardens, look to Leighton's *American Gardens of the 19th Century* and M. Christine Doell's visually rich *Gardens of the Gilded Age*. For post-Victorian gardens, the best is British: David Otte-will's *The Edwardian Garden*.

For an attractive introduction to historic ornamentals, see Katherine Whiteside's *Antique Flowers* or Rob Proctor's *Perennials and Annuals*; for more substance, turn to David Stuart

and James Sutherland's *Plants from the Past*. Fruits and vegetables are covered in Carolyn Jab's *Heirloom Gardener*.

With reprinted works, old-house gardeners can get advice straight from the horse's mouth. Reprint editions are available of A.J. Downing's *Victorian Cottage Residences* (1842), Joseph Breck's *The Flower Garden* (1851), Frank J. Scott's *Art of Beautifying Suburban Home Grounds* (1870, reprinted as *Victorian Gardens*), Louise Beebe Wilder's *Color in my Garden* (1918), several of Gertrude Jekyll's books, and many others.

All of these books can be ordered through local bookstores, or by calling Capability's Books, the country's largest mail-order garden bookstore, at 800-247-8154. Horticultural libraries are listed in Barbara J. Barton's indispensable *Gardening by Mail III*, along with hundreds of nurseries, societies, and more publications.

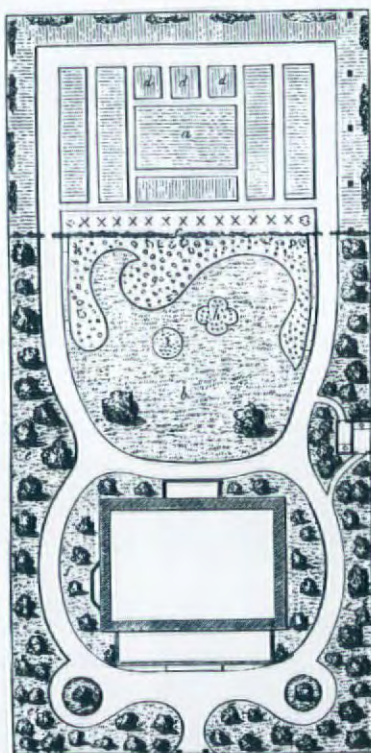
Among organizations, most valuable to amateur historic gardeners are the well-established Southern Garden History Society (Old Salem Inc., Drawer F, Salem Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27108; \$15/year) and the year-old New England Garden History Society (Massachusetts Horticultural Society, 300 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02115; \$25/year). Professional organizations include the Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation (P.O. Box 92, Charlottesville, VA 22902), the American Society of Landscape Architects "Historic Preservation Open Committee" (annual symposium, c/o Noel Vernon, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306), and the Association for Preservation Technology (landscape workshops, P.O. Box 8178, Fredericksburg, VA 22404). State Historic Preservation Offices can also offer guidance.

In conserving historic plants, the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants plays a leading role (Monticello, P.O. Box 316, Charlottesville, VA 22902; free catalog/newsletter). Plant organizations with a historic focus include the Heritage Roses Group (c/o Miriam Walkins, 925 Galvin Drive, El Cerrito, CA 95538; \$5/year); the Historic Iris Preservation Society (c/o Verona Wiekhorst, 4855 Santiago Way, Colorado Springs, CO 80917; \$5/year); the well-known Seed Savers Exchange (for edibles, \$25/year; substantial publications); and the new Flower and Herb Exchange (catalog \$5, both at RR 3, Box 239, Decorah, IA 52101). See "Restoration Products," July/August 1991 *OHJ*, page 64 for further information.

For further guidance in researching a landscape, see Timothy and Genevieve Keller's *How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes* (bulletin 18, available from the National Register Reference Desk, 202-343-5726).

Other basic works include Diane Kostial McGuire's *Gardens of America: Three Centuries of Design* and William Tishler's *American Landscape Architecture: Designers and Places*. McGuire's book photographically showcases some of America's finest restored landscapes, whereas Tishler's profiles 42 historic landscape types and designers.

For more on our earliest home landscapes, see Ann Leighton's dense, authoritative *Early American Gardens*



The A.J. Downing plan for a small yard includes curves and asymmetry, two characteristics of the "modern," mid-Victorian landscape.

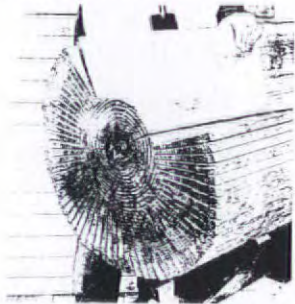
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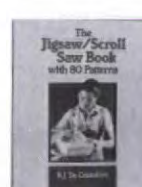
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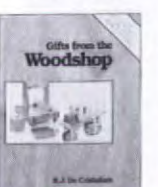
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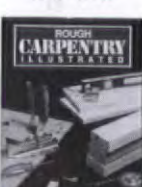
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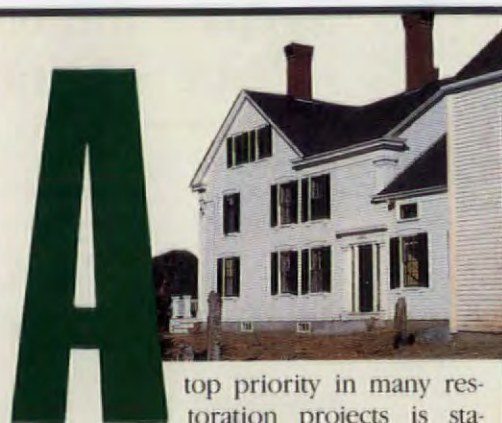
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# Sash Window WORK SHOP



top priority in many restoration projects is stabilizing the "weather envelope" of the house, the surfaces that shed rain, wind, and sun. The roof and the exterior siding, of course, make up the bulk of this envelope, but it also includes the windows: fragile, working house parts that take a beating in any building.

That was certainly the case with this project. The town of Waterboro, Maine, is maintaining the 1850 Taylor House as a focal point for local history and training ground for old-house restoration and preservation methods. The windows in this Greek Revival building are double-hung wood sash in wood frames that are, with rare exception, the same wood and glass installed when the house was built over 140 years ago. Through the years, the windows received little attention other than basic glass replacement, putty renewal, and just two or three coats of paint. Today they stand in a somewhat deteriorated, but basically sound condition. Ordinary maintenance methods could take care of flaky, peeling paint as well as failed and missing glazing, but specialized techniques would be needed to repair loose joints and warped wood.

After surveying each of the 49 windows to evaluate the amount of work each would need (as well as labeling each sash using a scheme that described its location), I began the process of systematically pulling and reconditioning each sash. Restoring a house full of windows is a project that tends to hide its real size. One way to see the work through is to set up a production line and break each repair phase into specific procedures. Here I'll describe six of the methods I use to restore historic sash so that they hold up to the rigors of the New England climate and still retain their appearance.

BY JOHN LEEKE



Sash windows are designed to be disassembled for maintenance and repair. Rather than restore windows in place, I prefer to pull each sash, using the following sequence, so that I can work more efficiently back at the shop.

**1) Remove the interior sash stop beads** — In most cases, both window sash can be pulled by removing only one of the two interior stop beads. First, cut the paint film where the bead meets the window trim, using a knife or a zipper tool (a specialty hand tool designed for freeing stuck windows (figure 1)). At the same time, remove any



screws or other fasteners obviously holding the bead in place. Next, work two putty knives into the joint at about mid-bead to protect the woodwork. (If nails are nearby, start at one of these.) Then, slide a slim pry-bar between the putty knives and begin prying the bead (figure 2). As the bead loosens, bow it out carefully by hand to avoid scraping or mar-



ring the window stool (figure 3). If the bead is mitered at the top, maneuvering it out of the frame will take even more bowing and care. Once it's out, you can label the bead with the window number.

**2) Remove lower sash** — Slide the sash up a few inches



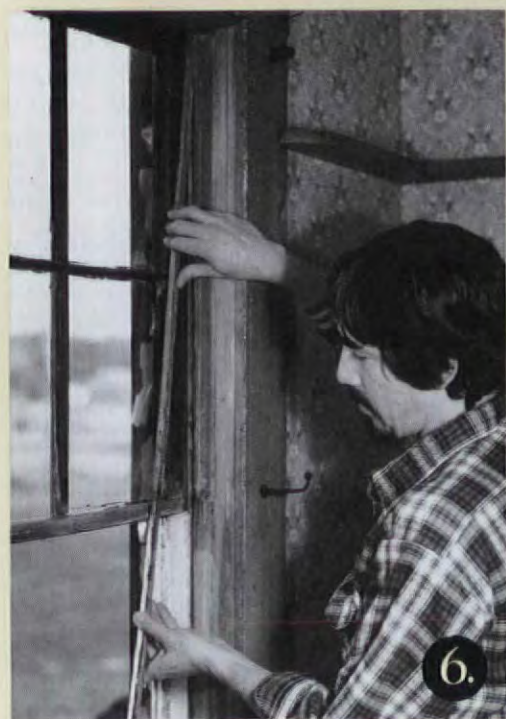
past the stool and swing the edge out clear of the frame (figure 4). If the sash is counterbalanced by a weight-and-pulley system, it's often easiest to secure the weight first by pulling it to the top of the pocket, then either knotting the cord or slipping a nail through the chain right at the pulley. Chain or cord can then be disconnected from the sash without fear of losing the weight in the wall cavity.

**3) Remove parting bead** — To loosen the parting bead that separates the upper and lower sash, grab it near the bottom with pliers and gently start to wiggle it out of its channel. As the bead loosens, work up its length and guide it carefully around the weather stop on the bottom rail of the upper sash (figure 5). Once the bead is nearly free of the channel (figure 6), be careful to slide the notched top (if any) out of the upper frame (figure 7). Parting beads are slim pieces of wood which often suffer in the course of pulling sash, usually at their mid-points. Beads that break (or have been previously broken and reinstalled as-is) can either be repaired with glue or replaced entirely with new stock.



**4) Remove upper sash** — Before removing the upper sash, determine how it is held up. Sashes that are not counterbalanced may be permanently fixed in place with a full stop strip nailed to the frame stile, a stop block nailed





6.



7.



8.

below the sash, or the sash may simply be toenailed to the stile. Hardware such as patent sash holders are also common, but may not be obvious after years of non-use. We found interesting-looking sash stop catches on the upper sash that used an iron pin to hook into the stile (figure 8). Once the sash is freed, it can be dropped below the top of the frame and swung out for removal like the bottom sash. Afterwards, install a temporary insert of plywood to fill the opening, one that can be reused from window to window as you pull and replace sashes. Panels can be lightly secured by using drywall screws — easily removed with a battery drill. Take advantage of the empty window at this stage to prep the frame and sill for painting. Check the working surfaces for paint buildup that can cause binding and make major repairs (such as replacing deteriorated sills or framing) if indicated.

I take pulled sash back to my shop for reconditioning, where I can hold them firmly in a small bench clamp. Holding the sash solidly greatly improves the effectiveness of operations such as scraping and planing, and frees both hands to do the work. Another idea is to anchor the sash to any flat work surface with a stop and wedges (figure 9). This setup can be locked or released with just the swing of a hammer, and easily accommodates variations in sash size. Before touching any paint, I take notes on historic colors and paint layers and put on a safety respirator (both paint and glazing compound can contain lead). Then I begin the reconditioning process:

**1) Remove paint** — Dry scraping is a viable paint-removal method for the small, complicated surfaces of wood sash, especially where the paint is already failing badly. I use a traditional hook scraper for sash faces, scraping with rising grain (much like planing) to avoid damage to the wood, and sharpening the edges frequently with a mill file. If the interior side of the sash requires

## II. REMOVING PAINT & PUTTY

scraping (usually due to moisture condensation deteriorating the paint), I work the muntins with a homemade scraper filed to match the curve of the muntin profile (figure 10). The last step is to sand all surfaces to be repainted with 120-grit open-coat paper. This procedure not only removes any remaining loose paint, but it also cleans away dirt and loose wood fibers, and prepares a sound, stable surface.

**2) Remove glazing putty** — Loose or crumbling glazing compound will yield readily to a putty knife, but otherwise it can be hard as rock and a real headache to remove.

Caustic paint removers will decompose linseed oil-based putty if given enough time, but I find heat tools soften stubborn putty much faster. I use a heat gun when I don't have to worry about preserving paint or glass, and a heavy soldering iron if I'm only digging out small spots. If the project involves extensive putty removal from many panes, I use an electric putty softener, an L-shaped tool that is wired with a heating element.



9.



10.



After paint and glazing problems, loose joints and warped meeting

rails are the most common forms of deterioration I see in wood sash. Fortunately, there are effective treatments for both. It is possible to perform these repairs with the glass still in the sash, but this approach does risk breaking the glass. This is especially true if clamps are applied to the sash (and more so if the glass has been replaced since the damage occurred). For these reasons, I usually remove glass before starting repairs, particularly old panes that I am trying to preserve.

### Loose Joints

The typical wood sash in 19th- and early-20th-century houses is made of an outer frame joined at the corners with mortise-and-tenon joints. Before we removed the sash from the window, we could see  $\frac{1}{16}$ " to  $\frac{1}{8}$ " gaps and peeling paint in the lower joints of several Taylor House sash. Later, when the sashes were out of their windows and the glass removed, the sash frames would rack slightly, confirming our suspicion. Loose joints are caused by water penetration, typically where muntins meet the bottom rail in upper sash, and at the lower frame joints in lower sash. When paint cracks at these joints, water enters and causes the paint to peel. This allows more water to enter, which swells the wood. When the wood dries, it shrinks leaving an open joint that admits even more water. As the cycle repeats, the joint widens even further and water accumulates, eventually resulting in wood decay.

Here's the procedure I follow for regluing loose or open joints in wooden sash:

**1) Clean** — Scrape loose paint away from the joints and clean old paint and putty out of the joints with a thin knife blade.

**2) Soak in epoxy consolidant** — Epoxy consolidants are syrupy liquids that permeate porous or decayed wood and then harden (see "How to Use Epoxies," May/June 1989 *OHJ*). First mix up only as much consolidant and hardener as you can use in a short time, blending the ingredients thoroughly. Then apply the consolidant to the joints using a narrow-spouted bottle, returning to each joint for more applications as the epoxy soaks in (figure 11). The goal is to cover all the interior surfaces of the joint and saturate any decayed wood. For consolidants to penetrate deeply and be effective, all wood must be dry.

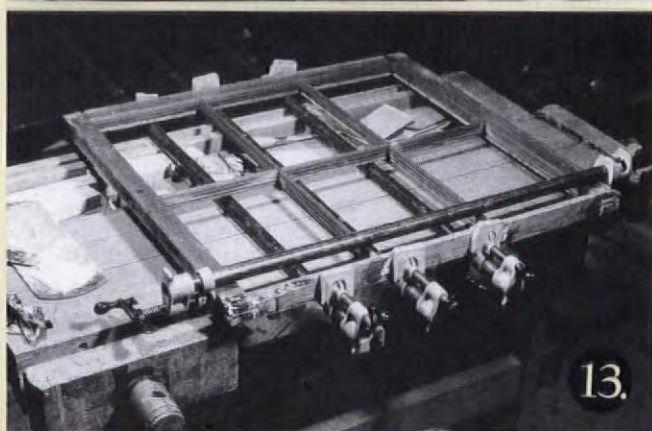
**3) Fill gaps with epoxy paste** — Epoxy paste is consolidant combined with powdery fillers in order to give it a "mashed potatoes" consistency. When hardened, this mixture has working characteristics and flexibility similar to that of wood.

On a flat board, mix a little consolidant in with some of the epoxy paste to thin its consistency. Work the thinned paste into the loose joint from all three sides, using a putty knife. Then continue to fill the joint using some of the thick paste, thereby forcing the thinner mix deep into the joint (figure 12). The goal is to completely fill the joint with epoxy paste.

## III. FIXING FRAMES

**4) Clamp** — If necessary, close the joints with bar clamps (figure

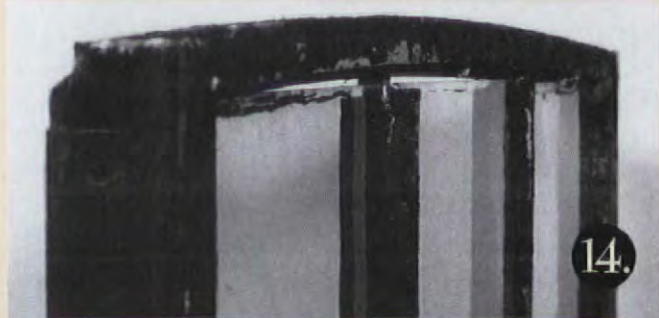
13). Only slight pressure is needed; overtightening can break the sash. Work on a flat surface and make sure the sash is flat and square as you clamp. Let the epoxy cure overnight.



### Bowed Meeting Rail

The bottom rail of the upper sash — the meeting rail — was bowed or warped on many windows. Misalignment of a sash meeting-rail latch is an early indication of a bowed rail, as is a gap between the muntin or the lower edge of the glass and the rail. This gap, though, is not always apparent if the glass has been replaced. Warp in a lower meeting rail is caused by sunlight and water. Ultra-violet rays pass through the glass and deteriorate first the paint





14.



15.

and then the wood fibers. Water from condensation on the living-space side of the glass contributes to the deterioration. Eventually, these forces warp the wood.

If the bowed rail is flexible enough, it can often be pressed back into place. Evaluate the flexibility of the rail by setting the sash on a bench, bowed rail up (figure 14). Try pressing the rail back in place using only hand pressure. If it returns most of the way to its original position, without putting too much stress on the rest of the sash, the rail can be repaired.

**1) Apply adhesive** — After filling frame joints with epoxy paste (as described in the "Loose Joints" procedure) but before clamping, treat the muntin-rail joints with consolidant to act as a primer. Then apply a very thin mix of consolidant and epoxy paste to act as an adhesive (figure 15). Work the epoxy into the joints with a putty knife, and by working the bowed rail up and down.

**2) Clamp** — Clamp the meeting rail in place using bar clamps positioned across the frame from the meeting rail to the top rail. Use at least two clamps. Tighten the clamps until the bow disappears, sighting along the meeting rail to make sure it is straight. Don't overtighten or another part of the sash may break. After setting the meeting-rail clamps, add another clamp to draw the sides tiles together and pull the frame joints up tight. Be sure the sash is flat and square. Let the epoxy cure overnight. Then, remove the clamps and trim away excess epoxy with a sharp chisel.

Making minor wood repairs is a very likely phase in sash reconditioning. Two typical conditions that showed up in several of the Taylor House windows were 1) decay in the top or bottom rail of lower sash, and 2) splitting of the weather stop in the upper-sash meeting-rail weather stop (usually caused by trying to force the window open). Repairs also made use of epoxies:

**1) Prime** the surface with a thin mixture of consolidant. Let the epoxy soak in and harden.



16.

**2) Work** epoxy paste well into the broken surface to assure coverage and bond (figure 16).

**3) Clamp** on a plastic-covered piece of thin board to create a form (figure 17).

**4) Fill** the damaged area with epoxy paste to slightly more than the original volume; allow to harden.

**5) Shape** the epoxy down to the original form using a plane, chisel, or rasp (figure 18). "Cheese grater"-type tools (such as Stanley Surform products) may also be handy for removing excess epoxy and roughing out the repair. Epoxy fillers can be sanded and painted just like wood.

## IV. MINOR WOOD REPAIRS

**6) Repeat** steps 4 and 5 if necessary to achieve the

final form. Once the repair is finished, be sure to clean all hardened epoxy out of the glazing dado, especially at joints where it may have oozed out during clamping.



17.



18.



Muntins are thin strips of wood moulded on inner edges and rabbeted on outer edges to hold the glazing in the sash (figure 19). Usually, they intersect each other with tight fitting, precisely cut joints. One of the advantages of this type of construction as far as restoration goes is that the individual parts of the sash can be replaced if they are damaged. Muntins often decay when the outer glazing falls

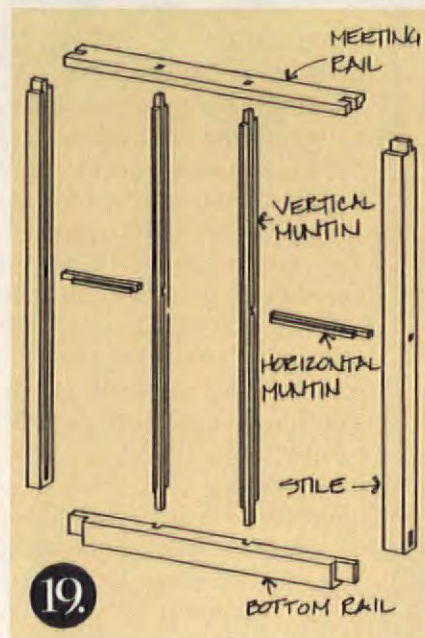
## V. MUNTIN REPAIRS

out, or they're split by open latches on the lower sash.

### Getting Ready

To replace a damaged or broken muntin, begin by removing the two panes of glass which border it. (Bear in mind that you may wind up taking out all of the glass in the sash to keep from breaking it.)

The best muntin repairs duplicate the profile of the original muntin



down to the smallest detail in the mouldings, appropriate where the goal of the project is to preserve historic character or where the window is highly visible. If you have a lot of muntins to repair and authenticity is a requirement, it may pay to have the stock made at a custom woodworking shop. Muntin stock that exactly matches the moulded profiles of the sample piece might require a \$75 to \$200 setup charge, plus \$1 to \$2 per lineal foot to make the stock. However, practical and effective repairs can be made with stock that is properly sized yet less faithful to the moulded profiles. Such an approach is appropriate when cost is important or when the sash is seldom seen up close (as with cellar or barn windows).

You can make your own less-authentic stock if you have a table saw and the skill to cut wood accurately. Sash parts are not very large, so they must be milled to close tolerances — typically, no more than  $\frac{1}{100}$ " — so you'll need a vernier caliper to measure small sections with precision. Use the same species of wood as the original sash, for instance, white pine, yellow pine, redwood, or mahogany. Always select the wood for straight grain and heartwood. Grain that slopes results in weak muntins.

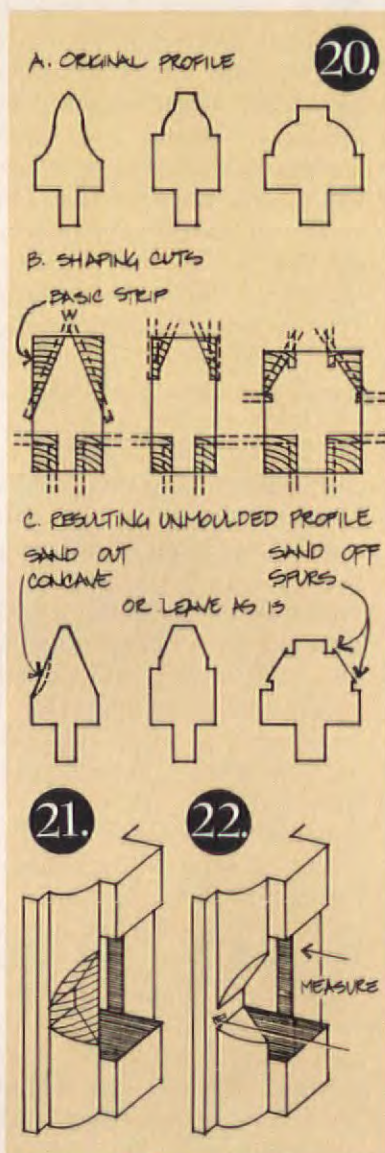
Set up the saw with a smooth-cutting planer blade and a table insert that fits close to the blade. Be sure to use push sticks and spring-type hold-downs to guide the wood through the saw — you don't want to have your fingers anywhere near the running blade when cutting these narrow parts. Test each saw setup for accuracy.

First cut basic, rectangular strips to the overall dimensions of the muntin's cross-section. Cut plenty of extra pieces that will be needed for testing setups, practice pieces, and so on. Then make the shaping cuts. I usually cut the rabbets next, then follow up with the bevel and edge cuts needed to rough out the moulding profile (figure 20). The trick is to make the cuts in an order that leaves enough of the outer surface of the basic strips to allow the subsequent cuts to be made safely and accurately. The more you cut away, the less there is to guide the passes through the blade. Touchup planing or sanding will complete the profile to the desired level of accuracy.

### Installing the Muntin

Usually a sash doesn't need to be disassembled to install a single section of muntin, as is the case when I replace a short, horizontal muntin in the center of a six-light sash. First, I remove the broken muntin (which has short tenons on both ends, which fit into the mortises in the vertical muntins) and clean out the mortises. Next, I use a very fine tooth saw and sharp chisel to trim away a small triangular section of the interior moulding next to the mortise (figure 21). This provides room to slide the new muntin into place. Then I cut the new muntin to length, measuring to the side of each mortise to determine the length (figure 22). Once the new muntin is cut to length, I trim the moulding with a sharp chisel to form a bevel that meets with the triangular section previously cut in the muntin.

To set the muntin in its home, I slide it into both joints at once from the exterior side of the sash. I like to make this a "press fit" so the part holds itself in place by friction during gluing (using an epoxy adhesive meant for wood). To get this fit, I trim the length with a sharp chisel.





# HISTORIC WALLPAPER

When my father, who worked in demolition in Philadelphia during the 1940s and '50s, tells me stories of the mansions they routinely demolished, I confess that I listen with the same sort of fascination for tragedy which helps sell supermarket tabloids. After these grisly tales, I mop my brow and feel relieved that I was born into a more civilized era that respects the historic value and high level of craftsmanship in old buildings. Yet after extensive conversations with Elizabeth Kaiser Schulte, senior conservator at Philadelphia's Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, it becomes clear that the definition of what is "historically valuable" is still evolving. Or, to put it differently, we aren't there yet. Schulte's love is wallpaper, and she explains that even after home restorers painstakingly repair their oak mantelpieces and clawfoot tubs, many of them still indiscriminately tear off valuable wallpaper. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. Schulte says there is an increasing understanding of the value of old wallpapers — historic and otherwise — as well as an appreciation for the artistry of their design. That understanding manifests itself as a growing interest among homeowners to preserve their historic papers in cases where they still exist.

**W**allpaper has been around for centuries. The Chinese have used it in some form since 200 A.D. The tradition in the West, however, dates to the 1500s. Decorative papers first served as a less-expensive substitute for wall-covering materials such as leather, tapestry, and fabric. These early papers were printed in black ink with single-relief-cut wood blocks; when colored, they were done so by hand. By the end of the 18th century, paper stainers had perfected the use of multiple wood blocks (hundreds in some cases) to produce polychrome papers. These were rag papers fashioned from individual paper squares that were glued together in long strips prior to printing. The advent around 1840 of a relief-printing machine and the production of paper in a continuous roll allowed for the



## *With Digressions on its Restoration, Removal and Archiving, etc., etc.*

by Martin H. McNamara

manufacture of machine-printed paper. This made wallpaper available to a much broader range of consumers (although hand-printed papers continued to be produced throughout the 19th century, as they also are today). Along with innovations and demand came changes in materials and design. By the late 1800s, less expensive papers were made of ground-wood and straw, and the thick, opaque colors associated with hand printing were thinned and chemically altered to hasten drying time. Styles continued to reflect those of other design arts.

### Is Your Paper Historic?

Whatever course a homeowner plans to take in regard to his or her wallpaper, the first question to ask is, "Is my paper historically important?" This is a worthwhile consideration even for those who feel certain that they want to remove their paper because of aesthetics or deteriorating condition. Wallpaper, like historic textiles, may tell a minor story of little relative value, yet there is also the possibility that it can tell a very important story and be worthy of preservation. According to Gail Winkler, co-author of *Victorian Interior Decoration*, "Wallpaper is such an ephemeral thing. It's torn off and covered over with such little regard, that anything that is old and reasonably intact should be considered rare." And particularly if the paper is original to your house, no matter that a million rolls were produced, it's valuable for the context in which it appears.

### On the Paper Trail

Clearly, the odds are in favor of your wallpaper being machine produced. If the paint is thick, you probably have a hand-printed paper — and in most cases a more valuable one — whereas signs of graininess or streaking probably means the paper was machine made. To find out for sure, do a little detective work — there is an array of sources a homeowner can consult. The primary source book for learning about and identifying wallpaper is *Wallpaper in*



*America* by Catherine Lynn (Barra Foundation/Cooper Hewitt Museum, W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., New York). Another good volume is *Wallpaper for Historic Buildings* by Richard Nylander (The Preservation Press, Washington, D.C.). Agencies that conserve wallpaper are another route. In Philadelphia there is the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts; in Andover, Massachusetts, the Northeast Document Conservation Center. Both organizations are willing to guide homeowners who want to determine the condition and historic significance of a paper. Institutions that collect historic wallpapers also exist, such as the Athenaeum in Philadelphia, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in Boston, and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York City. Additional sources are local historical societies, museums, libraries, branches of the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and your State Historic Preservation Office. And for those seriously interested in the subject — generally speaking, professionals — there's a Lee, Massachusetts, newsletter called *Wallpaper Reproduction News*. An excellent volume for locating all these and other sources is the *Landmark Yellow Pages*, published by The Preservation Press.

### Assessing Wallpaper Condition

Once you've learned a little bit about your paper, it's time to assess its condition. Damage or deterioration breaks down into two general categories: problems a homeowner can treat to some degree and those which require professional help. For the purpose of this article, we provide guidance in restoring a paper intended to remain on a wall, but you should recognize that more often than not a paper's deteriorating condition will require it to be removed and conserved, something best done by a professional. Problems a homeowner can do something about are small areas

of paper detachment and loss, dust, cobwebs, surface dirt, and small areas of paint loss. Problems that a homeowner should not reasonably expect to be able to repair include water or other types of stains, large areas or "bubbles" of detachment, detachment due to cracked or crumbling plaster and large areas of lost paint, oily dirt, insect damage, and flaking or "friable" (chalky or dusty) paint.

Note that even when these signs of deterioration do not exist, if there is any chance that the wallpaper is valuable, a conservator should be consulted before any attempts to restore the paper begin. Elizabeth Schulte explains that many problems can be eliminated or improved by a conservator, whereas the typical homeowner does not have the equipment or the skill to do more good than damage. "Anyone can mend a tear in a jacket, but it's a question of what that mend will look like," says Konstanze Bachmann, paper conservator at the Cooper-Hewitt. Schulte adds that she spends a lot of time undoing the "restoration work" of nonprofessionals.

The likelihood of having valuable paper is slim, but they exist. If you do identify such a paper, one which you would like to conserve but can't afford to, you may want to explore the possibility of exchanging reproduction rights with a wallpaper company in return for the reproduced paper. It's not going to be an alternative for most homeowners, but it has been done. Another option: Offer to donate the paper to a collecting institution that will agree to remove it for you.

### Restoring Wallpaper

If you've decided to go the restoration route yourself, it is crucial to first understand that no efforts can return a paper to its original condition. The best that you can hope for is to stabilize the



Two examples of wallpaper problems most homeowners cannot address: insect damage (top) and bubbles of detachment (bottom).



Restoration of this c. 1870s frieze (left) lifted ash and dirt, resulting in an astounding brightening of colors. But a section of the same frieze (above), discovered in an attic trunk, demonstrates the vibrancy of the original red pigments forever lost.



paper — stop or slow deterioration — and to make cosmetic repairs that will improve but not necessarily transform its appearance. Again, homeowners should only do work on papers that are *not* of intrinsic historic value; those should be addressed by a professional conservator, because anything you do to the wallpaper involves the risk of further damage. The following steps are suggested as the least potentially harmful, but even these could worsen a wallpaper's condition.

**Cleaning:** Don't wash wallpaper! In fact, avoid using any sort of cleaning solutions, as well as chemically treated dust rags or anything wet or damp. To clean wallpaper, use the brush

attachment on a vacuum set on low suction, and gently vacuum the paper through a piece of soft, nonabrasive material, such as Dacron mesh (available in fabric stores) or flexible fiberglass screen (found in hardware stores). You can also use a soft, clean, dry dust rag to remove any insect webs, cocoons, and what Schulte delicately calls "accretions" — fly dung. The issue of insects and other pests is an important one. Schulte says that she has seen entire areas of paper eaten away by silverfish or rodents and suggests calling an exterminator if these pests seem to be a problem.

If wallpaper is flaking or chalking,

even vacuuming should be avoided because it could cause further damage. As for deeply embedded dirt, a vacuum will be of no help at all. One case in point is when coal dust has settled on wallpaper — a common problem in homes once heated by coal. There are not a lot of alternatives for homeowners trying to remove this sort of ingrained dirt. One possibility is to surface clean with a white vinyl eraser or an eraser pad, such as Scum-x or Opaline (available from art-supply stores). Schulte says that the problem with this approach, apart from the enormous labor involved, is that an eraser may have different effects over an entire room. Dirt may come off well in one area and not at all in another, leaving mottled-looking walls.

For these reasons, this type of cleaning will be most effective in reducing heavy grime accumulation in discrete areas. If you do want to attempt a large wall surface, first do several unobtrusive test patches.

**Reattachment:** If a paper has become loose at an edge, but all or most of the paper is still intact, it's possible to reattach it to the wall, although you run the risk of staining. For this reason you'll want to use a very thick wheat-starch or methyl-cellulose paste (available at local paint and wallpaper stores). A thin paste, like that first used in hanging the paper, may discolor the piece that you're reattaching, as well as stain the nearby area. Under no circumstances should you use white glue, rubber cement, or pressure-sensitive (cellophane, masking, etc.) tape to reattach the paper; it will only cause further damage and make future conservation more difficult.

Mix the paste to a medium consistency (say, of yogurt) and spread a thin film on the plaster; never apply paste directly to the paper itself. Press the paper onto the plaster using white paper towels, which will absorb paste that escapes at wallpaper edges without transferring dyes. Small amounts of excess paste can be dabbed away with a cotton ball.

Then smooth the paper with your hands, a plastic spatula, or rubber brayer (available at art-supply stores), starting at the center of the piece being reattached and moving toward the edges. Let the newly pasted area air dry or direct a hair dryer on low heat over it.

If small pieces of paper are missing, you may consider painting the surrounding plaster a related



**Top:** A fiberglass screen serves to protect old wallpaper during the vacuum-cleaning process. **Above:** After repasting a wallpaper section, excess paste may be dabbed off with a white cotton ball. **Right:** discrete areas of lost or flaking paint being inpainted.





color which appears to extend the paper, using water color or acrylic paints. If a large piece of paper is missing, another option is to search your closets, behind radiators, or in other hidden spaces of the house for a patch that you can remove unobtrusively to cover the bare spot. The difficulty here is that the colors of the paper you find may be less faded than the piece to which you are adding it, and, of course, you need to match the pattern precisely.

**Inpainting:** Wallpaper is a printed medium and if there are discrete loss areas due to flaking paint, you can fill these in by hand, a process called "inpainting." Matching colors probably will be the greatest challenge, because even one that appears similar may not be quite the same once it is applied, in part because the paper is probably dirty (even though it may not appear that way to the naked eye). Do a test patch first. You also should expect the paint to age and react to environmental conditions differently than the paper does.



With inpainting, Schulte strongly affirms the Mies van der Rohe maxim: "Less is more."

The goal is to apply the least amount of paint possible for the maximum effect. The eye does a lot to compensate for slight differences between old wallpaper and new paint. Like a Seurat painting, the brush strokes will blend from even a short distance to form a coherent whole. This explains why filling in a few areas of loss can have a fairly profound effect in giving a paper a look of completeness again. One point which Schulte says she cannot stress enough, however, is to "never inpaint papers of historic significance"; again, in this case she rec-

ommends contacting a conservator. She also advises to observe great care not to paint over a design that is already there. Schulte cautions that it is tempting to do so to make it look "nicer," but the more you cover, the more you undermine the value of the paper.

For inpainting you don't need anything more than an appropriate-sized paintbrush (0-000) and ground-pigment watercolor or acrylic paints. You can also use pastels or pastel pencils; these are easy to work with but won't hold up in high-traffic areas because they tend to smear. Stay away from oils, oil crayons, felt-tip markers, or watercolors with dyes in them: All of these are generally less expensive, but they fade much too quickly.

### Maintenance

Like any other valuable furnishing, wallpaper should be treated with care. You wouldn't treat your Tiffany windows carelessly or smear caustic chemicals on a mahogany highboy, yet such abuse happens frequently to wallpaper. Whether you have a historic or reproduction paper, there are a number of things you can do to prevent deterioration: Be careful when polishing furniture nearby that the cloth does not rub against the wall. Keep an eye out for insects and pests, and regularly clean away webs with a soft clean cloth or brush (do not vacuum regularly, however). Examine paper for mold or mildew during hot weather and gently lift it off with a cotton swab. (You may also want to install a dehumidifier or turn on air conditioning.) And avoid abrading the paper with furniture — chairbacks, for instance — or marring it with candlewax, fingerprints, or anything else that can stain.



*Fragments of a classical frieze, pieced together, were all that Zina Studios had to reconstruct the design of this 19th-century paper.*

## Where to Find Reproduction-Wallpaper Companies

### • Carol Baker Designs

RD 1, Box 1079, Dept. OHJ  
Panton, VT 05491  
(802) 759-2692  
(also see "Restoration Products")

### • Bassett & Vollum

4350 N. Council Hill Rd., Dept. OHJ  
Galena, IL 61036  
(815) 777-2460

### • Bradbury & Bradbury

Box 155, Dept. OHJ  
Benicia, CA 94510  
(707) 746-1900

### • Brunswig & Fils

979 3rd Ave., Dept. OHJ  
New York, NY 10022-1234  
(212) 838-7878

### • J.R. Burrows & Co.

Box 1739, Jamaica Plain Stn., Dept. OHJ  
Boston, MA 02130  
(617) 574-1795

### • Classic Revivals

1 Design Ctr. Pl., Ste. 545, Dept. OHJ  
Boston, MA 02210  
(617) 574-9030

### • A.L. Diament

Box 230, Dept. OHJ  
Exton, PA 19341  
(215) 363-5660

### • Gracie

979 3rd Ave., Dept. OHJ  
New York, NY 10022  
(212) 753-5350

### • Christopher Hyland

979 3rd Ave., Ste. 1708, Dept. OHJ  
New York, NY 10022  
(212) 688-6121

### • Charles Rupert Designs

2004 Oak Bay Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Victoria B.C., Canada V8R 1E4  
(604) 592-4916  
(also see "Restoration Products")

### • Arthur Sanderson & Sons

979 3rd Ave., Ste. 403, Dept. OHJ  
New York, NY 10022  
(212) 319-7220

### • Scalamandre

950 3rd Ave., Dept. OHJ  
New York, NY 10022  
(212) 980-3888

### • F. Schumacher & Co.

939 3rd Ave., Dept. OHJ  
New York, NY 10022  
(212) 415-3900

### • Richard E. Thibaut

706 S. 21st St., Dept. OHJ  
Irvington, NJ 07111  
(201) 399-7888

### • The Twigs

5700 3rd St., Dept. OHJ  
San Francisco, CA 94124  
(415) 822-1626

### • Victorian Collectibles, Ltd.

845 E. Glenbrook Rd., Dept. OHJ  
Milwaukee, WI 53217  
(414) 352-6971  
(also see "Restoration Products")

### • Waterhouse Wallhangings

99 Paul Sullivan Way, Dept. OHJ  
Boston, MA 02118  
(617) 423-7688

### • Zina Studios

85 Purdy Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Port Chester, NY 10573  
(914) 937-5661

### • Zuber, Inc.

979 3rd Ave. Dept. OHJ  
New York, NY 10022  
(212) 486-9226



## Removal and Archiving

If you choose to remove a piece of the paper for archival purposes, the first thing you should do is take color photographs of the paper — be sure to capture a full repeat — while it is still on the walls, so a complete record exists of how it appeared in the house. These photos can then be included as part of the archive. According to a technical leaflet written by Catherine Lynn, "old papers will often come right off when a spatula or palette knife is slid under them because the old glue will have dried out and lost its adhesive qualities." A plastic spatula is generally better than a metal one, because it's less likely to tear the often fragile paper, and a tool that is thin and narrow has less chance of sending telegraphing cracks through the paint. Find a place where paper is detached, and move *upward* to prevent the paper from rolling down. Remove at least an entire repeat of the paper pattern so you have a complete record of the image.

Some papers still may be firmly attached to the plaster. A little moisture, however, should be sufficient to soften old paste enough to remove paper intact. Lynn recommends "a small, hand-held steamer, such as those sold for home-and-travel steaming of clothes. Choose a steamer with a head that produces a line or point of steam."

Begin at a loose corner and direct the steam at the paste. Avoid wetting the paper whenever possible, although you may have to steam the paper itself if there are no areas of detachment where you can begin. Lynn also recommends using a piece of wire window screen, with the edges well taped, to support the paper as you remove it. The ideal situation is to have one person steaming the paper and another standing by, ready to catch it.

In many cases homeowners will find that they have multiple layers of paper. It's easiest to remove them as a single piece, and then separate them; don't be surprised, however, to find that underlayers are in poor condition. Steaming is the preferred method of separating multiple sheets. You can, however, soak papers to separate them, laying them in a large, flat pan of

lukewarm water. As the paste softens, gently slide a wire screen under the top layer as a draining tray for separating papers. After the paste has soaked off, spread the papers on blotter paper, waxed paper, or aluminum foil.



*The centuries-old technique of wood-block printing polychrome wallpapers is still practiced by some companies.*

After removal and separation, you will want the proper housing for your wallpaper. It is best to store paper between acid-free cardboard or tissue in a folder or portfolio made of a stable or inert material — polyester film or acid-free cardboard or paper. Many of these materials are available at art-supply stores. Lynn suggests treating wallpaper samples like fine prints and matting them in four-ply mat board. They can then

be stored for safe keeping in Solander boxes, which are sold through library-supply houses.

## Reproduction Papers

If your paper is not salvageable or the pattern not to your liking, you might consider a reproduction paper. Today, there is a very wide array of papers to match the period of your house and perhaps even the original paper. Paul Duchscherer of Bradbury and Bradbury Wallpapers in San Francisco says that the designs for their papers are documented from old wallpaper-pattern books, papers they have gathered from historic houses, or fragments which have been sent to them. Bradbury and Bradbury uses a silk-screening process to produce their papers; other reproduction papers are machine manufactured, and some are still produced with wood blocks. Many of these papers are available at wallpaper stores and through mail order; a list of firms specializing in reproduction papers is on page 39. Manufacturers such as Zina Studios in Port Chester, New York, will custom-reproduce a paper based on the design already in your home. This route, however, can involve considerable expense, particularly for a small area. So if you don't have that money to spend, and your paper is in reasonably good shape, take a second, more admiring look at your old wallpaper.



*This neo-Grec roomset by Bradbury & Bradbury is patterned after c. 1887 designs by the Audsley brothers, architects, of London and New York.*



# HANGING

# WALLPAPER With NETTING

by Linda Whitehead

**H**anging wallpaper on wood-plank walls so that it will look good and last is a uniquely old-house problem. Fortunately, this problem can be solved by using a historically appropriate technique: netting. Also called sheeting or canvassing, netting provides an even surface on which to hang wallpaper by stretching a layer of fabric over the board surface of the wall, and holding the fabric in place with small tacks.

You may have discovered original netting — looking a lot like loose-weave muslin or cheesecloth — on the back of old wallpaper. During our restoration work here in Oregon, we frequently find netting in houses dating from about 1850 right up to the 1930s. Usually it appears on walls constructed of rough-sawn, random-width boards, although netting also has been used over log walls (with huge spaces left under the paper) and even on ceilings. Indeed, early builders sometimes let the fabric and paper alone serve as a ceiling: They would stretch the fabric across naked joists and secure it with tackheads that were cushioned by leather washers.

Early wallpaper manuals show that there was more than one way to put netting on a wall. For instance, in *The Paper-*

*Hanger's Companion* (1856) James Arrowsmith described a sophisticated process for canvassing over battens, which not only creates a smooth surface but also protects the paper from dampness in the wall by providing an air space between the wall surface and the paper.

The method required 3" x 5/8" wood battens to be attached along the top and bottom of the wall, around doors, windows, and other obstructions, at two-foot intervals across the wall and at right angles in each corner. These were secured with plugs at the edges of the wall only. Lengths of canvas sufficient to cover a full wall were backstitched together into one large piece and then stretched and



*Newspaper was often used as an underlining for wallpaper but provided little protection for the paper as boards expanded and contracted.*

tacked to the battens along the perimeter. Further helpful hints included removing the selvages so they don't cause ridges, using tinned tacks to prevent rust, and heating the canvas before a fire so it would stretch better. The manuals of other practitioners called for gluing strips of brown kraft paper over the rows of tacks (to hide the heads), sizing the fabric with a mixture of size and whiting (to fill the fabric pores and prevent wallpaper paste from adhering the netting to wallboards), or tacking down a paper lining first (which was a second-best solution intended for those folks who couldn't afford whiting.)

Netting in the 1990s is a simpler process that uses readily available materials, but the benefits are the same. The fabric



*If the old wallpaper pulls off relatively easy, it's likely you'll find netting such as this adhered to the back.*

All photos by Linda Whitehead





*If you want to provide a record for curious historians and restorers of a future time, you can place new netting over smooth, secure remnants of old paper.*

bridges irregularities in the wall surface and allows the wallboards to expand and contract without tearing the wallpaper. When we occasionally find wallpaper hung without netting, such as that glued directly to wallboards (or to newspaper which was glued to the wallboards), the paper is torn at nearly every crack between boards. We have never encountered old netting that could actually be restored to a fresh, paperable surface, because after many years the fabric becomes too fragile to work with. Netting can easily be replaced in kind, however. The effect of new paper over



*Although traditional netting fabric (left) was of a fairly loose weave, standard unbleached muslin (right), which is readily available today, meets all the requirements for netting.*

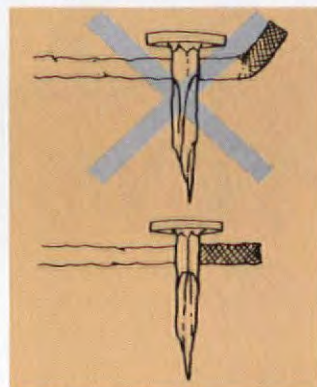
new netting is not only pleasing, but it also retains the handmade character of the room in a way which the perfection of sheetrock cannot be expected to match.

### Preparation and Preservation

Generally, the first step in putting up netting is to get back to bare board walls. First, remove all old coverings and pull or drive home all protruding nails and tacks. Your wall will be dotted with numerous tacks from previous nettings, but resist the temptation to remove them — it's an unnecessary and time-consuming operation. You can also leave the threads of old fabric which cling to the tacks, but you should first make certain that all the old tacks that

are left in place are flush against the wall.

The only place where you may need to remove all tacks is at baseboards or around window and door casings. Because the netting tacked on your walls years ago was carefully secured at these points, the tack buildup can be impressive, leaving few untacked spaces for you to fill. You can remove some of these by easing a sharp chisel under the heads and prying them loose. (There are hand tools made for this purpose, but we find that they only work where tacks are not nailed tightly.) The baseboards and casing themselves need not be removed.



*Place tacks as close to the selva edge as possible to prevent the edge from rolling up under the paper.*

The exception to the "bare boards" requirement occurs when you have examples of wallpaper you would like to preserve as part of your house's history. Although netting should not be expected to safeguard old or valuable wallpapers, using it over the common production wallpapers found in most houses is a good way to leave a "paper trail." Because new layers of netting and wallpaper do not have to be pasted directly to old paper, they can be removed at some point in the future, leaving the old paper intact enough for a historical reference.

From a preservationist's point of view, if you cannot leave any paper samples on the wall you should consider making a photographic record and saving some remnants. Sometimes a wallpaper sample will have the manufacturer's name printed on the selva. Old newspapers, commonly used in the papering process, may also give you an idea of the age of the work (if not an actual date). Evidence like this is worth saving and will continue to provide information in years to come. We have even found dresses that were taken apart and crudely sewn together into a flat piece of netting. Artifacts such as these might be donated to a museum if their age and quality warrant it.



*Heavy tack build-up, common at baseboards and ceilings, should be thinned to allow space for new tacks.*



## Materials and Tools

The netting fabric to look for is light- to medium-weight, unbleached cotton muslin, available in most fabric stores. Be sure to get 100-percent cotton, not a polyester blend, and be sure the muslin is not pre-shrunk (more on why later). I find prices vary from 89¢ to \$2 a yard for 45"-wide fabric. In the past, I have been able to buy a loose-weave muslin close to what appears on many old walls, but for the project shown here I used common muslin.

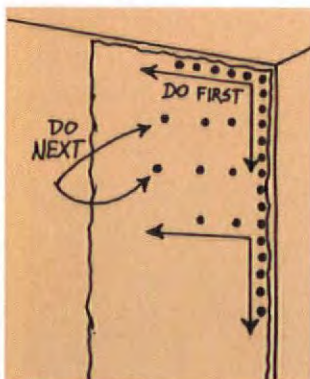
Calculate the yardage necessary as if calculating for wallpaper using either a 36" or 45" width, depending on which size muslin you purchased. (The minimum overlap between lengths of fabric is about 1/2".) Inquire about discounts if you are netting a large room; some fabric stores offer price discounts for purchase of a whole bolt of fabric (about 25 yards).

Netting is held in place with carpet tacks — small nails with big heads and chisel-shaped points. Remove a couple of old tacks to see what size was used in the past. (They're usually about 1/2" in length.) Old tacks were often tinned to prevent rust spots on the paper surface. Today, it still pays to specify rustproof "blued" tacks. Look for them at stores specializing in fasteners, screws, or upholstery supplies. (For mail-order tacks, try Mohawk Finishing Products, 518-843-1380.) I recently found them at a cost of 89¢ a pound.

Netting is tacked up easily with a magnetic tack hammer, available in well-equipped craft or hardware stores for under \$10. These hammers are magnetized on one end of the head so that the tack will cling to it; the other end is non-magnetic and wider for driving in the tack. With this tool you can smooth and stretch the fabric with one hand and implant the tack with the other. Be advised, though, that developing an accurate aim takes a fair amount of practice. Starting a tack with your right hand while holding a tiny fabric corner with your left hand can leave you feeling like a human pincushion after the first few tries.



*When netting a room, position tacks as needed to keep the fabric smooth, avoiding cracks between boards. Plan fabric runs so there are no horizontal seams (which can buckle or fail).*



*Following a tacking pattern such as this reduces the chance of dimples and wrinkles in the netting surface.*

## Hanging the Netting

Once you have assembled the necessary tools and materials, begin tacking by starting the width of the fabric at the top of the wall. After making sure that this horizontal cut edge is straight, tack it down closely for a few inches, spacing tacks about 1" to 3" apart. Next, start to tack down the finished selvage edge on the right-hand side, spacing tacks about 4" to 6" apart. When tacking selvage edges, position the tack so that its point is driven as nearly as possible into the very edge of the fabric. If the tack is placed in from this edge, the bit of fabric beyond the tack may curl up, which will cause a bump to form under your wallpaper. Then go back up to the top of the wall and continue to tack further across the material at the cut edge, keeping an eye on the positioning as you go.

After you have gone about one to two feet in each direction, add some tacks in the field of the netting, lightly stretching the fabric beforehand to make

it smooth. Tacks here and in all interior areas can be about 8" to 10" apart, but careful patterns are not necessary. Add extra tacks as needed to hold the fabric smooth. Afterwards, finish tacking the remaining length of the top edge and fill out the field as far down as you have tacked the right-hand selvage. Secure the left-hand selvage last.

Continue along the rest of the netting by working down the right-hand selvage, across through the middle of the fabric, and then finishing with the far selvage. When you reach the bottom of the wall, tack as closely as at the top. To add another length of fab-



*Netting can be used on ceilings and angled walls as easily as on vertical surfaces. Lap fabric runs a minimum of 1/2", covering tacks along the selvage edge of the previous run.*





*For better corner results, lap two pieces of fabric at the break point rather than attempting to span the corner with a single strip.*

ric, start the new piece as before but lap the new selvage edge at least  $\frac{1}{2}$ " over the edge of the previous piece. (Wider overlaps are no problem.) The tacks and selvage of the new fabric should entirely cover the just-finished work so that only one row of tacks will be exposed. Repeat the tacking sequence as with the first piece. As you work, watch closely for old nails. These often go unnoticed until they appear as unpleasant protrusions beneath otherwise smooth netting.

Removing new tacks once they are fully set is nearly impossible to do without damaging the muslin. One way to avoid this problem is to hang sections of fabric without completely nailing the tacks home. Then, if you discover that changes need to be made in fabric alignment or anchoring to eliminate wrinkles, tacks are easily removed and rearranged. If it turns out all your precautions were for naught, simply finish nailing in the tacks and move on.

### Room Corners

There are at least two different ways to hang netting in corners. One is to wrap a single piece of fabric across a corner and tack tightly in both directions — an approach that I have found is not the best. In my experience, it is difficult to tack the corner well enough to hold the netting in place reliably, especially once it becomes taut after shrinking. Rather than a crisp corner, the result is usually an air space under the fabric, which won't adequately support the wallpaper and which could result in a hole in the new paper after a slight poke.

My choice for handling corners is to first complete tacking the last length of fabric on one wall as closely into the corner as possible (tacks 4" to 6" apart).

Next, I cut the length of this fabric so as to leave a couple of inches that continue around to the adjoining wall. This strip is left free and untacked. Then, I start a new length of fabric on the next wall, running the selvage edge again down the corner so that it covers the loose overlap from the other wall. Last, I tack down the corner along this selvage (tacks about 4" to 6" apart again) and continue on the new wall with the rest of this piece.

### Shrinking and Wallpapering

Try to keep the fabric as straight and smooth as possible as you work, but don't worry about pulling it extremely taut — this isn't necessary, and can cause stretching and dimpling (especially near tacks). You have not taken pains to purchase 100-percent cotton muslin just because you are a natural-fiber enthusiast; the reason is that the final step is to shrink the cotton muslin. Lightly apply water with a spray bottle or sponge following each section of netting or when the entire room has been completed. Almost immediately the material will shrink noticeably and become very tight. One turn-of-the-century household manual talks about applying the fabric damp to achieve a surface "as tight and well-strained as the vellum head of a drum." I have found that moistening the fabric after it is tacked provides just as suitably taut a surface and makes tacking much easier.

Finally, wallpaper is hung on the netting much like it is on a conventionally prepared wall. Difficult spots may occur at baseboards and around window and door casings

where old and new tack build-up can make a slightly bumpy edge, but you can purchase tubes of extra-sticky adhesives from wallpaper-supply stores. Called border and seam sealers, they can work well for these areas. Wallpaper freshly applied to netting may show more initial bubbles than is common when working on, say, a plaster wall, but these will disappear as the paper dries.

The finished wallpaper job, if well pasted and carefully cut to meet the trim, should appear quite presentable as well as historically accurate. Of course, looking across the paper you will be able to detect some of the irregularities from netting tacks and board surfaces, and there won't be the machine-smooth surface that results from wallpapering over sheetrock or even plaster. However, rather than being a problem, these "imperfections" will contribute significantly to the historic character and charm of the room.



*After having been well tacked and shrunk taut with a light application of water, the netting received its new paper, and both are now ready for a long life.*



BY JAMES C. MASSEY & SHIRLEY MAXWELL



# AMERICAN HOUSES IN OLD ENGLISH STYLES

"English domestic architecture is the most delightful in the world," pronounced prominent American architect Aymar Embury in 1919. And, snuggling into their Old English houses, thousands of his countrymen and -women agreed.

**O**f all the picturesque, informal styles that piqued American homebuilders' imaginations in the first third of the 20th century, perhaps the most popular ones were those rooted in English traditions. Leaving aside the ever-dominant American colonial and Georgian precedents (which were, of course, mostly British themselves), homeowners on this side of the Atlantic could choose from a broad range of English revival architecture based on medieval, Gothic, or Tudor buildings of the 15th through 17th centuries. Their houses bespoke old-fashioned coziness (the cottage), dignified prosperity (the manor house), or even ancient nobility (the castle), all the while keeping the solid comfort of 20th-century amenities.

While revival buildings of British ancestry appeared in the United States as early as 1876, with Great Britain's exhibition buildings at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, the style probably had little impact on its American audience at that point. Homeowners over here were caught up in the 19th-century phenomenon of the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles. Ah, but in the 20th century, and especially after World War I, the story was quite different. Revivals of old European and English styles flourished, reaching a peak in the 1920s and '30s (to eventually almost disappear under the onslaught of post-World War II Colonial Revivals, contemporary ranch houses, and split-levels). Although they couldn't hold a candle to the popularity of Colonial Revival, the English styles were more popular than the French or even the Spanish, and new Old English buildings were soon to be found in every part of the U.S.

Why this eager reception to architectural ideas that were not just old but foreign? For one thing, after the

*The picturesque aspects of the Elizabethan style are evident in this Washington, D.C., house with its half-timbering, mul-*

*tigabled facade, and large projecting chimney. Note the use of different building and finishing materials.*





First World War, America was engaged in a frantic burst of suburban building, as families in unprecedented numbers bought and built their own homes. Feeling perhaps a bit put off by the rush of the 20th century and a tad insecure about their place in the new social

seemingly unplanned informality. If an English dwelling of that period had any style at all, the style was most likely Gothic, based on medieval building principles developed from the 12th century onward. The emphasis on function insured that castles didn't look like cottages, and manor houses didn't look like castles.

One unifying characteristic among varied building types was the reliance on vernacular construction techniques. Cottages and even large manor houses were often "half-timbered," i.e., heavy wooden framing members were filled in with "nogging" of stone or brick and, often, covered with plaster or stucco. In smaller houses, the filling might be wattle and daub, a combination of small wood sticks and mud plaster. The term "Elizabethan" has sometimes been used as a blanket term for all half-timbered buildings, but the practice was used in other periods as well. Other common characteristics of the period included

steeply gabled roofs or, sometimes, Flemish gables (shaped, curved gables based on those seen in Holland), massive chimney stacks with multiple flues, second-floor overhangs, wide wooden verge boards with decorative carving, casement windows with many small glass panes set in leaded mullions of diamond or lattice design. Bay windows and oriel windows were commonly used to grab as much light as possible for the

dark interiors. The four-centered Tudor arch was a hallmark of the period, and heavy paneled wood doors, stiles and rails, possibly studded with nails, were common. For both manor houses and cottages, the building material might be of stone or brick. Heavy oak half-timbering was secured by mortised-and-tenoned and pegged timbers. As for the floorplans, the interiors of most manor houses and castles were based on the idea of a great hall that served as an

*Not all English style imports were cottages, as this grand house with crenellated roof in Convent Station, N.J., proves.*

order, the families were inclined to turn for validation to what they saw as timeless architecture, which was most often American Colonial Revival. But, with so many new builders and buyers, some of them were bound to want something a little different. Along with warm feelings toward our allies, the war had sparked an interest among Americans in English and European buildings. At the same time came an increase in the sophistication of both architects and their clients, largely because of easier access to ideas through books, travel, and even movies. England, as always, seemed a likely source for design inspiration.

In most English buildings constructed before about 1550, exterior appearance took a back seat to practical demands for close-at-hand building materials, tried-and-true construction methods, and functional plans. Haphazard additions and changes by the successive generations who lived in the buildings led to rambling layouts and asymmetrical massing — a picturesque and



*At Meadowbrook Hall in Birmingham, Michigan (1927-29), complex chimneys, decorated verge board, and aged timbers suggest another era altogether.*



all-purpose work, sleeping, eating, and socializing space. Large country houses were often built around a central court for security and, in fact, often served as fortresses as well, sometimes with the addition of crenellation (notched parapets that allowed archers and other defenders to ward off attack from hordes of invading soldiers).

But all that was history. What about the 20th-century houses that imitated these early buildings? Ground-hugging designs for small houses based on cottages were intended to create a cozy, homelike effect, and they generally succeeded. For the most part, they were carefully designed to at least *look* as if they were built of brick or stone — even though it was likely that their masonry veneers were applied over a modern wood frame. Cement-based stucco was also often applied directly over frame construction, and exposed timbers were likely to be only non-structural surface decorations. Stucco, usually in a gray-white color, was sometimes “weathered” to make it appear as if portions had fallen off of the wall, exposing the timbers and nogging beneath. Timbers were adzed and stained or even charred to simulate old woodwork.

**T**o step up the visual interest, the facade often featured textured surfaces and a mixture of several different facing materials: brick with stone trim at doorways, window surrounds and building corners, plaster (stucco), and wood, and, sometimes, ornamental cast-plaster panels or parging. The picturesque effect of brick walls was sometimes enhanced by laying unevenly sized bricks in a staggered pattern that mixed dark “clinker” bricks more or less randomly with regular ones. Gable-roofed, one-room wings that projected frontwards were perfect for entrances or living rooms and lent a picturesque air to the facade, while side-swept roofs (catslides) over entries were nearly a cliché. (This was a good location for such conceits, since it provided maximum stylistic clout while wasting a minimum of interior space.) Slate, tile, or composition roofs sometimes suggested thatching but sidestepped the potential fire hazard of the real thing. Genuine thatch roofs were sometimes used, however (and, in fact, continue to be available today). Shingles were laid in irregular patterns and varying colors in order to create visual interest. Ornamentation was taken just so far, however. Carved verge boards, no matter how historical, were



*Leaded casement windows and a Tudor arched entryway at the base of a catslide roof make this Coronado, Calif., house English Revival.*

rarely used on 20th-century houses. This was an era that not only counted the cost of unnecessary ornament, but also still blushed for the excesses of Queen Anne decoration. Irregular, projecting chimneys of stone or brick, with chimney pots and multiple stacks, were obviously useful as well as picturesque,

so almost every house had one, often on a front wall. The same could be said for big bay windows and oriels, preferably with lots of quaint little diamond-shaped or rectangular panes. Dormer windows, only slightly less frequently found than bays, might have shed, gable, or eyebrow roofs. Any outbuildings (garages were the most common ones) usually were designed to complement the house.



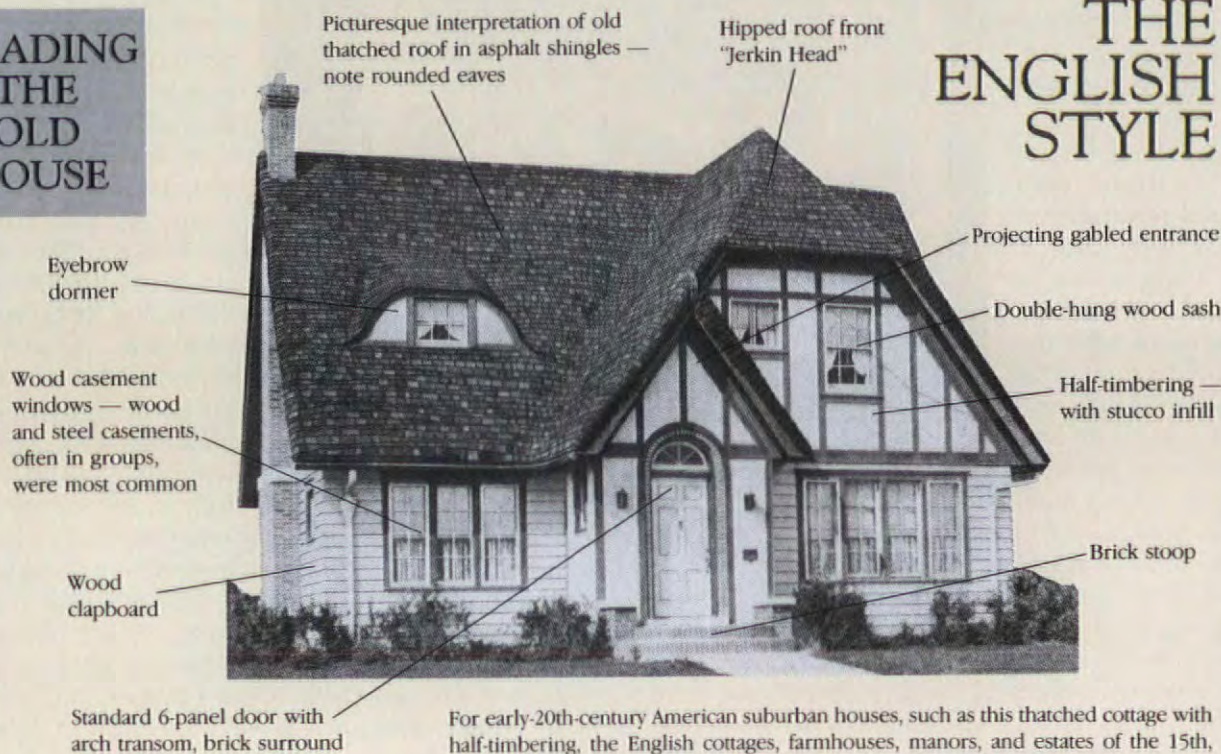
**Top:** This 1896 Montclair, N.J., house is more nearly American Queen Anne than English Revival. **Above:** Another early transitional residence, the Tilgman House in Madison, N.J. (c. 1907), is distinguished by its fancy brickwork, stepped gables, and symmetrical facade.



## READING THE OLD HOUSE

# THE ENGLISH STYLE

Source: 1927 *Home Builders Catalog*, Home Builders Catalog Co., Chicago & N.Y.



For early-20th-century American suburban houses, such as this thatched cottage with half-timbering, the English cottages, farmhouses, manors, and estates of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries provided a wealth of architectural inspiration.

None of these restraints necessarily applied to larger, high-style houses, however. A good architect might come up with something that hardly could be distinguished from a real castle or manor house, and, given the right client, the best architects often did just that. Architects who worked in the English Revival styles often practiced in other picturesque styles as

designed suburban or country homes for wealthy clients, some of which emulated parts of extant large manor houses or even castles in archeological detail. For the most part, however, the best of the American architects used the English styles as a springboard to their own creative reinterpretations, much to the enhancement of areas such as Philadelphia's English Village in Chestnut Hill and other early-20th-century trolley and railroad suburbs around New York, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, and a score of other major cities.

The English cottage style was prominently featured in ready-cut houses and plan catalogs, where it was highly regarded for its ability to deliver picturesque facades without sacrificing practical, if usually somewhat small, living spaces. But although the exterior of even small American houses in the English style were sometimes surprisingly accurate visual representations of the originals, interior layouts were strictly 20th-century creations. The plan nearly always attempted, sometimes very successfully, to fit modern convenience into a suggestion of a rambling

medieval plan. It also sought to tie the interior to gardens and yards, and french doors and large windows were liberally used. Examining floor plans of houses from the period gives ample evidence that times were changing and builders and architects knew it. Although most houses still had one-and-one-half or two stories, the one-storey plan was gaining in popularity, possibly



*All-vertical half-timbering, here on a home in Summit, N.J., is a common English Revival variant.*

well. Aymar Embury of New York; Wilson Eyre of Philadelphia; Cope and Stewardson of Philadelphia; Winslow and Bigelow of Boston; Frank Miles Day and Brother of Philadelphia; Ward Wellington Ward of Syracuse; and Smith, Hinchman and Grylls of Detroit are among the best-known names.

These architects made their reputations with artfully



under the influence of the bungalow. Nearly every kitchen had a breakfast nook off the kitchen. Both features are testament to the fact that almost all the housework is being done by Mom now (aided, it is true, by better kitchen planning and more electrical appliances). Breakfast rooms were found only in the most pretentious houses. Dining rooms hadn't disappeared, but there weren't many apologies when one end of the living room was put to use for family and company meals.

**A**s family life turned inward, toward backyard patios and basement recreation rooms, and outward, toward the ever-widening world of the automobile age, there was at least one largely unnoted architectural casualty — the front porch. Long the hub of social life, it died quietly, a victim of disinterest. But if one space was lost, another was gained: the garage. By the 1920s, the automobile had come to seem almost a member of the family. The kids could double up, but the car needed a room of its own, usually in a free-standing garage in the corner of the yard but sometimes in one attached to the house itself. (Interestingly, some architects of the period recommended temporary family housing in a "Garlow," a tiny three- or four-room structure that would revert to a two-car garage when the real house was finished.)

To offset all this modernity in the floor plan, the decorative scheme for the English house was likely to aim for a weighty effect in a medieval style with Renaissance overtones. It might start with oak wall paneling stained dark brown and extending from floor to ceiling. A bit of linenfold carving and lots of small panels, preferably with a few "secret" doors and recessed cupboards set into the wainscoting, would not be taken amiss. Then, naturally, there had to be a fireplace (or, better yet, several — couldn't let all those big chimneys go to waste) of stone or cement with elaborate carved jambs and lintels and ceiling-high overmantels. (Just to interject a note of reality, the openings, while wide, were probably smaller than in

the originals, since nobody was likely to be roasting a joint for all the king's men in even the largest suburban living room.) Libraries had considerable cachet, even in small houses, and appropriate bookshelves were heavy and substantial. Recessed window seats took ad-



*Large clapboarded dormers, such as the one on this Winchester, Virginia, house, made useful additions to steep-roofed buildings.*

vantage of bay windows and oriel. As for floors, the best were of stone. Failing that, plain wide boards or parquet in herringbone, checkered, or geometrical patterns gave a nice effect — or if money was really a problem, linoleum in an imitative pattern could fake it. Beamed ceilings with thick, dark, wooden or plaster beams (finished to look like wood) and sand-finished plaster or ornamental parge-work panels capped the whole thing off. Then, as now, ornamental plaster in Tudor designs, or even the beams themselves, could be purchased by the foot from architectural plaster companies. Suitable hardware for doors and cabinetry included wrought-iron H hinges and drop handles of brass or iron. Artificial light — and with all that paneling, light was needed — came from hanging center fixtures or wall brackets of wrought iron or in a dark bronze finish, often with bulbous center sections surrounded by scroll arms.

Castle or cottage, the English style fit neatly into the lifestyles and mindsets of early-20th-century Americans. Although its heyday is long past, there is no dearth of surviving examples, and, in fact, many a modern builder chooses to enhance a bland facade with a bit of tacked-on half-timbering — although rarely as well executed as that on even the smallest of the Old English houses of the 1920s and '30s.



*On this picturesque Washington, D.C., home, shingles are manipulated to suggest a thatched roof, and stone walls are exposed below artfully distressed stucco.*



# ADVENTURES IN STEAM

The heating contractor was about as frustrated as anyone I'd ever seen. We were standing in the basement of a circa-1920s, steam-heated house. He had replaced the boiler a few weeks before and was now having what I've come to call an Adventure in Steam Heating. He winced as the pipes hammered and sighed as water squirted from the air vents. We then spent the next hour or so figuring out what we were dealing with — this time.

**Y**ou've probably felt this frustration from time to time, if you have an old steam system in your home. There's no secret to making an old steam system behave, however; you just have to get to know it. A lot of the old systems ran on pure physics. This often makes them tough to troubleshoot because many of the old components had no moving parts — except for the steam and the condensate, that is — which means they'll last for a long, long time. It also means that there are things going on here that you can only see in your imagination.

An old-timer once taught me to ask these three questions whenever I was having an Adventure in Steam Heating:

1. What is it?
2. What does it do?
3. What happens if I take it out?

"If you can't answer all three of those questions," he said, "back slowly out of the boiler room and close the door quietly — before you wake it up!"

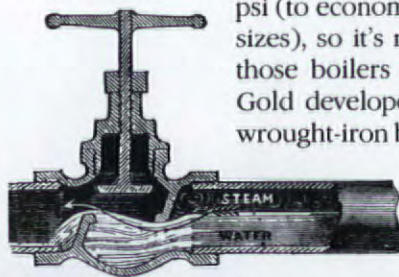
## STEAM-HEAT HISTORY

Good advice. You can't fix something until you know what it is and how it works, and when it comes to steam, knowing what you're dealing with can be difficult. Consider this. Between 1905 and 1930 more than two dozen completely different types of steam systems were dreamed up and offered to an eager public. In their time, they were often called "Vapor" and "Vapor/Vacuum" systems. They arrived in an orgy of invention, which seems to have fed on itself.

The heating industry was young and impetuous. Some systems became obsolete almost before they could be fully developed. But that didn't matter to their proud owners. That steam system was there for good as far as they were concerned. The thing that gives us fits nowadays is that most of them still are!

Steam heating takes advantage of the fact that water, heated in a boiler until it changes state and becomes a gas (steam), accepts an enormous infusion of energy without a rise in temperature. When contained in a system of plumbing, steam becomes an invisible carrier of heat that travels to the radiators, gives off this energy, and then returns to the boiler as condensate to be reheated. Popular steam heat started in 1854 with a New Englander named Stephen Gold who invented the first successful "one-pipe" steam system, a design where steam and condensate share the same radiator connection.

The mark of success in the 1850s was heating a house without blowing it up. You see, many of the early boilers left the basement rather unexpectedly, due to the fact that manufacturers' testing procedures were, well, let's say ... casual. In addition, the early heating men ran their boilers at pressures up to 60 psi (to economize on pipe and radiator sizes), so it's no surprise that many of those boilers went airborne. Stephen Gold developed and patented a small wrought-iron boiler with a cast-iron fire



*Different densities allow steam and condensate to flow in the same line.*

box that operated at very low pressure (which made it relatively safe) and a boiler that came equipped with some safety devices new to the industry. These features helped convince wary home owners that they should "give Gold a try." He also invented what folks came to call the "Mattress" radiator, a bulky but somewhat beautiful pair of iron plates that hung on the wall and



*"Path taken by the boiler" (1906) — a not-uncommon accident in the days before safe boilers.*

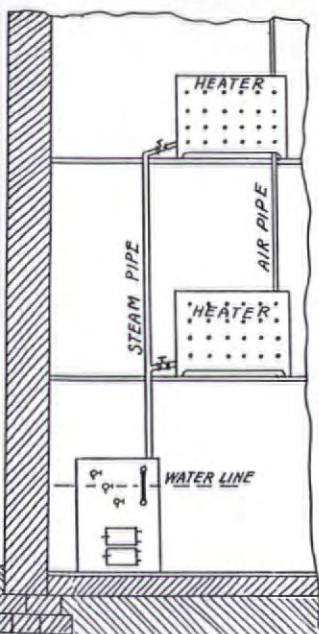
**BY DAN HOLOHAN**



# HEATING

received steam through a cylindrical valve.

The main drawback to the system was that Gold vented air from the radiators by running a pipe up through the roof, an extremely wasteful approach. However, because

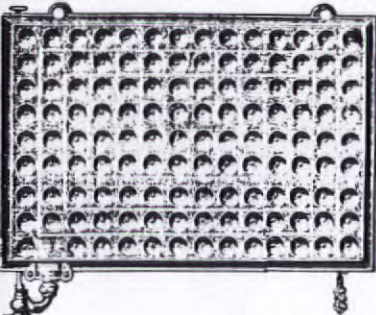


Gold's "one-pipe" system with air-pipe vents.

no one had invented a dependable air vent yet, he had few options. *All* steam systems have to be vented. Every time a steam system shuts down, it fills with air. On the next cycle, the steam has to push the air out again before the radiators can get hot. The pipes are never empty; when they're not filled with steam, they're filled with air. And because steam and air have different densities, the two can't mix. This is where air vents and radiator traps come into play. Early air vents were, at best, erratic. Their temperature-sensitive moving part was either a bi-metallic element or a composition-rubber post. In all cases, they needed constant adjustment to prevent spitting. "The

mop, bucket and screwdriver were never far from the radiator," was the remark of one early observer.

By the 1890s, Gold's mattress radiator had passed into heating history and was replaced by the cast-iron column radiators found in most of today's older homes. Steam systems, too, began to

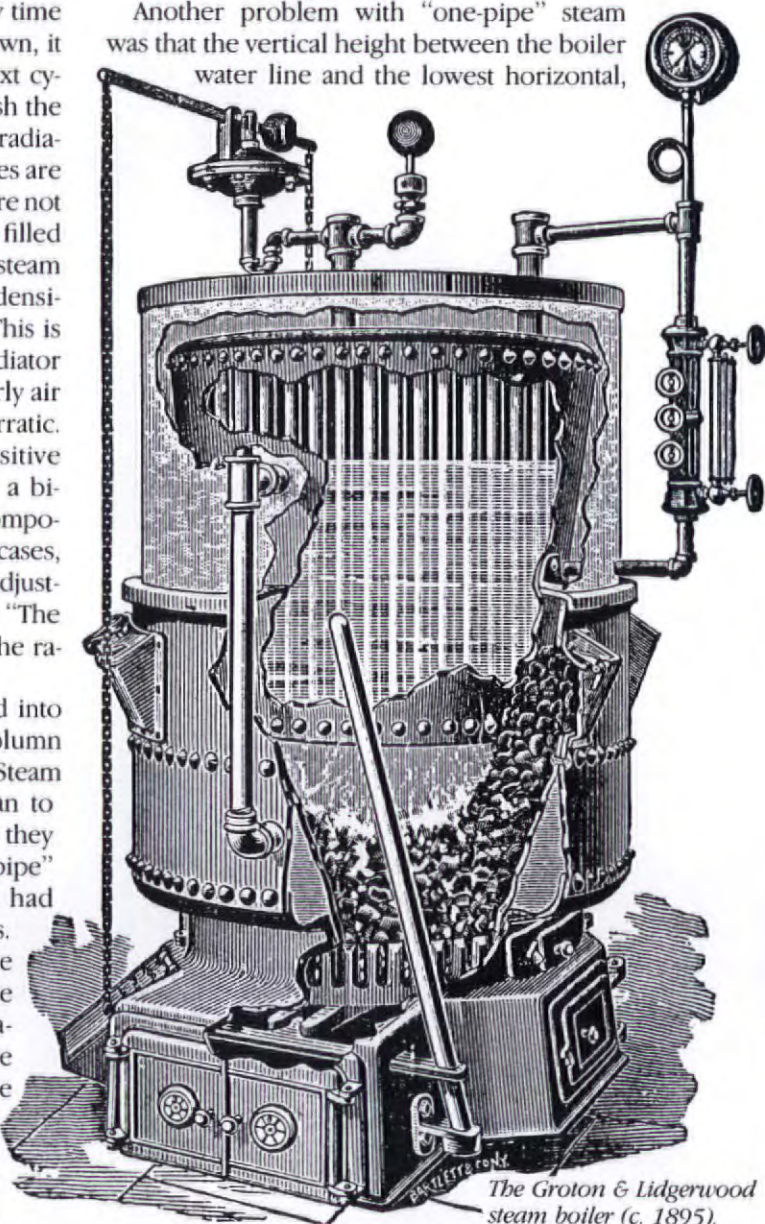


The "mattress type" radiator (1854).

look very much as they do today. "One-pipe" systems, though, had their shortcomings. To begin with, the counterflow nature of "one-pipe" radiators makes the size and pitch of the plumbing crucial if the returning water is to pass the incoming steam. When water and steam collided, the result was the loud, metallic ring

of "water hammer." Unfortunately, the geometry of some homes didn't allow for the ideal pitch, so instead of quiet heat, residents got banging pipes. In addition, you couldn't throttle the radiator supply valve in such a system; you had to keep the supply valve fully open. The only way to control temperature was to shut the steam off entirely or, more likely, open the window!

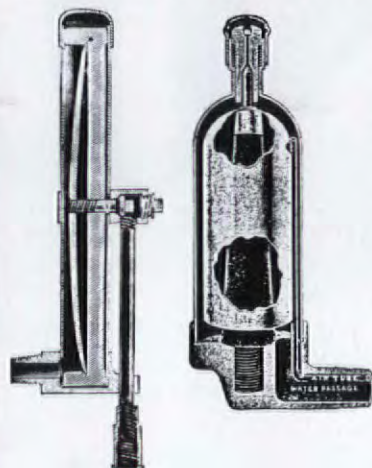
Another problem with "one-pipe" steam was that the vertical height between the boiler water line and the lowest horizontal,



The Groton & Lidgerwood steam boiler (c. 1895).



steam-carrying pipe had to be at least 28 inches. That's because the pressure exerted by this column of water and the "left over" steam pressure at the end of the main was needed to put water back in the boiler. If that vertical column was too short, water wouldn't return to the boiler



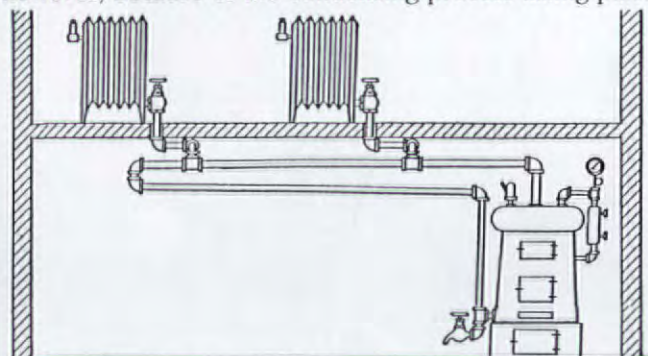
Some early air vents employed metallic strips (left). Modern vents (right) rely on a moving float.

and would, instead, back up into the radiators. In a similar way, if the steam pressure rose too high, water would back out of the boiler and flood the mains, causing water hammer in the system as well as a dangerous low-water condition in the boiler. Thus, it was important to keep boiler pressure low — a difficult matter in a coal-fired era, so the search for a truly reliable steam system continued on as the century turned. Eventually, heating engineers

tried to get around these problems by developing what became known as the "two-pipe, air-vent" system.

## TWO-PIPE SYSTEMS

Providing a second pipe for the radiator to work with was the beginning of what we today call "two-pipe" steam. In this system, the supply pipe is primarily for steam and the return is for condensate. But since there's no way to keep the steam from traveling across the radiator and entering the return, both pipes eventually wound up being charged with steam. So what we had here was a "two-pipe" system which operated as a "one-pipe" system in that both supply and return lines had steam and condensate traveling in opposite directions. The pressure on the return side was always slightly lower than the pressure on the supply side, however, because of the condensing process taking place



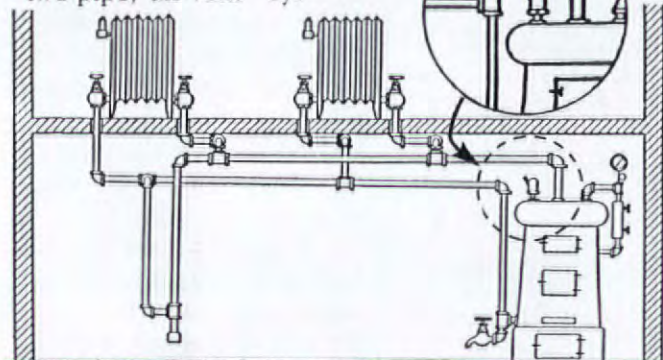
In basic "one-pipe" steam, each radiator has only a single connection to the system, and a vent at the opposite end.

in the radiator. This difference in pressure was what made the steam move from the boiler to the system.

That U-tube seal you see at the end of the steam main

also helped to maintain a difference in pressure between the supply and return pipes. It dipped down below the boiler-water line and remained filled with water. Since steam can't work its way through a water seal, the pressure on the supply side was always slightly higher than the pressure on the return side. This discrepancy in pressure established distribution. Naturally, the steam in both the supply and return lines moved toward the opened air-vents on the radiators because this point represented the lowest pressure of all: atmospheric.

But home owners continued to have problems with those troublesome radiator air vents. There didn't seem to be any way to keep them from spitting water all over the curtains and wallpaper, so the "two-pipe, air-vent" system also passed into heating history (although there are still many in operation today). Heating engineers, unable to beat the air vent problem, eventually decided to take the vents out of the rooms completely. Which brings us to this next development: an early Vapor system. As you can see, it's a variation on the "two-pipe, air-vent" sys-



"Two-pipe, air-vent" systems tried to dedicate the flow of steam and condensate to separate connections. Later designs moved the air vent from the radiators to the boiler (inset).

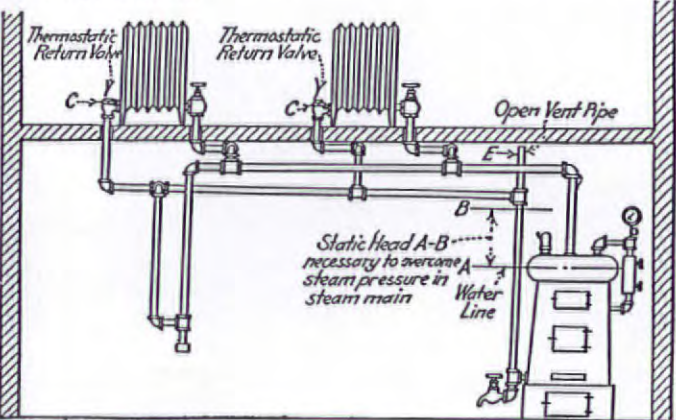
tem. The big difference is that the air vent has been moved to the basement where it can't cause any damage to the room furnishings. This central air eliminator was to become a characteristic of all of the Vapor systems.

If you have Vapor heating, you have one of these vents somewhere near your boiler. It's probably hiding up in the rafters. Look for it. If it takes a long time to get the steam up in your home, find that one basement air vent and replace it with a Hoffman Specialty #75 main vent. Often, that's all that's needed to balance the system and greatly improve fuel economy.

It was the introduction of the thermostatic radiator trap in 1905 which radically changed the development of steam heating. Suddenly there was a way to keep the steam on one side of the system and the condensate on the other. Steam traps allowed designers to get away from counter-flowing steam and condensate. A thermostatic radiator trap has an alcohol-filled bellows which remains open to air but expands and shuts when steam reaches it (see sidebar, page 53). With traps on the radiators, system designers



could now leave the basement vent wide open. Naturally, this increased the speed at which steam could move out to the system and went a long way toward balancing the heat distribution.



Radiator traps greatly improved "two-pipe" steam heating; the height of the water in the return line, however, became critical.

The problem, though, was that the thermostatic steam traps on the radiators isolated the "leftover" steam from the return lines. Now, the only force available to put the

water back in the boiler was the pressure exerted by the vertical column of water between the end of the return main and the boiler's water line. And that vertical column had to be 30 inches high for each pound of steam pressure produced by the boiler. There weren't many basements that could meet that requirement!

### KNOW WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING AT

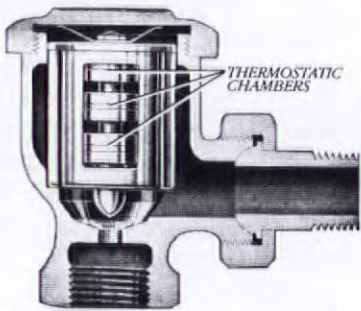
Special devices had to be developed to overcome this problem, bringing us to the Vapor and Vapor/Vacuum systems we find in today's older homes.

For instance, on the next page is an example of a typical Vapor system with a Boiler Return Trap — one of the most important of these devices. A Boiler Return Trap is a large cast-iron device that injects full boiler pressure directly into the return lines (downstream of the radiator traps) to help the returning condensate get back into the boiler. This steam pressure is added to the pressure exerted by the vertical column of water. Together, they overcome the boiler pressure and allow the condensate to reenter the boiler. It's an ingenious device that has few moving parts and lasts for years.

### FIXING AIR VENTS & RADIATOR TRAPS

**M**ost air vents fail because, over time, a crusty scale builds up inside them. If the air can't get out of the vent because of the scale, the steam can't get into the radiator. If you have a one-pipe radiator that's not heating properly, try cleaning the vent. Shut off the radiator supply valve and remove the vent by turning it counter-clockwise with your hand or with a pair of pliers. Boil the vent in white vinegar for a half-hour or so and then reinstall it on the radiator. Vinegar is an mild acid which dissolves scale (a base). If the vent still doesn't work after you've cleaned it, replace it with a new one.

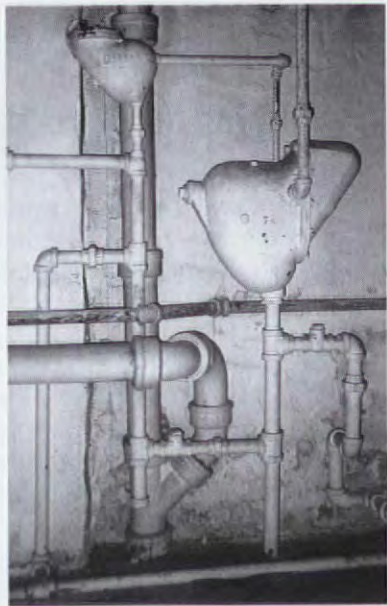
Radiator traps, like vents, also pass air. If a trap element fails in the closed position, the radiator will remain cold. If the element fails in the opened position, however, the radiator will heat but you'll have balance and water hammer problems in the system. To check radiator traps, try using a Tempil Stick. This is a special wax crayon that's designed to melt at a pre-determined point. Touch a 210-degree-F. Tempil Stick to the pipe on the outlet side of the trap. If the trap is working, the Stick will leave a waxy mark. If the trap element (or one nearby) has failed, the crayon will melt on contact. Tempil Sticks are available from some heating supply houses and from Big Three Industries of South Plainfield, N.J. You can rebuild most radiator traps, but fair warning, this can require patience and care. Turn off the system, let it cool, and then remove the hex cover with an adjustable wrench. The element screwed into the underside of the cover — and in some cases, the trap's seat — should be replaced. Some trap manufacturers still make repair kits (sold at heating-supply houses). Otherwise, try using a "Cage" universal repair unit made by the Barnes & Jones company (see suppliers list on page 54).



The No. 8 Hoffman Thermostatic trap.



Some manufacturers called the Boiler Return Trap an Alternating Receiver because it shifted steam pressure from the supply side to the return side of the system as needed. The most popular trade names were Hoffman, Dunham, and Warren Webster, although you can still find many other brands out there. The two check valves

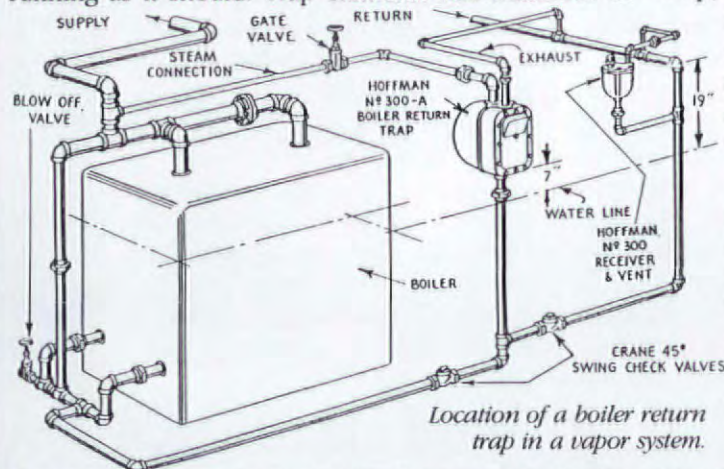


Boiler return traps are large, cast-iron components like the one shown right of center here.

at the bottom of the Boiler Return Trap are crucial to its operation. If they become clogged with sludge (as they will after years of service), the system won't work properly. These check valves are relatively simple to disassemble and clean, or they can be replaced with new valves (available at most heating-supply houses).

The same goes for the steam traps that are often found between the end of the steam main and the "dry" (above the boiler water line) return main. These steam traps — the same as those found on radiators — act as air vents, allowing air, but not steam, to pass back to the central air eliminator in the boiler room. Should the elements in these traps fail, steam will work its way into the return and stop the distribution of heat to the radiators. The result is a house that heats very unevenly.

As a general rule, you should change your steam trap elements every three to five years to keep the system running as it should. Trap elements flex hundreds of



thousands of times during the heating season and, after a few years, simply fail from metal fatigue. Improper trap maintenance leads to high fuel bills, uneven heat,

## SYSTEMS & SUPPLIERS

There were dozens of Vapor and Vapor/Vacuum systems. Names often appear on the major components on or around the boiler or on the radiator supply valve or return fitting. Here's a list of ones I've run into. So far.

- The Webster System of Vacuum Heating
- The Paul System
- The Van Auken System
- The Dunham System of Vacuum Heating
- The Dunham Return System
- The Dunham Home Heating System
- The Bishop & Babcock System
- The Eddy Vacuum System
- The Webster Modulation System
- The Broomell System
- The VECO System
- The Mouat Vapor System
- The Trane Vapor System
- The Vapor Regulator Company System
- The Moline Vapor/Vacuum System
- The Kriebel System
- The ADSCO System
- The Sterling Vapor System
- The Richardson Three-In-One System
- The O-E System
- The Hoffman-Equipped System
- The Morgan System
- The K.M.C. Vacuum System
- The Lytton Manufacturing Company System
- The Thermal System
- The Donnelly System

Here's a list of companies that specialize in replacement parts for steam systems:

**Meller Electric**  
2529 Atlantic Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11207  
(718) 385-6606

**Neuco, Inc.**  
5101 Thatcher Road  
Downers Grove, IL 60515  
(708) 960-3800

**Memphis Control Center**  
1063 E. Parkway So.  
Memphis, TN 38104  
(901) 274-1400

**Burke Engineering**  
9700 Factorial Way  
South El Monte, CA 91733  
(818) 579-6763


**Goodin**  
2700 North 2nd Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55411  
(612) 588-7811

**Barnes and Jones**  
P.O. Box 155  
Newtonville, MA 02160  
(617) 332-7100

and very noisy systems. If you own an old Vapor system, there is no way around steam-trap maintenance. It must be done.

If your heating contractor removes the Boiler Return Trap, say, during a boiler replacement, he must replace it with a condensate or boiler-feed pump and additional end-of-main steam traps. The pump is needed to provide pressure for the returning condensate. The traps are needed to stop steam from reaching through to the pump.

If you are replacing your boiler, be aware that parts for Boiler Return Traps haven't been available for more than 30 years. Still, if the unit is working, you might consider leaving it in the system to keep the overall expense down. That falls under the rule, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

But whichever way you decide to go, make sure your heating contractor is well versed in the "art" of steam heating before he takes the job. 

Dan Holohan operates a consulting firm that specializes in steam-heating problems: Dan Holohan Associates, Inc., 63 North Oakdale Avenue, Bethpage, NY 11714; (516) 796-9276.



# THE HOUSE ON 239 Warren Street

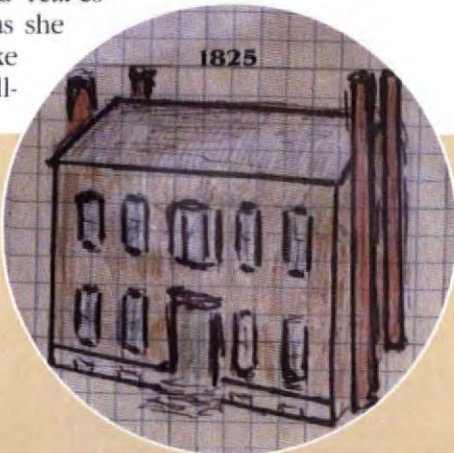
By 1982 I had turned 28, had a promising career, had saved about \$18,000, and had decided it was time to buy an old house. Actually, I had been waiting for this moment ever since I was 14. First came puberty, then an overwhelming desire to live in something older than me. Basically, I grew up in a real-life version of the Donna Reed family. But secretly, I wanted to be raised by Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations*, in an ancient, rambling house with a rotting wedding cake. I was a very strange child. Now here I was, all grown up and about to act on my dream of a young lifetime.

The cheap houses were out there. Every Sunday the newspaper would run ads for everything from broken-down shacks to broken-down "white elephants" (note the operative adjective, "broken-down"), all for less than \$40,000. I went to upstate New York and was held captive by a crazed real-estate agent as she tried to make me buy a fall-

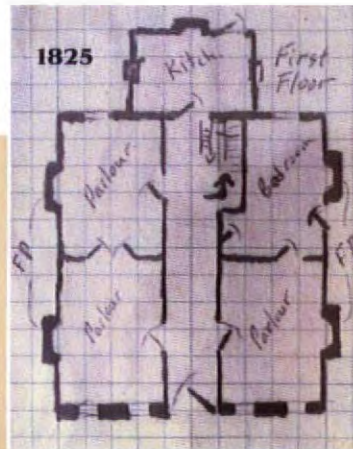
ing-down, five-room, pre-fab Thing ("all this for only \$38,000!"). And then I found Hudson, New

York — the town that time and real-estate development forgot. In 1982, Hudson was truly an old-house hunter's paradise. Every turn revealed yet another faded glory, another "noble ruin" waiting to be rescued. Down a somewhat shabby block near the main street, I discovered a brick building of uncertain pedigree called the "Dumont Apts." The house seemed to be Victorian, but it obviously had a center-hall floor plan and a sort of Federal shape. Those cornices and bays made it hard to figure. It had a handsome, sad, mysterious look about it. Perhaps there was a madwoman and a wedding cake locked inside!

The first thing I saw on entering was a couple of dead pigeons. "Nice touch," I thought. Peeling wallpaper, holes in the walls and ceilings, broken windows, dangling light fixtures, and wonderful Victorian woodwork greeted me next. There were heavy pocket doors with glass panes and brass



**1786**  
Lot owned by Joseph Barnard.



**1851**  
Henry I. Van Rensselaer in residence. Allen Bachman has tailor's shop downstairs.

**1860**  
Sold to John Poultnery, A.M.U. Express & insurance agent downstairs, for \$3,000.

**1852**  
Ellen McMany, maid.

**1856**  
Eliza Strong, maid.

**1864**  
Sold to Mary C. Barnard for \$3,500.

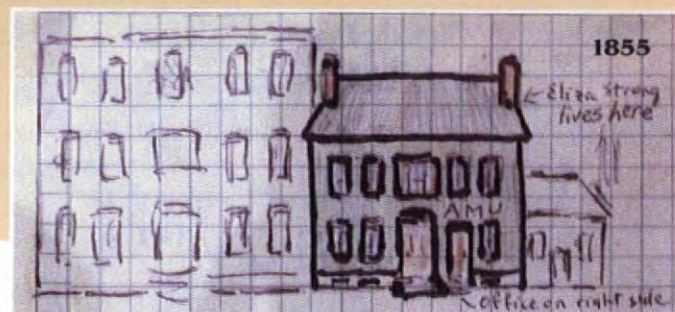
1785 1825 1830 1835 1840 1845 1850 1855 1860 1865 1870

**1825**  
House at 107 Warren Street (now 239 Warren). Probably a simple Federal house, free-standing, with four external chimneys and kitchen in back.

**1845**  
House divided: East side owned by Rachel D. Van Rensselaer and held in trust for sister-in-law Susan Barnard Van Rensselaer. West side owned by Susan's husband Henry I. Van Rensselaer (Rachel's brother?). Is this when the first business moved in? Second front door cut next to original.

**1855**  
Dr. Cook's mansion on left. Best's Clam House on right. Chimneys rebuilt internally.

**1865**  
Mary Barnard signs over to Francis A. Blanchard.



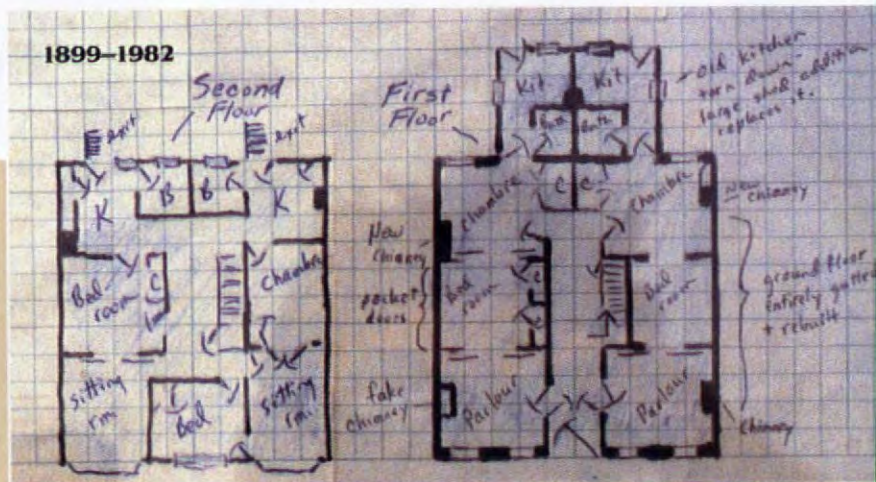


\$14,500 later and I owned the place. Now what? I had some vague idea that I would patch and repair, keeping as much material as I could, and bring the place back to the "original." But what was original? The house was shrouded in mystery, to which there were too few clues. Even the previous owner was no help. He thought it had always been an apartment house. And as to the age, all he could say was, "Oh, it's old all right, maybe even fifty years."

Cautiously, as I started my patch-job "restoration," I looked for clues to the house's earlier existence. The first floor had been divided up into two four-room railroad apartments, with kitchens and bathrooms contained in a large wooden addition in back. This arrangement certainly didn't seem original, but I was loathe to change it. However,

**I**nside the house, more clues lurked behind every wall. Pulling down a rotted ceiling, I found the framing for a staircase that continued into the basement. A bricked-up door partially disappeared behind a chimney, a closed-up fireplace peeked out from behind a wall. But no one discovery proved very revealing, until one day, I tripped over the clue — in a bank. There on a wall hung a property map of the 1870s, with every property line and building in Hudson carefully outlined and labeled with the owner's name. Although the street numbering system was different back then, I was able to make out my home. And there was what I had been looking for for two years, an owner's name: "F.A. Blanchard, 107 Warren Street." The past was coming into focus.

With a name to work with, I could make use of the materials in the local library, a repository for historical artifacts, documents, and books. One shelf contained a collection of city directories dating back to 1851. These listed residents' addresses as well as their occupations. In



**1882**  
Francis A.  
Blanchard dies.

**1874**  
Signed over to Jane  
Barnard Blanchard,  
with income going to  
Robert P. Blanchard.

**1892**  
Ball's Grocery  
moves in.

**1888**  
American Express  
moves out. Address  
changed from 107  
Warren to 239  
Warren.

**1899**  
Mary R. Blanchard Graves  
(organist, 136 Warren) sells to  
sisters Mary and Emma Rogers for  
\$2,500. Major renovation into three  
apartments by Panigot & Sons.

**1913**  
Wilson Hover,  
new owner.

**1873**  
Henry I. Van  
Rensselaer dies.

**1898**  
*Jane Blanchard dies.*



I've never been able to locate descendants of the Blanchards (their daughter Mary had two sons, William H. and Robert Graves — any Graves's out there?), but a few more recent former residents and neighbors have given me some information. I was told of the tenant so large he had to be buried in a piano box. And then there were the stories describing that mean old Mr. P., who always yelled at the neighborhood children. Three-hundred-pound T.R. (I changed the name to protect T.R.'s identity) revisited the house and offered to demonstrate with me the "good times" (nudge, nudge) had in his apartment, which has since become my bedroom. I graciously declined.

**T**he courthouse also became a wonderful resource. There was all sorts of great stuff there, ready to be explored. The 19th-century census records were the first stop. Back then, unlike today, people's names were included, so it was a simple matter to find the Blanchard household in 1875 and trace it back and forth. From 1845 to 1860, not only did Henry I. Van Renselear live there with his wife Susan (nee Barnard — do we see a pattern?) and three children, but there was also a maid named Ellen McManey, later replaced by Eliza Strong. Did these poor Irish girls live in that attic bedroom? No wonder it was so hard for Susan to keep help! The census also told me the approximate value of my "brick residence" (\$2,300 in 1851, \$2,000 in 1856) and gave me news of the neighbors. Houses first seemed to appear on either side of mine in the 1840s — Clancy's saloon on one side, and the private hospital/mansion (now remuddled into apartments) of Dr. Abijah P. Cook on the other. To this day, my property is defined as bordering that of the "late Dr. Abijah Cook." Since he was





born in 1808, he must be very late indeed.

Still, the original date of construction eluded me. The census records became indecipherable before 1845, so on I searched. I uncovered a property map showing how the founding fathers divided up the newborn City of Hudson in 1786, with what appeared to be my house lot being owned by Joseph Barnard. There's that name again. Probate records also were useful when it came to helping me sort out family trees and all those Barnards — however, no one specifically mentioned my house. Unfortunately, the old tax records had been destroyed in a flood.

**A**t long last, we come to what probably should have been my first stop in the records game, the title search. To be honest, those deed books rather intimidate me, and I still get all those guarantees and guarantors confused. Yet once I figured it out, it wasn't hard. Each deed refers back to the previous one, and the information I gleaned served to tie together the pieces that I already had. I found lots of Barnards, discovered that one of the American Express agents owned the house during the Civil War, and that the price remained around \$3,000 for over 60 years. The most curious thing I discovered was that in 1845, some Barnards and Van Renselears got together on a deed that didn't seem to make any sense: The property line for my 36-foot-wide house was described as going "westerly, 19 feet, ten inches, then southerly twelve feet, then westerly three feet eight inches, then southerly twelve feet, then westerly two feet ten inches, then southerly ..." etc. A different building? The next

page had a similar deed for a property that dovetailed into the first, creating as a whole my current lot size. I took the dimensions home and sketched them out to scale over a floor plan of the house, when it hit me: These people divided ownership of my building, and the property line went around the rooms they were claiming as their own. Susan Barnard Van Renselear had the east parlours, center hall, and front door. Her property line exactly delineated the space that would have been occupied by the staircase whose framing I found, and then proceeded around what is now just the ghost of the kitchen. On the other side, Mr. Van Renselear would have had to cut out a new front door — probably just at the spot where the marble string-course mysteriously turns to slate. The ghostly fireplaces that now disappear behind walls are centered in the vanished rooms. I looked again and saw that what once must have been my exterior chimneys (servicing these fireplaces) now are incorporated into my neighbors' houses. At some date, smaller, interior stove-chimneys had been built in mine. This double ownership would last only a few years, but

that peculiar deed actually provided the best evidence to the date of my house's early configuration.

All in all I had found lots of little pieces to a rather intricate jigsaw puzzle, which I assembled on a timeline to help me sort it out. The title search became too difficult for me before the 1840s, so I still don't have a firm date of construction, but I expect some day I'll be able to trace it back. What I've got is a line of ownership by Barnard women, all seemingly descended from that original Barnard who helped found Hudson, and who in 1786 bought the lot where my house now stands. Maybe it was his first residence, maybe it was built on speculation, maybe it was built as a present for some newlywed daughter and just continued to house Barnard women and their husbands. I look at the timeline and imagine 1845 — young Susan Barnard Van Renselear in ringlets and a dark, silk dress, trying to manage three children amidst the confusion of renovation as the first business moves into the front parlour. In 1861, John Poultney closes the A.M.U. Express Agency early so he and his wife, Gertrude, dressed in her

best hooped skirt and bonnet, can hurry down to the depot to watch the newly elected Abraham Lincoln as he passes through Hudson on his way to Washington, D.C. On the anniversary of the Great Blizzard of 1888, I think of old Mrs. Blanchard, widow of the ne'er-do-well "Professor of Music," as she sits in her shabby parlour, huddled close by the stove in an old black dress.

During the hysteria of the Spanish-American War, Mary and Emma Rogers hire the Panigot boys to do a wholesale renovation of their house into the Dumont Apartments and 13 years later sell it to an ordinary seaman named Wilson Hover for one dollar. What did young Mr. Hover do to deserve that? In 1950 the state police were raiding Hudson's red-light district and new owners took over the Dumont Apartments. They replaced hot air with steam heat and rented an upstairs flat to the very large person mentioned earlier. The 1970s saw a decline and abandonment and 1982 brought me along to try to rescue a house that may have never been a very happy home.

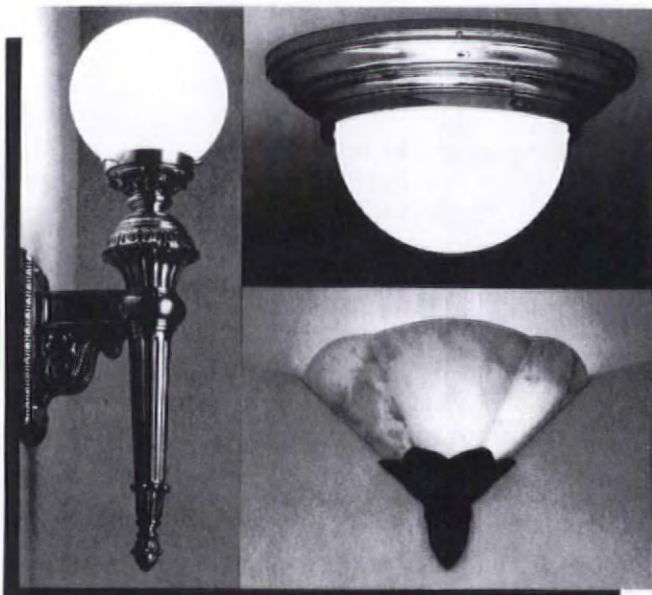
Working with limited time and resources, I tried valiantly to patch and repair, coaxing the old wreck into a comfortable, single-family residence. I reveled in the eclectic past of this house, never trying to restore it to any particular period, but rather bringing back all the various eras that the house exemplified. People would say, "You can't do that, it isn't period!" to which I would respond, "Which one?" This house is rich in "periods" and in human history as well, as my efforts at restoration and detective work continue to reveal.



239 Warren  
Street, looking to  
the 21st century.



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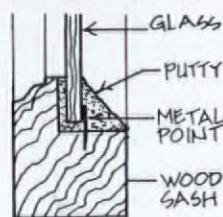


by Gordon Bock

# GLASS TOOLS

Window glass won't be a "pane in the neck" to reglaze if you use sharp tools and quality materials:

**1) Clean out the glazing rabbet** — Use a putty knife, old chisel, or heat tools (see "Sash Window Workshop," page 30) to remove all old putty. To remove broken glass, wear heavy gloves and try working over a barrel to catch the debris.



Putty seals the glass; points hold it in place.

## 2) Measure for new glass

Make the new pane  $\frac{1}{8}$ " smaller in width and length ( $\frac{1}{16}$ " for each side) than the opening in the sash. This loose fit allows for irregularities

and expansion.

**3) Cut new glass** — To cut a new pane, obtain a good quality glass cutter and single-strength glass (S.S.), suitable for most small panes. Work on a flat surface and hold the cutter

and dip the cutter tip in kerosene or light oil before each cut to lubricate it. Then draw the cutter across the glass with a straightedge and off the edge in one stroke, scoring a line. Don't press hard or go back to re-score the line. Never use a dull cutter; if in doubt, buy a new one.

Break the glass right after scoring by holding it at the edge between two hands and giving it a gentle bend. At the right instant, a crack will start and continue down the glass until it pops in two. Another technique is to tap the score on the opposite side of the glass with the ball end of the cutter. This should start a fissure that can be completed by lifting the glass apart. Narrow strips can be broken off with the notches on the

cutter or the wide jaws of glass-cutter's pliers.

**4) Backputty the sash** — First, prime the glazing rabbet with linseed oil so that the wood doesn't draw oil from the new putty. After this has dried, press a layer of putty all around the rabbet to create a seal behind the glass. Don't skimp on putty quality (traditional

putties are primarily linseed oil and whiting; modern compounds contain synthetics). Knead the putty in one hand to warm and homoge-

nize it before application with a knife or finger.

**5) Set the glass** — Press the new pane slowly and carefully "home" into the sash and putty, and secure it in place with metal points. Modern *push points* are designed for foolproof setting but with practice, old-time *triangle points*

handle just as easily and often hide under the putty better in old-house windows. Points are wiggled into the wood with a sharp screwdriver, putty knife, or chisel, one or two to a side — just be careful not to put pressure on the glass. If you run out of points on the job, cut your own from scrap galvanized sheet metal or tin.

## 6) Putty the pane

Lay more putty into the glazing rabbet (some folks roll it into a rope first). Then "run down" the putty to its finished bevel by drawing a putty knife across glass and sash like a plow. Work with a clean, polished knife and pure putty; dirt or impurities will cause the knife to drag or leave marks in the work. Copy the slope of the old putty (it should not extend noticeably beyond the inside muntin's edge). Dress the intersections of sides with a corner of the knife—like decorating a pie crust.



After scoring, bending with two hands snaps the glass.

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**Top:** The tiny wheel on a glass cutter (at left) does the scoring. **Left:** triangle points (being set) and push points. **Right:** "running down" putty for a finished bevel.

upright between the index and middle finger, notches towards you. Clean the glass thoroughly first (dirt interferes with the scoring process)





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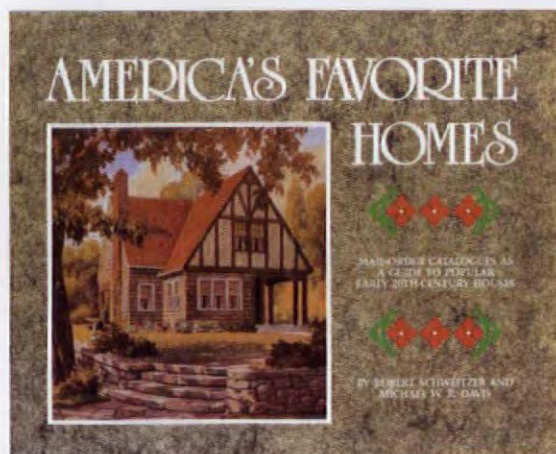
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## Mail-Order Houses

*America's Favorite Homes: Mail-Order Catalogues as a Guide to Popular Early-20th-Century Houses* by Robert Schweitzer and Michael W.R. Davis. Pub.: Wayne State University Press, 5959 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, MI 48202; 313-577-6120; 1990, 363 pages (12 color and 234 black-&-white illustrations). \$49.95, hardcover; \$24.95, softcover.

For nearly 50 years, America's pre-cut-house manufacturers supplied suburban settlers with practical, pleasant, economical housing — a sort of 20th-century equivalent of the log cabin. And they got no respect at all. Pre-cuts were too little and too new to be interesting — and they certainly weren't ARCHITECTURE. Then came Ward Jandl and Katherine Coles' excellent book on Sears' Modern Homes, and pre-cut houses took on a new luster. Now Robert Schweitzer and Michael W.R.

Davis have done a good deed by presenting examples from lesser-known Sears competitors. Besides Montgomery Ward and Aladdin (Sears' biggest rivals), firms such as Gordon-Van Tine, Lewis/Liberty Homes, Ster-

ling, and Mershon & Morley also flourished until the Great Depression and World War Two did them in. (The book glides lightly past East and West Coast firms such as Bennett and Pacific Homes.) Despite some organizational flaws, *America's Favorite Homes* deserves a spot in the libraries of small-house watchers. Ignore the blurred focus (there's a lot of unnecessary material) and go for the gold — this attractive, well-illustrated book has solid information you won't find anywhere else.

—James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell

## Restoring Old Furniture

*Discovering and Restoring Antique Furniture* by Michael Bennett. Pub.: Cassell, distributed by Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016-8810; 212-532-7160; 1991, 160 pages (36 color photos). \$29.95, hardcover.

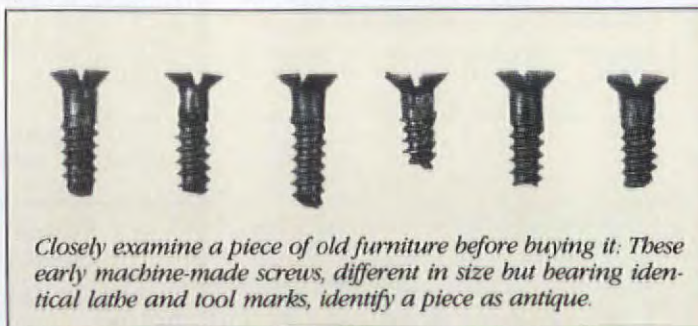
Michael Bennett, author of *Discovering and Restoring Antique Furniture*, clearly loves the old stuff. But his feelings stop short of the look-but-don't-touch reverence that characterizes the attitude of many buyers and owners (even though these same folks look at and touch their old

structural aspects will allow you to do both with more confidence.

To this end, the first chapters describe the traditional methods that were used to make old (primarily English) furniture. Bennett even covers the history of nails, screws, and the like. If some of this sounds familiar, it's all there, and it lays the groundwork for what follows.

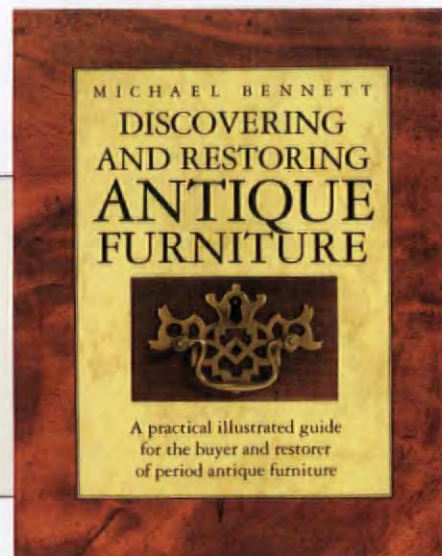
Techniques for repairing cabinetry and finishes comprise the heart of the book. This is where do-it-yourselfers will learn how to correct a wobble caused by loose chair joints — a common problem — or repair drawer runners. For the ambitious, there are instructions for recreating missing marquetry and inlaywork. But even more-casual readers will gain insight into what goes into these types of jobs, which should prove valuable when it's time to turn a piece over to a restoration pro.

Apart from the generally practical advice, Bennett's book is useful for the way it underscores how seemingly superficial damage (i.e., excessive veneer loss) may point to a bigger problem. In extreme instances, moving quickly on a repair



Closely examine a piece of old furniture before buying it: These early machine-made screws, different in size but bearing identical lathe and tool marks, identify a piece as antique.

houses all the time). In this well-illustrated guide, the author counsels that you can't be afraid to handle a period piece — either in the pre-purchase or restoration phase — and that knowing more about the con-



may help "save" a piece of furniture. And saving furniture is ultimately what this book is about.

— Suzanne La Rosa



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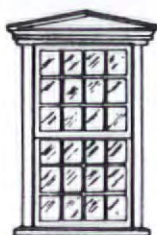
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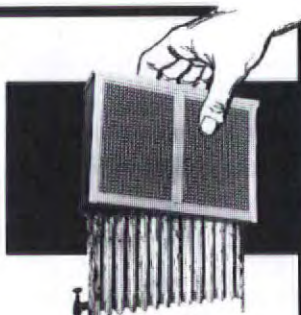
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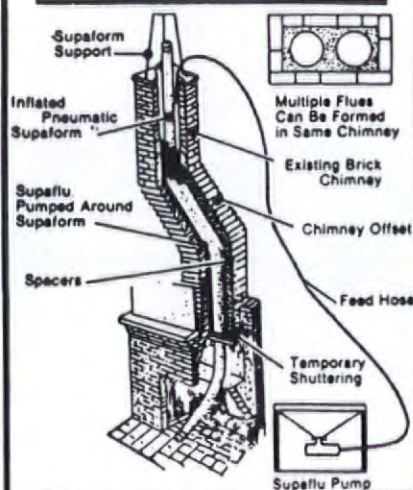
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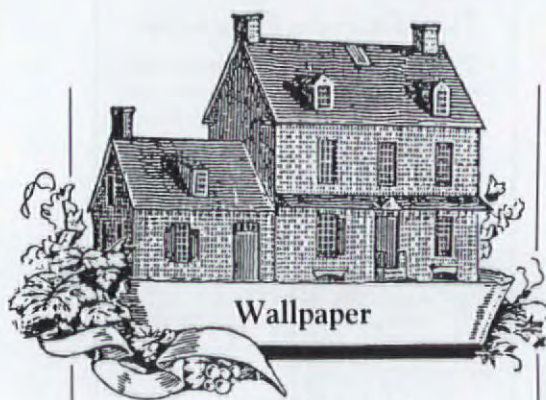
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"Petite Fleur" and "Mary Dailey Crook" (shown right) are two turn-of-the-century designs in the Brillion Collection.

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Traditional Craftsman colorways are used in reproducing the "Scenic Frieze" and "Bunnies" borders.

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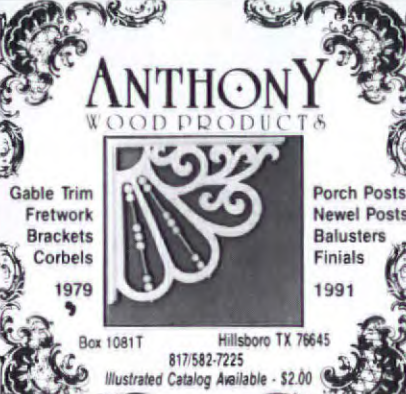


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*DIF Wallpaper Stripper and PaperTiger remove wallcoverings.*

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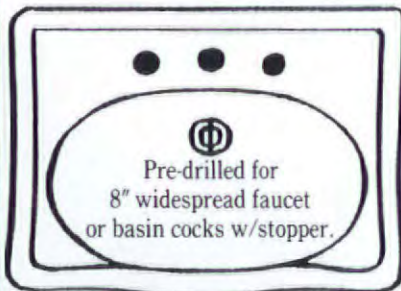
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For the houses shown in this issue, blueprints include:

- **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.

- **Framing diagrams** that show layouts of framing pieces and their locations for roof, first and second floors.
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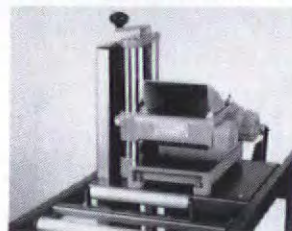
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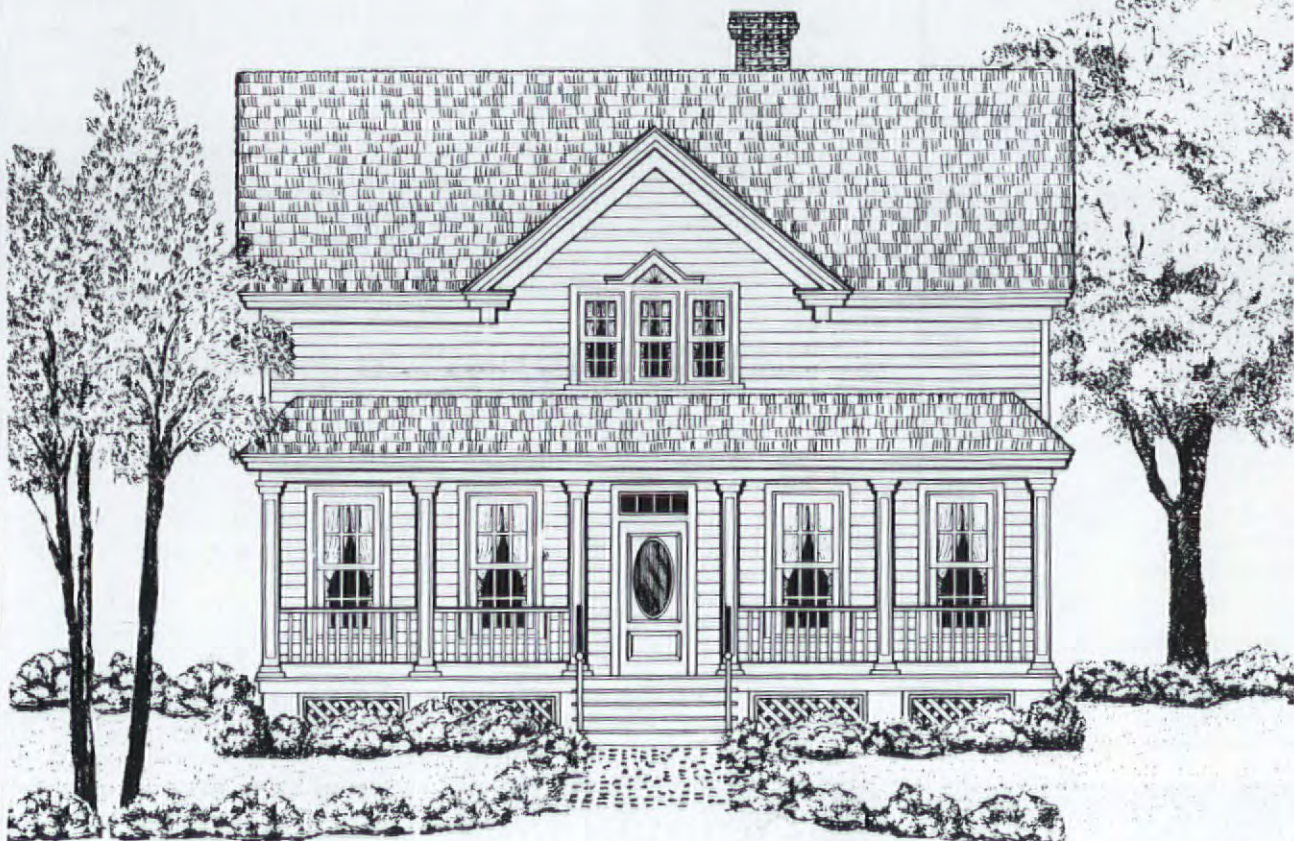
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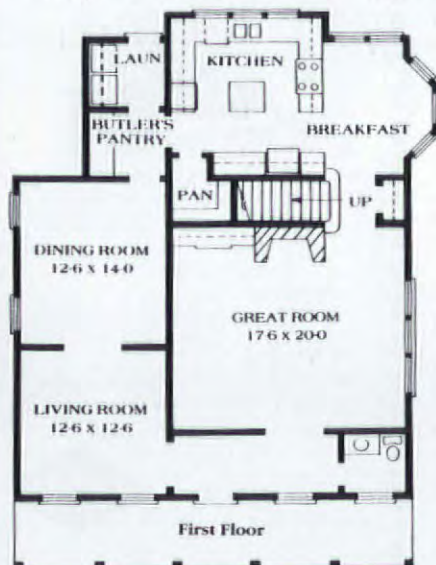


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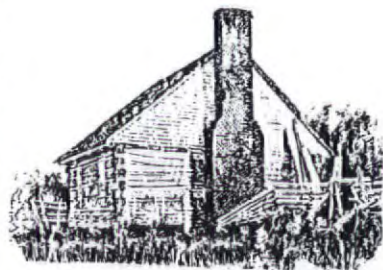


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OVERALL DIMENSIONS  
WIDTH ..... 37  
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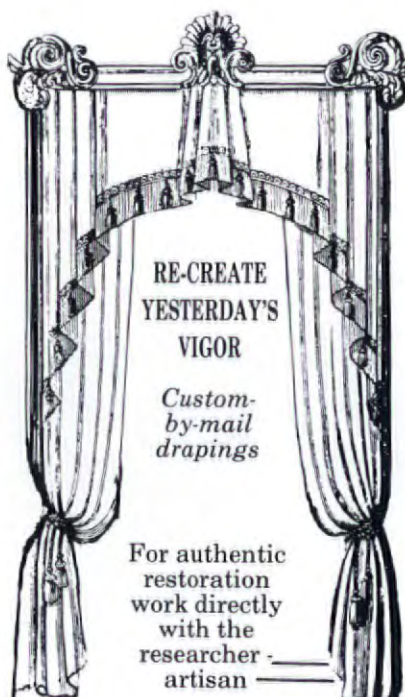


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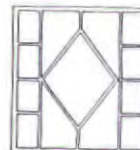
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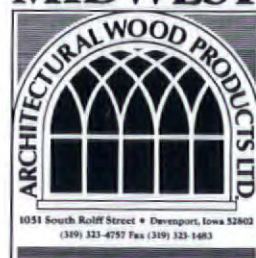
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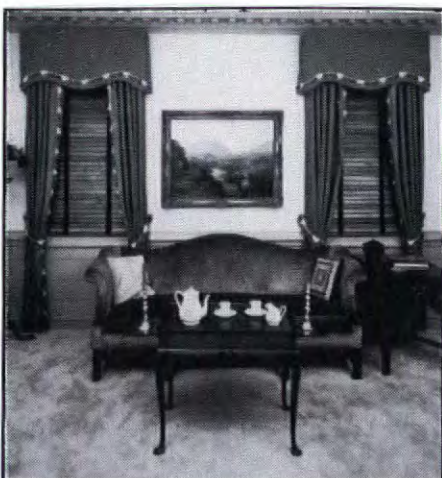
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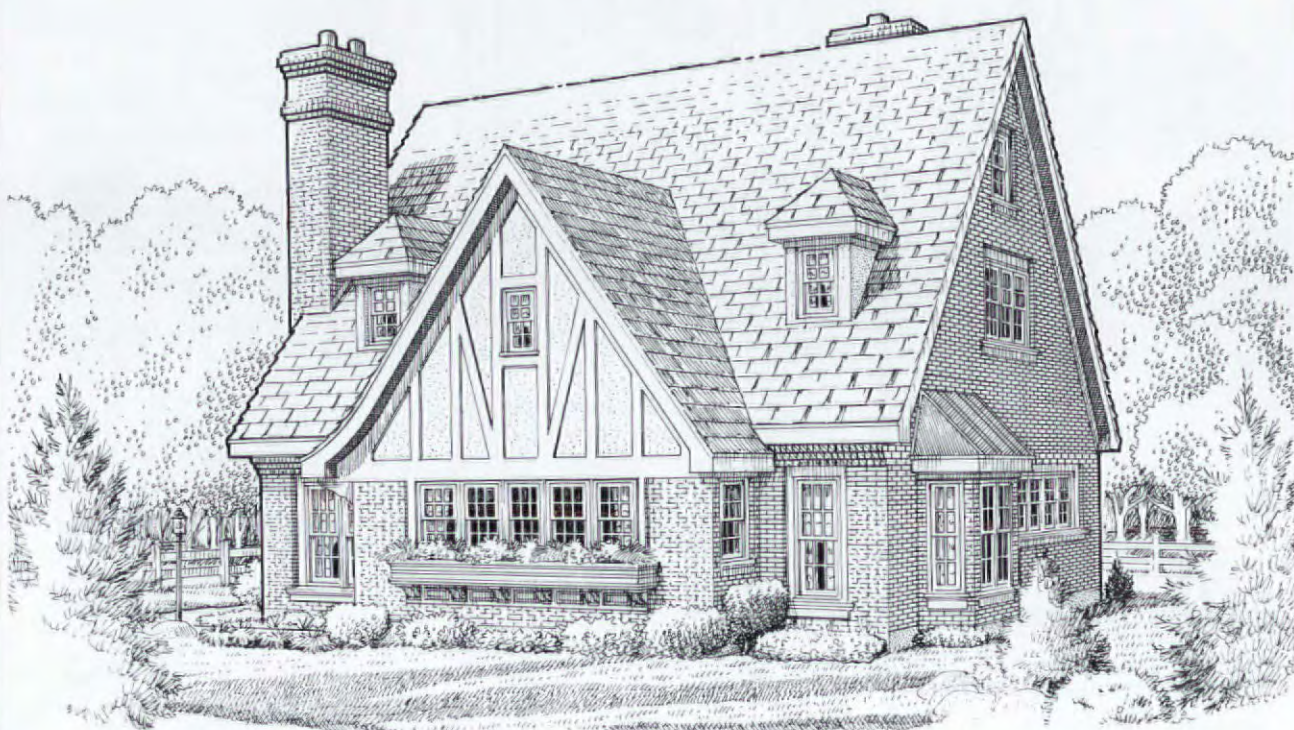
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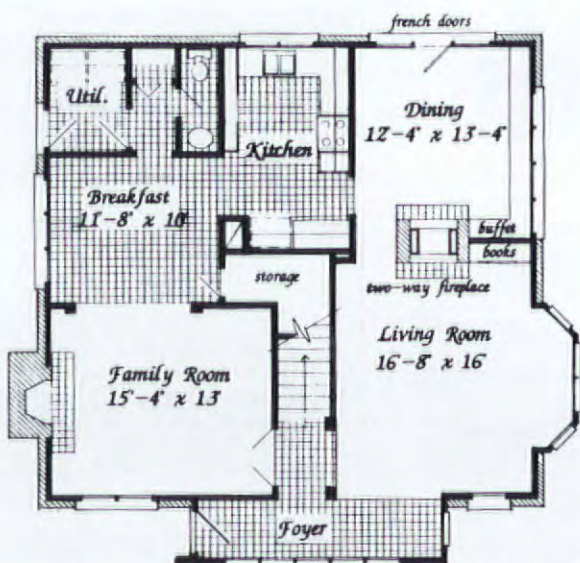
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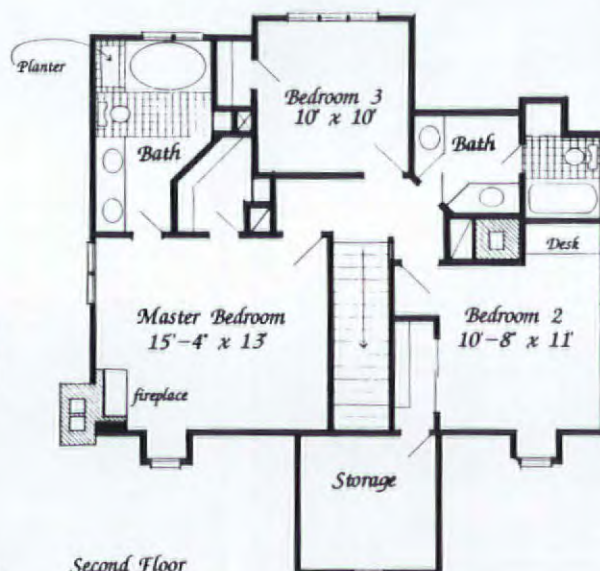
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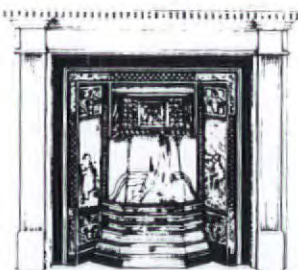
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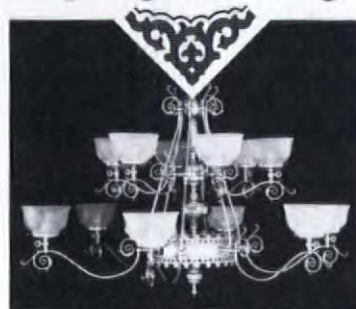
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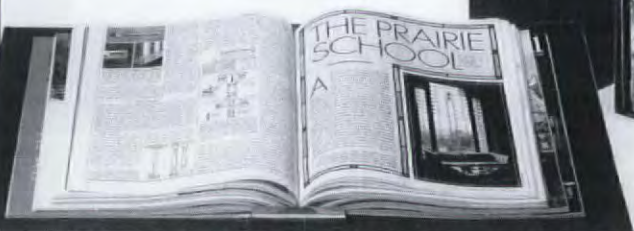
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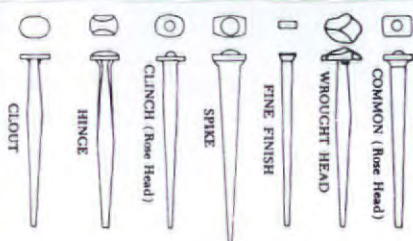
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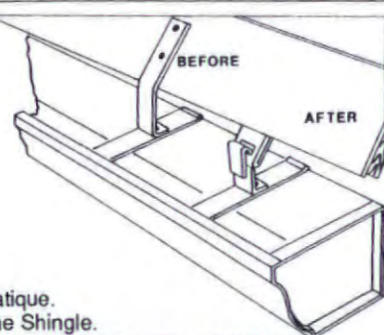
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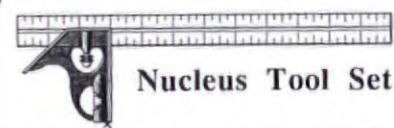
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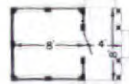
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**WORKSHOP** — Traditional Timber Framing. October 2-6, 1991, Hancock Shaker Village, Hancock, MA. Jack Sobon, Box 201, Windsor MA 01270, (413) 684-3223 or Dave Carlon (413) 684-3612.

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**DECORATORS' SHOW HOUSE** — Hillsborough's celebrated "Carolands" mansion, considered the largest private residence in the country, will be open to the public September 8-October 20, 1991. For information, contact Connie Sevier (415) 348-1102.

**HOUSE TOUR** — Saturday, September 21, 1991 in Trenton, New Jersey. Visit 10 grand homes of Tudor, Georgian, and Colonial Revival style from 1910-1930. For further details, call (609) 394-5864.

**HOME TOUR OF THE BUNGALOWS** — Eight historic homes will be open in The West Adams neighborhood in Los Angeles California. Sunday, October 6, 1991. For more information call Rory Cunningham (213) 735-3512.

**SOUTH PARK HOME TOUR** — September 15. NCR founder, Patterson, shaped late 19th-century neighborhoods using Olmsted landscaping advice. 10-12 homes, multi-media art show in Ohio's largest historic district. Write: SPHD Tour, 449 Wyoming Dayton OH 45410.

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**ARCHITECTURAL CAST IRON RESTORATION** — A national workshop for architects, contractors, craftsmen, consultants, and property owners on methods and materials for maintenance, repair, and replacement of architectural cast iron. New York City, September 14-15, 1991. Call (212) 995-5260.

**HISTORIC HOUSE TOUR** — Tour twelve 19th- and turn-of-the-century homes featuring various architectural styles in Saratoga Springs, October 13, 1991. For more information, call (518) 587-5030.

**CHAUTAUQUA '91** — Winona Lake, Indiana. September 21, 1991. Tour historic homes on the "Island" in this famous turn-of-the-century resort community. For information, call (219) 269-3856.

**APTI ANNUAL CONFERENCE** — September 22-29 in New Orleans, LA. This year's training courses study the preservation of outdoor monuments and cemetery art, masonry and moisture, and timber frame construction. For more information contact The Association for Preservation Technology International: (703) 373-1621.

**NEW ORLEANS ARCHITECTURE SYMPOSIUM** — This year's theme is "Urban Latin Traditions: Plazas, Courtyards, and Townhouses." Tours, exhibits, receptions, etc., are planned. For details, contact Preservation Resource Center (504) 581-7032.

**FALL HOUSE & GARDEN WALK** — Aurora, IL, September 15, 1991. For tickets and information, contact the Aurora Historical Museum, 305 Cedar, Aurora IL 60506, (708) 897-9029.

**HISTORIC ELGIN HOUSE TOUR** — This 10th annual tour features 10 private homes and one public building. Elgin, IL, September 8, 1991. For further information, call (708) 742-6631.

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# Tu-Tu-Tudor, Goodbye!



**T**he beauty of the Tudor Revival style, from the dramatic sweep of the rooflines, arches, doorway, and fenestration to the subtle brick patterning, has been lovingly maintained in the unremuddled house (far right). The neighboring house (above), however, is almost unrecognizable as a Tudor, especially when viewed from the front. To gain more living space in the second storey, the entire facade has been sacrificed. The center of attention is no longer the brickwork or the rooflines, but just some all-too-familiar glass patio doors, centered in a barefaced expanse of dark siding

and crowned with overhanging swags. And this improbable party hat requires four new columns to support it (although the one at the far right looks like it needs some support itself!). Erected in a glaring white brick, they cancel out any attention the original brickwork could have commanded. The closing off of the old archways with a blank swath of cement (see detail shot, top left) is the final indignity.

*"Here in Dallas, Texas, we too see a few remuddlings," wrote Lisa Nelson when she sent these photos. "It seems rather disheartening that after sinking a nice sum of money into a house, your neighbor's house could look like this [above]."*





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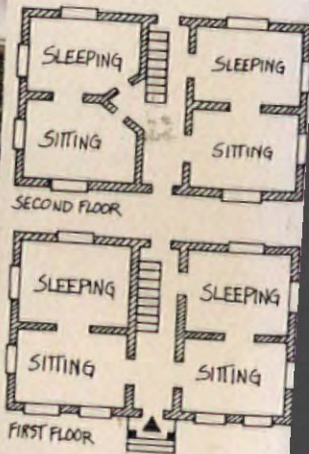
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## Vernacular Houses



# Amana Four-Family

Beginning in 1854, the True Inspiration Congregations established seven villages in Iowa County, Iowa, which became known as the Amana Colonies. The basic living arrangement in these villages was communal, with meals prepared and eaten in shared kitchens, and families living in group dwellings. A typical dwelling housed up to four family units in two-room suites.

Known as Amana Four-Families, these houses were built between 1855 and 1870. A typical "family" house was a simple two-storey, gable-roofed building with a center hall and two suites of two rooms on each floor. A variety of materials — including wood, stone, and brick — were used for construction. The first floor was uniformly five-bays wide and the second storey was usually three-bays wide, sometimes with windows almost randomly organized.

At its peak, the Amana Colonies consisted of two to three hundred of these dwellings. Their design was apparently systematized by an oral tradition that even standardized house dimensions. This regularity reflected a community aversion to visual independence, and was a practical solution for keeping a balance between individual and community. Unlike the buildings of some communal societies, these houses were nicely sized for use as single-family homes, a role they generally play today.

— Judith M. Capen  
Washington, D.C.

Pictured are three Amana Four-Family houses constructed of different materials: coursed-rubble stone (top), wood frame with cement (middle), and brick (bottom). The early floor plan of an Amana Four-Family (top right) did not include a kitchen, which was in a separate communal building shared by approximately 20 families.