

# Old-House Journal

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1991

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26



31



34



44

## ❖❖❖ The Old-House Woodworker ❖❖❖

### Detailing A Railing 26

by John Leeke

*The design, construction, and installation of a porch-roof railing for a Colonial Revival house*

### Refinishing Arts & Crafts Furniture 31

by Bruce Szopo

*Re-creating a Craftsman finish with the traditional technique of fuming the wood*

### A Bay Comes Back 34

by Gordon Bock

*Woodwork repairs and the restoration of an ornate Victorian bay window*

## ❖❖❖ Features ❖❖❖

### The Beaux Arts Style 39

by James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell

*How historical European styles were adapted for America's early-20th-century grand buildings*

### Victorian With A Vengeance 44

by Connie Archambault

*Old-house living in Connecticut proved to be a polychrome paradise for one family*

### The OHJ 1991 Index 50

*A guide to all the articles featured in the past year of OHJ*

continued on page 2

**Cover:** Fitting replacement trim in an 1880s window with Traditional Line, Ltd. Photo: Gordon Bock



## Editor's Page 4

*Thoughts regarding the year ahead*

## Letters 6

*Steam-heating follow-ups and some facts on  
Frazer Forman Peters*

## Restorer's Notebook 14

*Good ideas on drilling, screwing, and stripping*

## Outside the Old House 16

*Antique apples for today's connoisseur*

## Who They Were 18

*Calvert Vaux, partner of Downing and Olmsted*

## Ask OHJ 22

*Laying out an arch and locating Greek-key  
tile borders*

## Old House Mechanic 48

*The facts on how to do a dado*

## Restoration Products 54

*Post-Victorian lighting and good tools  
for woodworkers*

## Historic House Plans 58

*A three-quarter cape and a Virginia  
plantation house*

## Restoration Services 68

## Emporium 70

## Products Network 76

## Advertisers' Index 79

## Remuddling 80

*Slashed in New York City*

## Vernacular Houses 82

*The rain-porch houses of Alabama*



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# WHAT'S NEW FOR '92?

The past year has been fun and exciting, and a big one for changes here at OHJ. Each of us on staff has seen our responsibilities shift and expand as the office grows — and with our sister publication GARBAGE entering the “terrible twos,” that’s a lot of growing. Friends and co-workers have come and gone. We lost Chester, our corporate cat of many years, but we gained a new member in the extended family: William Carl Thomson, son of OHJ’s president Patricia Poore.

We’ve also been busy improving what’s between the covers of OHJ. Issue by issue, we’ve kept our eyes open for more informative photos and illustrations to include, as well as doing our best to run articles on often-requested subjects like housemoving, exterior paint, wallpaper, and steam heating, all of which appeared this year. That’s just the way we like to work here, answering questions about old houses with articles we would want to read ourselves. It won’t stop in 1992 either. The editorial calendar is already filling in fast with features and department ideas we’ve been itching to get to for some time. Here’s a peek at what’s ahead in the coming months:

**Graining:** The most convincing and widely used of the faux finishes, we’ll take a look at how craftsmen of the past turned “humble” woods into oak and mahogany lookalikes, and how it

can be done today. Also included will be tips on what to do if you find historic graining in your house.

**Old-House Living in a “Mud House”:** How one reader decided on a real challenge: restoring an 1833 house built not of wood or stone, but rammed-earth (coming this spring).

**Basements and Foundations:** Over the years, we’ve gotten a steady stream of

letters requesting information about basements, so next year we’ll get “in the cellar” for a whole issue. The focus will not only be solving problems associated with these special spaces,

but also a look at their history.

**Financing the Old House:** Money is always scarce, it seems, when you’re working on an older building, and the post-Reagan economy hasn’t helped the lending climate. There are opportunities out there, however, if you’re willing to keep searching and be creative.

**Drain Surgery:** Advice from plumbing experts on how to get traps, ducts, and cleanouts working again.

**Kitchens:** The service areas of an old house are where historical sensitivity and modern convenience “bump heads.” In this issue (due in the fall), we’ll examine pantries, Hoosier cabinets, and the updating of the most important working room in any house.

**Mantels and Fireplaces:** How to keep them operating, plus designs and sources.

Well, that’s a little of who’s on our “dance card” for 1992. Here’s hoping we’re on yours!

*Garrett Beck*



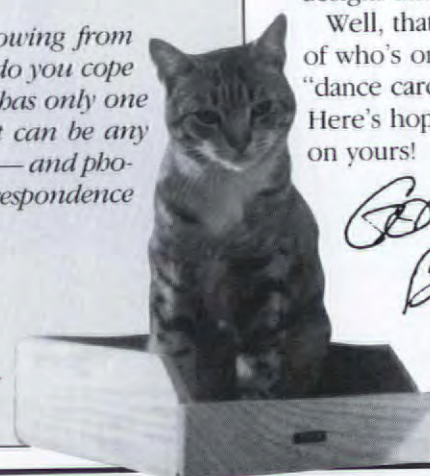
## WANTED: Tales of Cats and Tiny Old-House Living

*We’re on the prowl, again, for first-hand stories from our readers. Two years ago we sent out the call to anyone who had found a “time capsule” in their old house and the response was tremendous. This time we’re curious to hear about what old-house living is like with a cat around, or in a building that’s under 500 square feet.*

*What do you do when tabby starts meowing from inside the wall you just boarded up? How do you cope with space problems when your old house has only one room? Tell us your story or experience. It can be any length — maybe just an amusing incident — and photographs are more than welcome. Send correspondence to:*

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*We’re looking forward to reading your stories by March 1, 1992!*



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## Frazer Forman Peters

Dear OHJ,

Every time I see articles on stone houses, like the one in your July/August issue, I hope to see mention of Connecticut architect Frazer Forman Peters.

Peters' houses are distinctive, with low walls, steep high roofs, and an overall shape which is graceful and yet dramatic. He liked to build on "interesting" lots and designed these houses to crawl down a steep hill, bridge a creek, nestle to a rock ledge, and so on.

His interest in stone houses stemmed from his frustration at restoring typical New England frame houses and his recollection of the many stone buildings he had seen as a First World War soldier in Europe. He combined the qualities of modern technology and traditional stone

work, all but eliminating the dampness problem that is endemic to stone houses.

H-shape, center-hall, or side-hall designs are the core of most of his plans and are then adapted to site and owner requirements by varying floor levels and adding extensions. His houses are always planned to change or grow as the needs of their occupants change.

Many of his houses can only be classified as mansions, but he felt strongly that the ordinary man should also be able to afford a good house, and he built many of these as well. Mine is a small one but deceptively large, with no chopped up or wasted space; its cathedral-ceiling living room encompasses the stairway that adds to the character and feeling of spaciousness in the room. Although the small upstairs bedrooms

have low knee walls, the steep ceilings keep the rooms from seeming too low.

I love my house and want others to know of this architect who was a great designer, a quality and cost-effective builder, and perhaps above all a philosopher — someone who understood the importance of a house being a home.

— Mary Sorensen  
Norwalk, Conn.

## Reproduction Wallpaper

Dear OHJ,

Needless to say, we were delighted to see the photograph of our Byers-Evans reproduction wallpaper on the cover of the Sept/Oct '91 *OHJ*. Mt. Diablo Handprints, although a fairly recent participant in the field of historic-document wallpaper reproduc-

*continued on page 8*

## Tulpehocken Station

Dear OHJ,

I am a long-time subscriber to your magazine and enjoy it very much. I would like to see a regular feature on neighborhoods that contain houses of interest to your readers. The source of the articles can be information contributed by your readers. These articles could serve a number of purposes, including: encouraging the revitalization of neighborhoods; giving people an idea of where to look when they are in the market to buy an old house; letting people know of places to go see old houses; serving as an excuse for publishing pictures of old houses.

On the assumption that you may have some interest in this idea, I am enclosing some pictures of my neighborhood, the Tulpehocken Station Historic District in Philadelphia,



*Three 19th-century stone houses from the Tulpehocken Station Historic District, located in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*



Pennsylvania. The District is rich in history and today is an active community with a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and lifestyles. It has a well-earned reputation as a place where residents work hard to solve common problems. I have never had better neighbors.

— Robert E. Simmons  
Philadelphia, Pa.



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continued from page 6

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— Bob Carter

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## Wallpaper Warning

Dear OHJ,

Your wallpaper issue [Sept/Oct 1991] was just what I needed. But I do believe you failed to mention one word of caution: Striped patterns can make you *crazy* in a crooked old house!

— Margaretta & Harris Colt  
New York, N.Y.

## "Hartford Loop"

Dear OHJ,

The article "Adventures in Steam Heating" was a good refresher on the workings of steam boilers and piping. There are many houses in old District of Columbia with such heating systems. My Grandmother's is a one-pipe clunker and banger. I was surprised that no mention was made of a "Hartford Return Connection,"

continued on page 10



Nineteenth-century buildings are in the pink in Sharlottesville, Pennsylvania, thanks to Karen Kinnane and Barry Block.



## Think Pink

Dear OHJ,

I get ideas for restoring our 18th-century stone house from your magazine. Now I want to give YOU a fascinating tip: Sharlottesville, Pennsylvania. My husband and I stumbled upon the town when driving on Interstate 78, thinking about where to stop for lunch. The buildings are small Victorians painted in striking combinations of bright colors: vivid

pastel pinks, yellows, purples, all shades of blue, orange, lime greens! It sounds odd, but it works!

One young woman, Karen Kinnane, and

her partner Barry Block are responsible for this color scheme. Seeking her out, we told her how much we enjoyed the colors. She invited us to tea in her stunning black, white, and red kitchen, and said that she and her friend had bought a tiny 19th-century log cabin in town and spent a year restoring it. Then, as if coming out of a daze, they noticed that a number of buildings on Main Street were vacant and crumbling. They began to buy them up and restore them; they now own seven of the 50 buildings. As each one is completed, they give it a fancy color scheme to call attention to the improvements. Then other people in town began to use these multicolor effects when repainting, and the trend is spreading. Karen said that she and her partner did a tremendous amount of cleaning and "dejunking," and that many of the neighbors followed suit.

— Celia Aptacy  
Saugerties, N.Y.



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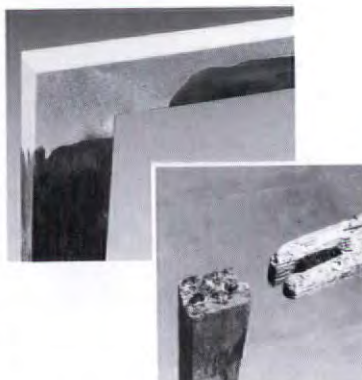
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continued from page 8  
or more commonly, "Hartford Loop," as a method of getting equalization in order for the condensate to return into the boiler. Sometimes it can be added to an old system to make it work better.

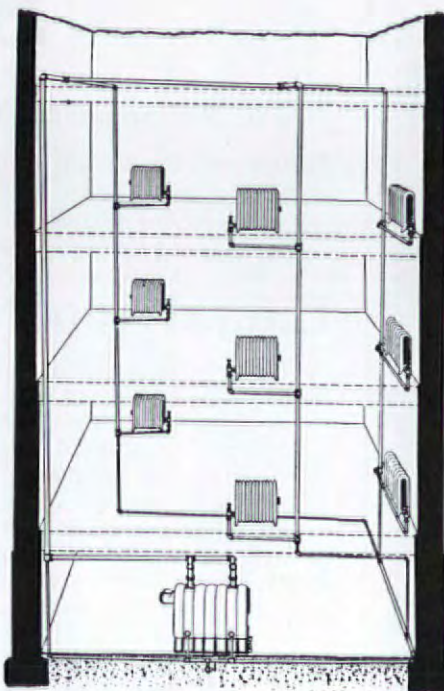
I also enjoyed the detective work Mr. Hall did on 239 Warren Street [*"Old-House Living," Sept/Oct 1991*].

— Clifford Hines  
Arlington, Va.

## All the Systems

Dear OHJ,

A long-time subscriber, I've read every enlightening article affecting me as the homeowner of a moderately venerable house. Your Sept/Oct '91 issue was a revelation as to the function and dysfunction of heating a house with steam. Where you found Dan Holohan, I don't know, but the manner in which he explained not



A one-pipe overhead system from 1906.

only my ailing steam-heat system, but also extensively analyzed all steam systems, is extraordinary. Thanks for your excellent selection.

— Ted D. Thurston  
East Hampton, N.Y.

[We're under oath not to divulge how we became acquainted with Mr. Holohan, but we do hope to have another article from him in 1992. — the editors]

## One-Pipe System

Dear OHJ,

Upon receiving the Sept/Oct issue of your magazine, I was delighted to see an article addressed to steam-heating systems. When I finished reading it, however, I was disappointed that my "one-pipe" system was dismissed as troublesome.

continued on page 12

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continued from page 10

Whether it is the ideal system or not, it is what I have in my 1926 Colonial Revival, and I would like to see information on how to operate and maintain it efficiently.

— Moira O. Jones  
Williamstown, Mass.

## "Four-Family"?

Dear OHJ,

I was pleasantly surprised to receive OHJ with its explanation of the Amana Four-Family [*"Vernacular Houses," Sept/Oct '91*]. I think some further clarification may be in order, lest your readers be left wondering how an entire family lived in two rooms, of which only one was a bedroom.

Unlike the Shakers, who forbade marriage and enforced celibacy, the Society of the True Inspiration

merely strongly discouraged marriage, with the result that most of its members remained unmarried, and thus, childless. As a result, they only required a living room and a bedroom for each single person. Thus, the four-unit dwelling shown by you. For those persons who gave in to the lustful desires of the flesh and entered into marriage, more commodious accommodations were provided. To avoid confusion, it is probably better to refer to the structure as a four-unit (apartment) house, rather than four-family.

— David Arbogast  
Iowa City, Iowa

## Bats in Michigan

Dear OHJ,

We appreciated the article on bats in the July/August issue. My wife and

I have been struggling with the bats (small browns) in the roof of our cabin in the western upper peninsula for a number of years, over exactly whose cabin it is — ours or the bats'. It's very annoying to hear them scratching around our roof during the middle of the night, but we realize their importance as they fly around at night with their mouths open. (We go to the 'U.P.' to get away from people like that in lower Michigan.)

The article was very helpful and informative — much better information than what we've received prior to this. We'll be installing hardware cloth and moth crystals in the ridge vent in our roof along with some bat houses on nearby trees.

— John & Cindy Singerling  
Grand Haven, Mich.

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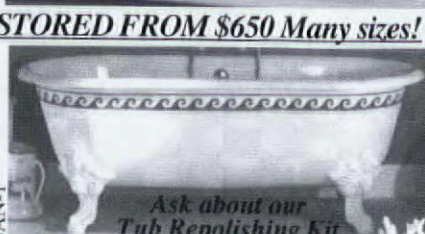


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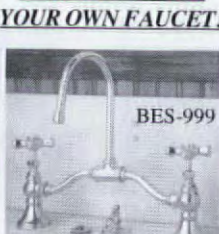
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## It's in the Bag

Having replastered the better half of our Queen Anne, I am always delighted to drill holes for hanging pictures (on my wife's insistence). To



ease the pain of this activity, I use a small, brown-paper lunch bag and some tape. I tape the open bag to the wall, placing the tape over the site of the impending hole. When I drill through the tape, the debris all falls right into the

bag, easing the task of cleanup; and the tape protects the plaster and paint. Then I remove the tape and bag and discard them. (This method works on drywall and masonry too!)

— Richard A. Kuhlman  
Cincinnati, Ohio

## "Iron the Wood"

To remove *many* layers of varnish and shellac from woodwork or flat surfaces of furniture, use a steam iron on moist cheesecloth and "iron the wood." (Use several layers of cloth and an old iron.) The varnish is picked up by the cloth. Denatured alcohol and lacquer thinner with some steel wool will remove whatever layers that may still be left.

— Margo Hildebrand  
Indianapolis, Ind.

## Metal-Ceiling Touch Up

Painted metal ceilings have a tendency to chip and flake, which often leaves highly conspicuous blemishes with jagged edges that are only slightly less noticeable upon repainting. To create a uniform appearance prime the bare metal with an oil-based paint. (I use Kilz.) Then, using

joint compound, spackle the blemish just as you would a wall. Obviously, this is easier on flat surfaces, but moulded areas can be conquered. Don't try to get the patch perfect, just *filled*. After the joint compound has dried, sand the repair with very fine sandpaper to match the adjacent surfaces of built-up paint. Difficult patterns may take two or three applications of joint compound. Once the repair has been sanded, prime again with oil-based paint. The ceiling is now ready to be painted.

— Eric Swegle  
Baltimore, Md.

## Screw Your Bricks

I'm aware of several traditional anchoring methods for brick masonry (such as using wood, lead, or plastic plugs) but have never really liked any of them. Knowing that our bricks are soft, and knowing that hardened

drywall screws work even in dense woods such as oak (a pilot hole might be necessary), I thought I'd try them in brick. We had a chair rail that needed to be placed on a brick wall, so I predrilled and countersunk holes in it. The screw hole will be filled inconspicuously later. I also drilled a small pilot hole in the brick. I used a drill (variable speed is best) with a phillips bit to drive the screw effortlessly. The beauty of drywall screws is that the drill can be put in reverse and the screws taken out.

— Dan Miller  
Elgin, Ill.

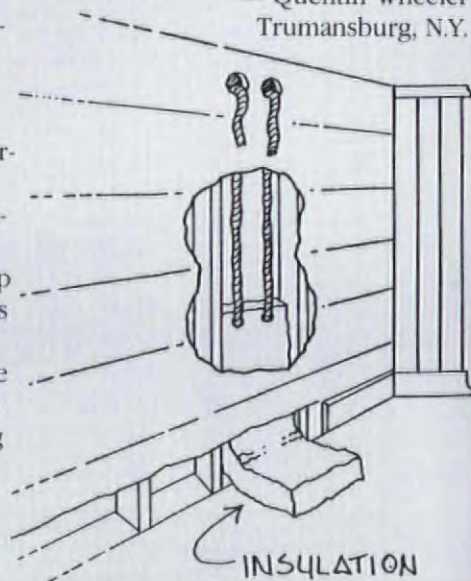
**TIPS TO SHARE?** Do you have any hints or shortcuts that might help other old-house owners? We'll pay \$25 for any how-to items used in this "Restorer's Notebook" column. Write to Notebook Editor, The Old-House Journal, 2 Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930.

## Getting the Last Lath

Our bathroom has horizontally applied wainscot on the walls, which makes the application of insulation problematic. To insulate without destroying the wall, we removed the baseboard to gain access to the balloon-framed wall void. We then drilled two holes between the studs, as high on the wall as possible, and threaded stiff nylon cord through these holes down to the baseboard holes. The cords were then attached to a scrap of lath narrower than the distance between the studs. With a staple gun, we attached the "top" of a strip of paper-backed insulation and a strip of plastic moisture barrier that was wider than the void. Then the cords were pulled at the same rate to raise the lath, while an assistant fed the strips through the opening at the bottom. The moisture barrier allowed the material to slip easily within the cavity, and once the pulling stopped the insulation

expanded sufficiently to hold the material in place. The holes in the wall were plugged with dowel buttons, stained, and polyurethaned. And we have enjoyed a cozy, warm bathroom with no moisture problems ever since.

— Quentin Wheeler  
Trumansburg, N.Y.





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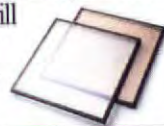


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*Broad branches and deep shadows — the charm of apples.*

## antique apple trees

Compared to kiwi, kumquat, and fraise des bois, apples may seem a mundane fruit — until you taste a “Calville Blanc,” “Newtown Pippin,” or “Esopus Spitzenburg.” Antique apples like these have made a big comeback recently, and with good reason. They offer a rich diversity of tastes — and scents and textures — unknown to those of us accustomed to supermarket apples. Though you may not find “Esopus Spitzenburg” at your local market,

you can grow them in your own yard, no matter how small it is.

Fruit trees were part of most home landscapes until the early 1900s. At first all trees were full or standard size, 20 to 35 feet tall, but by the last quarter of the 1800s, dwarf trees — which are easier to care for —



**Top:** a low, spreading standard apple. **Above:** an espalier design.

were increasingly planted. Sizes today range all the way down to miniatures at 5-7 feet. Apples that are espaliered (intensely pruned into a flat design) can even fit against a garage wall.

better in certain parts of the country, or keep longer, or make the best pies. To find out, consult a good local nursery or catalog or your Cooperative Extension office.

All apple trees take a good deal of care: pruning, spraying, picking. But nothing compares with an apple from your very own tree. For eating, my favorites include:

*Calville Blanc d'Hiver* (by 1598) — The classic dessert apple of France. Its tender flesh is tart, superb for cooking, and contains more vitamin C than oranges.

*Esopus Spitzenburg* (by 1776) — Reportedly Jefferson's favorite, the Spitzenburg is big, juicy, and powerfully flavored. The tree's tall, narrow profile suits it to a small lot.

*Fameuse* (Snow Apple, late 1600s) — If your ideal apple is crisp and intense, Fameuse may take some getting used to. Its soft, white flesh has a mild flavor I find haunting.

*Golden Russet* (by 1845) — Russets have rough skins and dense flesh. They're crisp, sugary, excellent for dessert or cider, and hardy to minus 45 degrees F.

*Newtown Pippin* (early 1700s) — One of the leading American apples of all time, the Newtown Pippin packs a rich, tart flavor that improves with storage. It ripens best with a long growing season.

*Northern Spy* (about 1800) — A leading commercial variety up to World War Two, Northern Spy is an excellent all-purpose apple. The fruit is

large and juicy, with a complex flavor.

Before planting, you can taste-test many classic apples by ordering from suppliers like Applesource. In their Pick-Your-Own packs (about \$20), you can choose two each of any six varieties from an array of 90.

For more fun, consider an apple-tasting party. You'll need six to 12 varieties, bread and cheese as palate-cleansers, and sparkling water (alcohol dulls the taste buds). It's a sensual celebration of fall!

### SUPPLIERS

*Fruit, Berry and Nut Inventory*, Kent Whealy, ed., Seed Savers Publications, RR 3, Box 239, Decorah, IA 52101; \$26, hardbound; \$19, softbound. *Lists all available varieties with mail-order sources.*

**North American Fruit Explorers**, Rt. 1, Box 94, Chapin, IL 62628. *A lively group with a quarterly journal, \$11/yr.*

**Applesource**, Tom Vorbeck, Route 1, Chapin, IL 62628. *Apples for taste-testing; free catalog.*

**Burford Brothers**, Monroe, VA 24574. *Trees; catalog \$8, list \$1.*

**Sonoma Antique Apple Nursery**, 4395 Westside Rd., Healdsburg, CA 95448. *Trees; catalog \$1.*



*Traditional apples from this 1901 Grocer's Encyclopedia plate include Spitzenburg (no. 1), Golden Russet (no. 3), and Northern Spy (no. 6).*



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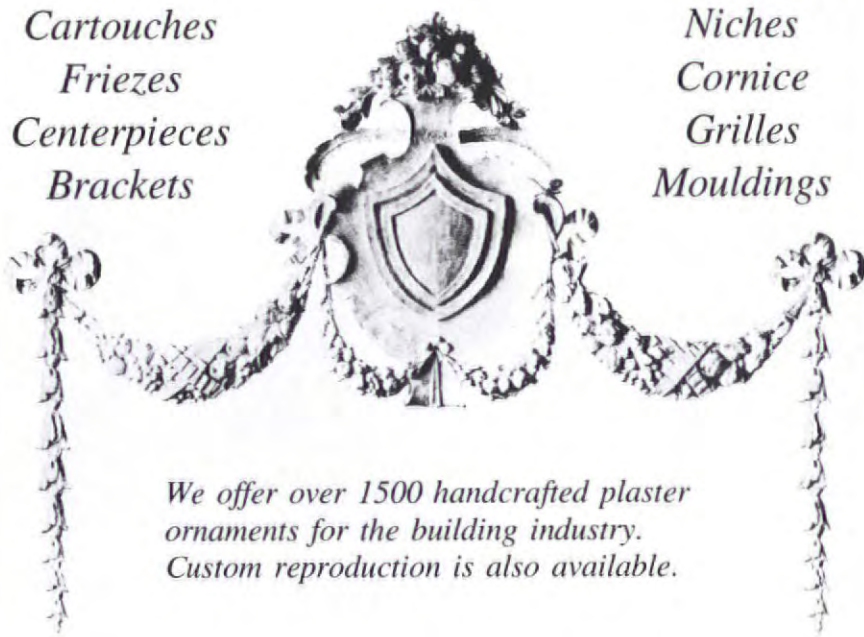


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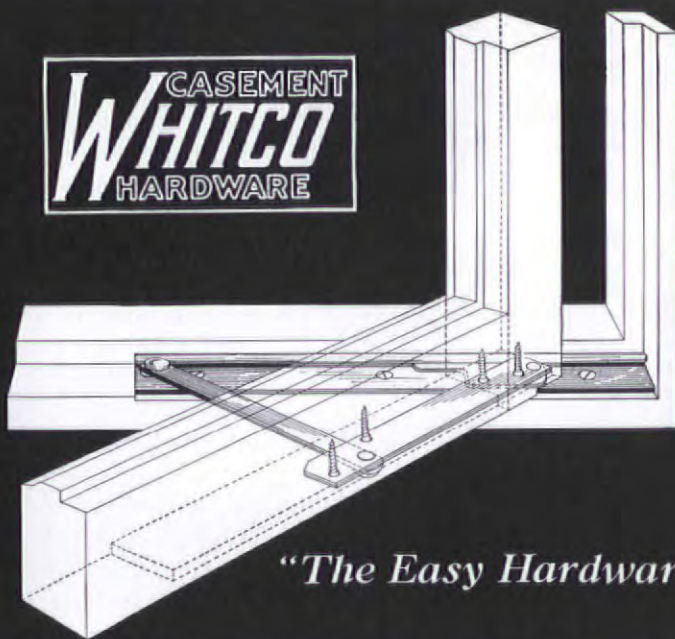
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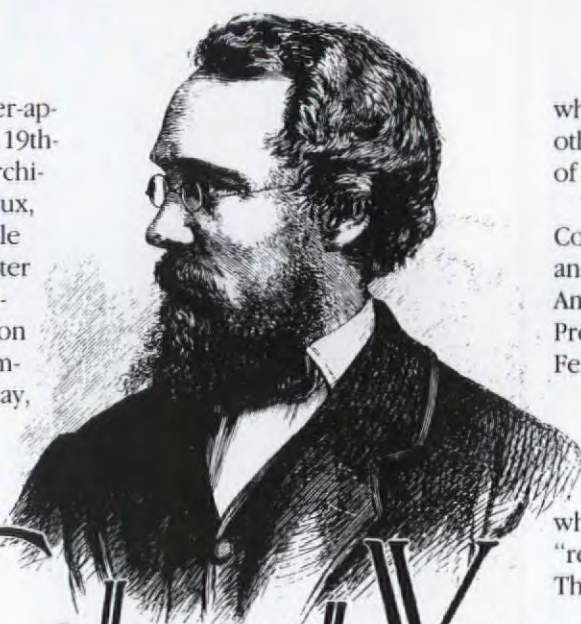
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by Jeff Wilkinson

One of the most under-appreciated figures of 19th-century American architecture is Calvert Vaux, the "silent partner" of the notable firms Downing and Vaux, and later Olmsted, Vaux and Company. Although the names Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted are better remembered today, it was the calm and skillful talents of this brilliant designer which stood behind the reputations of both men.

Unlike his two famous collaborators, Calvert Vaux (the "x" is pronounced) was a trained architect. Born on September 20, 1824, in London, England, he studied at the Merchant's Taylor's School where he received a strict education. At the age of sixteen he became an apprentice to architect Lewis Nockalls Cottingham. Cottingham was a noted medievalist and restoration architect and Vaux worked amidst an



## Calvert Vaux

house designs that were executed throughout the Hudson River Valley and the East Coast and were often published. They were hard at work on Downing's most important commission, the redesign of the Washington Mall, when Downing met his tragic death in 1852 (see "Who They Were," May/June 1989 *OHJ*).

The loss must have had a significant effect on Vaux who not only dedicated his book to Downing's memory but also named his son after him.

Vaux left Newburgh in 1856 for New York City where he pursued his architectural practice and became involved in a competition for what was to become Central Park. During this time he contacted Frederick Law Olmsted, an acquaintance he had

met through Downing. Olmsted, who was working for the city at the time, knew more about the topography of the site than was shown in the survey provided for the competitors. Reluctantly, he joined Vaux in collaborating on a design for the new park. It was their "Greensward" plan — the last of 33 submissions —

which won, establishing not only another partnership, but the new field of landscape architecture.

The firm of Olmsted, Vaux & Company became nationally famous and produced what are perhaps America's greatest parks, including Prospect Park in Brooklyn, Boston's Fenway, Manhattan's Morningside

Park, and the town plan for Riverside, Illinois (an environmentally enlightened suburb). Their relationship continued until 1872 when it was dissolved due to "reasons of mutual convenience."

The real grounds, though, were a difference in motives: Vaux saw their work as mainly artistic whereas Olmsted saw it as social. Vaux also resented the widespread public perception that Olmsted was largely responsible for the design of Central Park, a notion that continues to this day.

Vaux's contribution to American domestic architecture lies not only in the many houses he designed in the Rural Gothic and Italianate styles (both popularized by Downing), but also his recommendations for sound and logical construction. Much of his advice appeared in his only book *Villas and Cottages* (1857) which contains over 50 designs deemed suitable for North America. (The expanded second edition continues to

*continued on page 20*



*The central chimney (for efficiency) and side gable (for staircase headway) made this simple Vaux cottage a highly buildable design.*

extensive collection of Gothic artifacts. In 1850, on a trip abroad, American horticulturist and estate planner A.J. Downing chanced to see an exhibit of Vaux's work. He was so impressed with the young architect's rendering style that he persuaded Vaux to return to America where he became head of Downing's "Bureau of Architecture" in Newburgh, New York. The firm produced many



*Also from Villas and Cottages, this Downing & Vaux villa, erected near Newburgh, typifies the firm's specialty, Hudson River mansions.*

from Villas and Cottages (1857)



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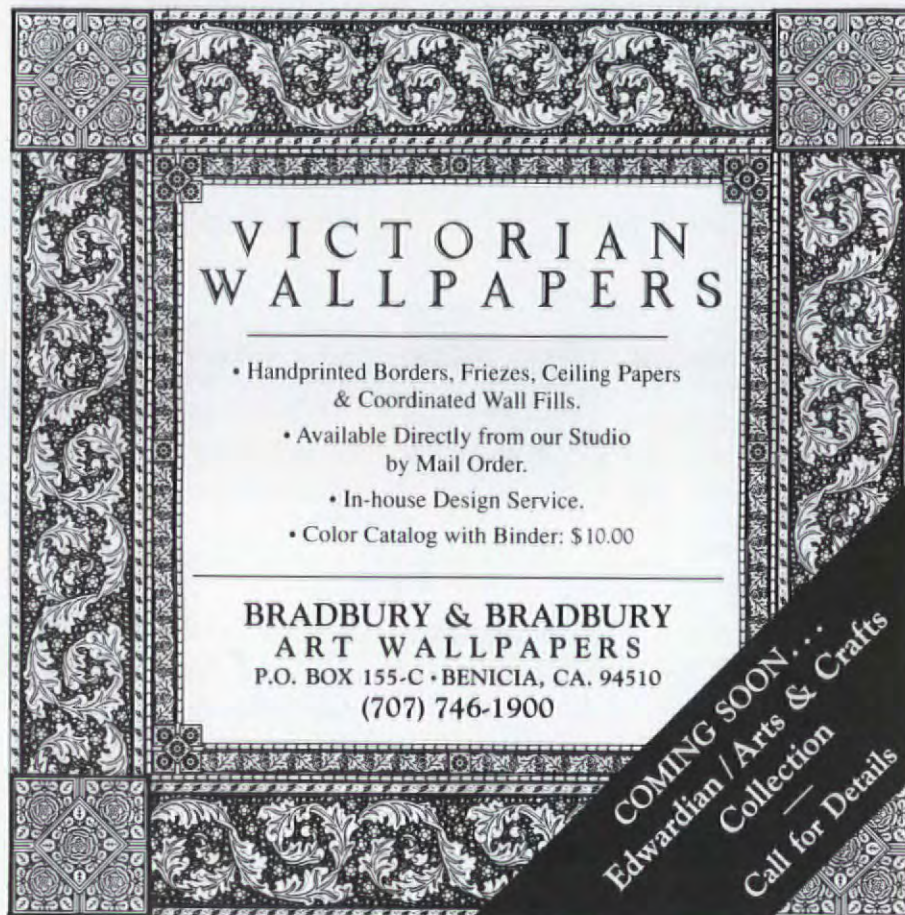
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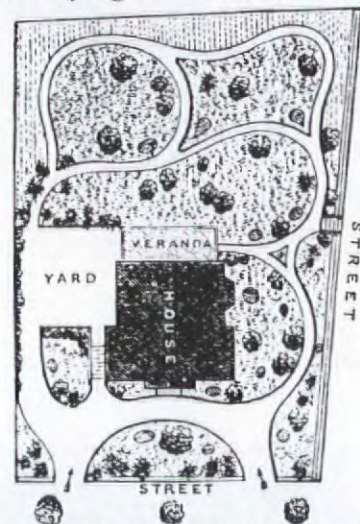
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*continued from page 18*

be reprinted.) Like Downing in his books, Vaux analyzes the many parts of the home and suggests the best options, along with complete plans. Where Downing's preferences are often based on taste, however, Vaux's are more articulate from an architectural point of view. His discussions on drainage, lighting, ventilation, and siting are as valid today as they were 140 years ago. Vaux saw beyond the mere styling of a house to its under-



*Vaux did not neglect landscapes in his book: here, a plan for a corner lot.*

lying planning and structure.

After the construction of Central Park, Vaux continued on intermittently as its consulting architect. Not surprisingly, two of his later major commissions included the first buildings for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History, which were built on park land. He also completed many residences and was responsible for the initial design of Olana, the famed villa of Frederick Church. By the 1890s, the Classical Revival styles were becoming fashionable and the demand for the high-Victorian architecture Vaux had helped develop dwindled. In November 1895, he met a watery death, though one less heroic than his former partner Downing: On a cold, foggy night Vaux slipped off a pier and drowned in Gravesend's Bay, Brooklyn.



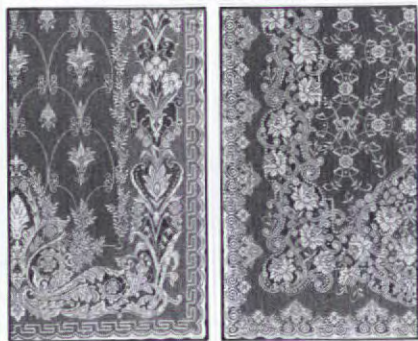
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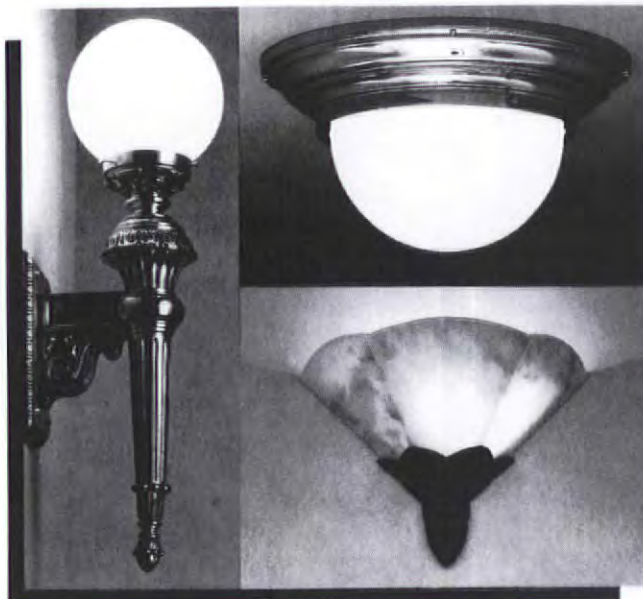
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## Gothic and Stick

**Q** Could you help us identify our 1881 home's architectural style? The side porch was changed in the mid-1930s and appears to be Greek Revival. Having lived in this house for one year, we are now beginning

*Gothic Revival and Stick Style features shaped this 1881 house.*

*to realize just how much we both need to learn.*

— Dale & Betty Widoe  
Nebraska City, Nebr.

**A** Like many Victorian houses, yours is an example of the ebb and flow of architectural fashions within a single

building. The basic design is drawn from the Gothic Revival style, as seen in the ornamental vergeboards, steeply pitched roof, and centered-gable form of the building. Gothic Revival houses that date after about 1865, however, are often recognized

as a distinct late phase. Typically, they are built of masonry with polychrome bands created by alternating contrasting colors of stone or brick — the same as those appearing over your windows.

Your house also exhibits details characteristic of the Stick Style, which was a transition between the Gothic Revival and Queen Anne styles. The Stick Style, essentially a set of structural-looking decorative details for wood-frame buildings, shows up most strikingly here in the bold king's post trusses bridging each roof gable. Equally prominent are the more-than-adequate brace supports under the front eaves. As you suspect, the front porch has probably been altered by adding classical columns and mouldings. Most Stick Style and Gothic Revival porches make use of square, chamfered

*continued on page 24*

## Shaping Up

**Q** I am looking for a company that makes templates for arches, which will be used by carpenters to cut the archways that divide rooms in early-20th-century-style houses. I need templates for elliptical and peaked arches, in door width and wider. Do you know of any company that makes them, or will I have to draw the arches free-hand on brown paper?

— Jennifer M. Mazur  
Calgary, Alberta

**A** You're unlikely to find ready-made templates, because any pattern will have to match exactly the springpoints of the arch, a dimension that varies with the width of the wall opening. However, laying out different types of arches — lancet, gothic, tudor, elliptical — was once a standard part of carpenter's geometry and is not hard to do.

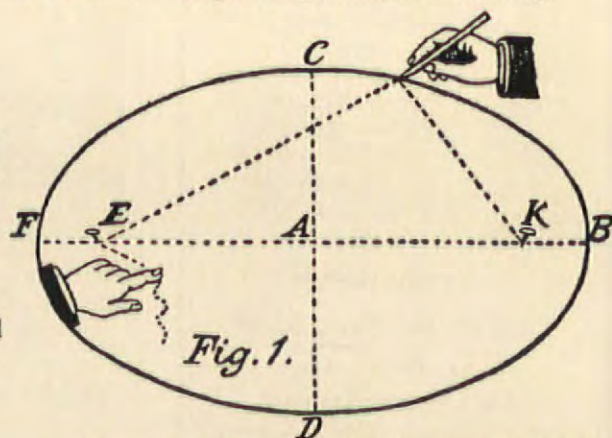
To lay out an elliptical or "basket-handle" arch, you'll need two nails or pins, cord or string that doesn't

stretch too much, a large carpenter's square, and a pencil. First draw line FB at a length equal to the wall opening. At the exact center of this line, point A, draw a perpendicular line CD which will determine the height of the arch. The length of CD is an estimate, but start with  $\frac{2}{3}$  the length of FB (for a flatter arch, shorten CD). Line CD must also have its center at point A, so that CA equals AD.

To locate the focal points E and K, take half the width of the arch (say, the distance AB), and, starting at point D, swing an arc so that it locates each of the focal points where it crosses FB. Then insert pins or nails at the focal points and tie one end of the string to K. Stand the pencil at point C and run the string around it and down to the pin at E. Pull the string taut and wrap it around the

pin a couple of times to secure it. Finally, outline the arch by holding the string end tight and drawing the pencil down towards point B, letting the string guide it. Repeat this step in the opposite direction by starting back at C.

This technique was also called a "gardener's oval" because it was used to mark off oval flower beds and curved walks. It is still employed by plasterers and painters to lay out elliptical decorations on ceilings.



*Laying out an ellipse from Modern Carpentry (1903).*





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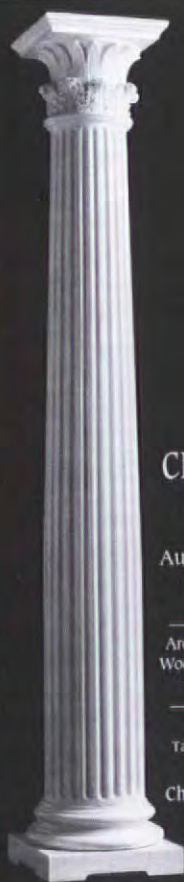
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continued from page 22

porch supports with curved or diagonal braces running up to the roof. For a Stick Style porch, the doorway gable would end up in not a pediment but a decorative truss.

## Greek-Key Borders

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A ceramic mosaic floor advertised by the Robertson Art Tile Company in 1907.

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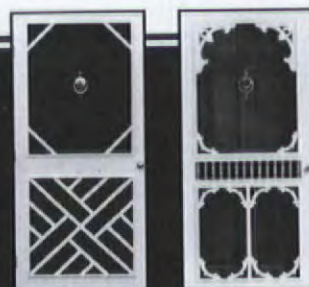


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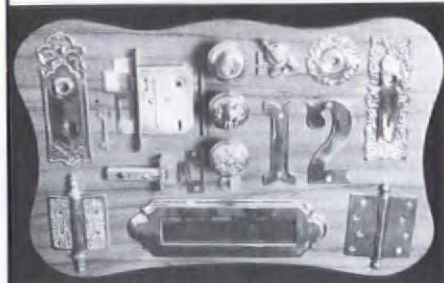


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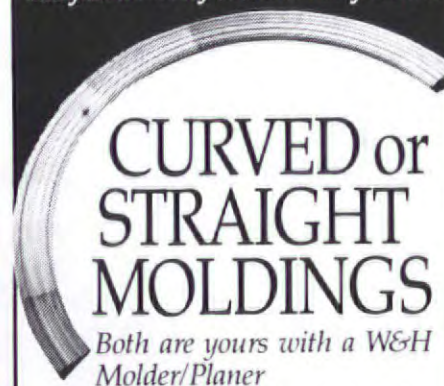
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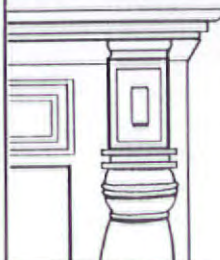
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BY JOHN LEEKE

Roof railings have been a feature on high-style American houses from the 1700s to the present day. These ornate crowns were particularly common on houses built in Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival styles, so it was no surprise to find an example on the 1820s home where this project took place. The original portions of the railing, however, were built of wood around 1900 in a unique Colonial Revival style, using 2" x 10" posts to support top and bottom rails. The space in between rails was then filled with a grille of narrow strips and diamond-shaped blocks to form an appealing — but intricate — repeating pattern.

When the owners of the house were faced with making repairs to a leaking roof on the rear addition, they decided to also upgrade the rear railing so that it matched the original railing sections. The whole project encompassed three phases: repairing damage caused by the leaking roof, re-roofing, and installing a new railing. In this article we'll concentrate on how the new roof-top railing was fabricated and installed using a variety of woodworking and planning techniques to make the more-than-1000 parts.

Larry Forbes and Peter Rice (in charge of this project for Farrell & Company of Freeport, Maine) were concerned about how this rail pattern would perform — both struc-

surface with his hand to emboss the pattern into the paper. Later on at the shop, he cleaned up the lines with a pencil and straightedge on the drawing board. This method took much less time than measuring all the angles and parts and mechanically drawing them out on paper. Next, he took detailed plan measurements of the new roof, noting changes in elevation. This provided the dimensions of the space that the new railing would have to fit.

Larry took this information back to the drafting table and came up with a modified pattern that would fit the new work. He expanded and multiplied the basic "common denominator" square-and-diamond motif to accommodate the changing heights in the new railing, repeating it twice in short sections and three times in tall sections. This required adjusting vertical and horizontal dimensions a little, while still being careful to maintain the same proportions. Larry also planned on slightly varying the widths of the posts to make up the difference between the design and the total run along the roof which needed to be filled. Subtle "fudging" like this is a legitimate way to get new carpentry to mesh with the inconsistencies of a seasoned building, and is often what makes the project work.

Once the layout was finalized, a section of the new design was drawn out on paper in its actual size and pinned up on the shop wall to simulate its appearance on the roof. Peter checked the final layout against the dimensions of the house and drew a cross section of the 2-pattern and 3-pattern rails to figure out construction details like the

# DETAILING

turally and aesthetically — in a new version much longer and taller than the original. There were also questions about the final fit of the pattern because all pieces would have to be fabricated before assembly could start. Calling on their timber-framing and cabinetmaking experience, Larry and Peter were confident that an organized approach could pull the project off.

## Planning and Design

Their basic strategy was to clearly document the existing conditions, and then divide the work into manageable sections. Then, they planned the actual fabrication with detailed drawings and lists, and used production methods to make and assemble the many parts into frames. Finally, they installed the frames with custom-made hardware. Throughout the entire project Larry and Peter worked closely together, checking each other's work frequently.

The first step in designing the new railing was to find a "common denominator" in the pattern, which could be repeated in the new work. Larry copied the pattern by placing plain paper against the railing and rubbing the

size of mortises and tenons. Afterwards he sketched and dimensioned each individual part and compiled a cutting list of all the parts to be fabricated. An all-important part of organized woodworking, the cutting list completely describes each and every part: quantity needed, finished size, part name, location in the assembly, and work required after the part is cut to size. Peter also designed a metal bracket that would support the rail in all directions as well as keep the rail up off the roof.

Allowing for spoilage is a common production technique that Peter and Larry used to save time and dollars. Rather than checking each part to make sure it is perfect and usable, extras are made to account for the few that will inevitably have defects. In the end, this approach costs less than making replacements, and means you don't have to go back to the beginning of the production process if a part is ruined later on. Generally, Peter allowed for an overage of about 5 to 7 percent, especially on small parts which were needed in the hundreds. However, for larger parts such as the posts and rails, he made the exact amount needed, taking the time to get each one right.

A construction project like this often requires the skills





of more than one trade, and in such a case good planning becomes essential. Because the design of the railing was completely thought out on paper beforehand, special parts and services that would be needed later during installation (such as the custom-made metal brackets or the sealing job around them) could be lined up before work began on the railing.

## Materials

The first step in producing the railing was rounding up the special materials needed. White pine was chosen for all railing parts, as the wood has an effective balance of cost, availability, machinability, paint retention, and resistance to decay. "Machinability" refers to the wood's ability to be cut evenly without clogging power tools, thereby leaving

# A RAILING



Photo by Peter Rice

clean surfaces. This characteristic is very important on a project like this railing, one that uses a lot of machined parts and where hand surfacing of each piece is impractical. Paint-holding ability is important considering the severe rooftop exposure.

*The porch roof railing on the left side of this Greek Revival house is probably a Colonial Revival detail added around the turn of the century. A modern railing on the right capped off a recent addition at the rear of the house. The square-and-diamond motif (top left) borrowed from the earlier railing became the basic design unit that was repeated in multiples of two and three (top right) for the increased height of the new work.*



# F

or the posts in particular, Peter took pains to select vertical-grain (edge-grain) lumber. Vertical-grain wood is quartersawn from the log so that the annual rings pass directly from one face of the board to another. A vertical-grain board will expand and shrink less in width with changes in moisture content, and also

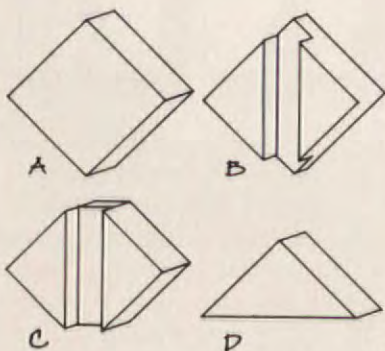
holds paint better than a flat-grain surface.

Paint is exterior woodwork's first line of defense against weather and moisture. For a complex structure like this railing, it pays to backprime all the surfaces — hidden and exposed — of each piece before installation, and to follow with a topcoat right after installation. To avoid potential peeling problems, the primer should be the same brand as (or at least compatible with) the paint that will be used for the rest of the project.

A weather-resistant adhesive is mandatory for exterior woodworking. Epoxy adhesives are a good choice because they are slightly flexible and will give and take with the wood movement caused by moisture changes. Larry used West System-brand epoxy adhesive from Gougeon Brothers, Inc. (see supplier's list, page 30). Formaldehyde-resorcinol is another type of weather-resistant adhesive, but it is somewhat brittle and can fail due to wood movement. Moisture-resistant adhesives generally have only moderate resistance to the extremes of the outdoors.

## Production Work

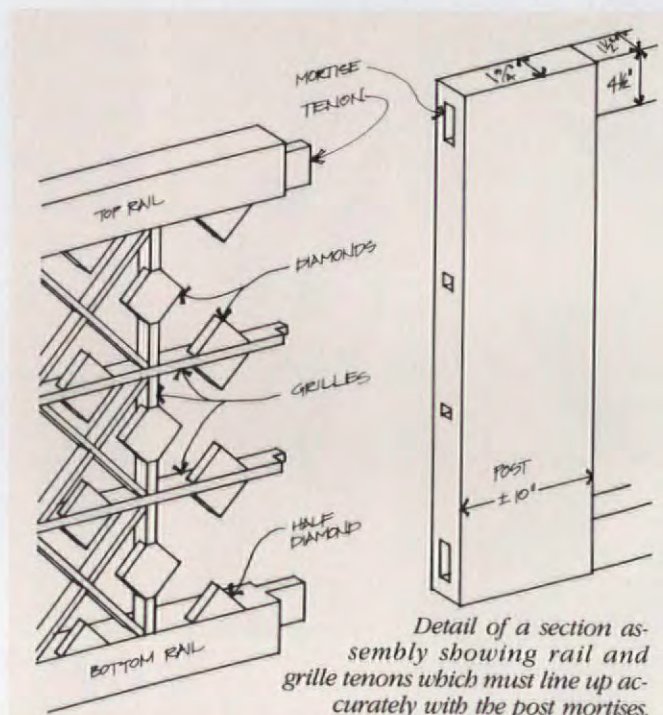
Working from the cutting list, Peter first cut the rails to exact length, including the tenons. Then he laid out mor-



*Making the diamonds: cut basic block (a); cut dado (b); cut off "ears" (c). A half-diamond (d).*

tises for the grille tenons, cut the posts, and laid out mortises for the rail tenons. To rough out the mortises, Larry used a drill press chucked with a large wood bit. Then he finished-shaped these deep slots by hand using chisels and a mallet.

Often in production woodworking, special jigs and fixtures are used to hold and guide the work pieces as they are cut and shaped. This method saves time because each piece doesn't have to be individually measured and marked. The results are also more accurate from one piece to the next. Jigs and fixtures are custom made to suit each specific operation and several were used in fabricating the parts for this railing. For instance, Larry cut the rail tenons on the radial arm saw using a stack-type dado-head blade (a specialized saw blade that cuts a square-sided groove or *dado*) and a jig designed to simplify this job (see drawing, page 29).



*Detail of a section assembly showing rail and grille tenons which must line up accurately with the post mortises.*

Stock for the grilles was ripped to finish width on the table saw from  $\frac{3}{4}$ " select pine. Then it was cut to the exact length on the radial arm saw. All grille intersections were half-lapped using the dado head on the radial arm saw. Finally the ends of the grille pieces were tenoned, again using the radial arm saw.

## Assembling Frames and Grilles

The frames were assembled relying on the snug-fitting mortise-and-tenon joints for their strength. No metal fasteners were used at all. Assembly was done on a large, flat, work table to assure that the frame remained flat. After an initial fitting and coating of the joints with epoxy adhesive,

each frame was pulled together using bar clamps.

Sizing of the X-pieces that make up the matrix of the railing was critical because only adhesive would hold them in place between the grilles. Therefore, these pieces were cut to length after the frames and grilles



*This jig held four diamonds at a time for dadoing and trimming. The whole fixture is passed along the tablesaw fence (at left).*

Photo by Peter Rice

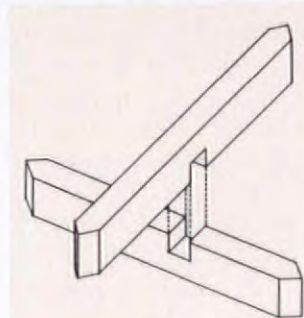


were assembled to assure a tight fit. The X-pieces were strengthened with a cross-lap joint at the center made by cutting dadoes in each piece.

Next, the diamond pieces were cut on the radial arm saw. Dadoes were cut four at a time with a dado blade and special jig on the table saw. The jig's base board has four diamond-shaped holes that allow the diamonds to drop in and rest on the table underneath. Each diamond is held in place with a holddown stick that fits into grooves in the battens. While holding down the stick, the whole fixture is passed over the table saw blade. After the cut the stick is removed, the diamonds are taken out, and another set of four is loaded in. The "ears" were cut off with a 60-tooth, carbide-tipped cross-cut blade using the same jig.

Once cut, the X-pieces and diamonds were fit and fixed into the grille with epoxy adhesive. The face of each side

of the sections was finish-sanded with a Rockwell half-sheet sized orbital sander. Peter spray-painted the completed sections with three coats of Benjamin Moore solid-white stain. Where possible on weatherprone parts like the posts, he sanded sharp edges and corners to a  $\frac{1}{32}$ " to  $\frac{1}{16}$ " radius. If the edges of exterior woodwork are perfectly square, the paint film will be thinner



*X-pieces were dadoed in the middle then cross lapped for strength.*

here and weather away quickly to allow water entry. "Breaking" these sharp surfaces allows the paint to form a continuous, protective film around the edge.

## Installation

**B**efore the railing could be mounted, the metal brackets that support it had to be lined up and attached to solid blocking beneath the roof sheathing, using #14- $\times$ -2", hot-dipped galvanized screws. After fabrication and before installation, each bracket was coated with "cold galvanize" paint, a metallic pigment product with a high content of zinc. Then an additional layer of bitumen roofing was "flame sealed" to the surrounding roofing and over the top of the lower flange of the bracket to form a watertight seal.

Working together, Larry and Peter started installing sections at one end where the railing joins the house. Posts that met the building were made a little wider than needed so there was an extra inch or so to play with in final fitting against the siding. Each section was joined to the previous one using epoxy adhesive, drawing the mortise-and-tenon joints together with come-alongs and straps. Outside corner posts were made up of two posts set at right angles, then glued, screwed, and plugged together. All fit perfectly. The final section post was trimmed in width to fit against the house just the same as the first did.

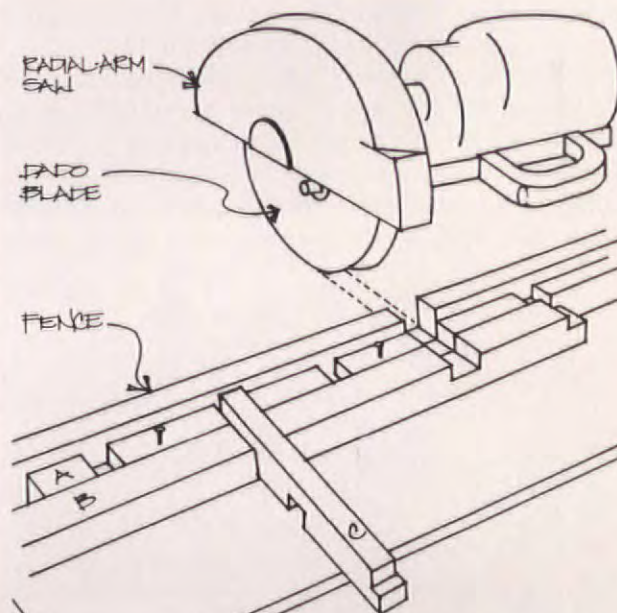


*Photo by Peter Rice*

*Painting one of the individual sections which incorporate a top and bottom rail and one post.*

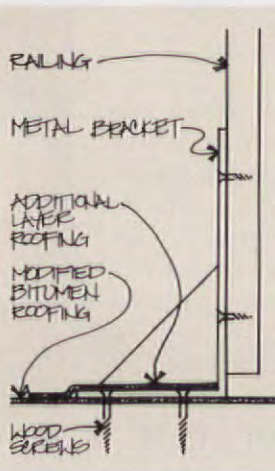
The sections were designed so that the bottom of the lower railing is held off the roof by at least 2". Roof (or porch deck) cleaning, maintenance, and repair is far easier with such a clearance — a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " or 1" space is not enough. Without a sufficient opening, the bottom rail will catch leaves and debris which hold moisture against woodwork and start problems.

A cap rail and band moulding were applied, mitering out and around posts to match the original railing. On exterior woodwork, it pays to slope all horizontal surfaces so that water drains away quickly, and for this purpose Peter gave the cap rail a slightly rounded contour. Last,



*Cutting tenons and lap joints with a jig: A pattern strip (a) is tacked to the table of the radial arm saw against the fence. The workpiece (b) is laid against the pattern and the first tenon is cut. An alignment stick (c) fits into a dado in the pattern piece and the workpiece to position the workpiece exactly. Then a dado cut is made. The process is repeated for all the joints with the same spacing. Later, the pattern-strip spacing is adjusted for the next cuts.*





Custom-fabricated steel brackets (left) support the railing and tie it to the roof structure. The brackets were mounted over the already-laid, modified bitumen roofing, and then sealed with another layer of roofing (right).

caps were added on top of the posts to provide a three-dimensional effect from the ground and to shed water.

## One Year Later

It's common for any exterior woodwork to need some kind of followup treatment a year after it's installed, so much so that it should even be considered part of the original work. On this railing, cracks had started to open up on the exposed end-grain of some of the diamonds at just about the time they were a year old. End-grain exposed on exterior woodwork doesn't hold paint as well as flat-grain or side-grain. When the paint fails, cracks develop which allow water to enter and make for more paint failure.

The best way to prevent end-grain checking is to reduce or eliminate the exposure of end-grain wood. When this can't be avoided, the next best approach is to seal the exposed end-grain with epoxy consolidant before painting. Epoxy consolidant is a thick, syrupy liquid that soaks deeply into the end-grain and then hardens into a flexible plastic.

the job is in progress. Says Peter, "Since we're in business to earn a living, there is always a clock ticking away in the back of your mind. The natural urge is to start cutting wood



A minor failure, end-grain checks on some diamonds, showed up after a year's exposure.

before planning is complete. On this railing, though, we resisted that urge and all the planning really paid off."

Even though the work proceeded without any major hitches, Larry and Peter calculate that production woodworking in the shop took 25 working-days, site assembly took 5 working-days, and planning for the project alone took 2½ working-days. Looking back on the project, Peter considers the final fit the most satisfying part of the work. "When you are cutting hundreds of pieces, there is always the question in the back of your mind: Will everything fit in the end? We were very pleased with the results."

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Peter Rice and Larry Forbes, now of Rice & Forbes, Inc. Classical Carpentry, specialize in custom carpentry and woodwork in northern New England; (207) 865-4061.

Contributing Editor John Leeke is a consultant and contractor who helps homeowners, contractors, and architects maintain and understand early buildings: RR 1, Box 2947, Sanford, ME 04073; (207) 324-9597.

Photo by Peter Rice



The new railing (center and right) on the roof of the rear addition visually matches the original railing (left) on the side porch roof.



# REFINISHING ARTS & CRAFTS FURNITURE



Photo courtesy of The Arts & Crafts Shop

By Bruce Szopo



Since the 1970s, more and more people have come to admire the deep, mellow finish of Arts and Crafts furniture. With collectibles in particular, the emphasis has always been on preserving the original finish. But today's reality is that the finish of almost every piece for sale needs some help. Unfortunately, the *correct* restoration of Arts and Crafts furniture is not widely practiced. Known as a fumed finish, it is a technique that can bring new life to all varieties of Craftsman-style woodwork.

It's hard to understand why Arts and Crafts finishes are not being authentically redone, because the process is not necessarily difficult or expensive. Gustav Stickley, considered by many to be the father of the American Arts and Crafts movement, wrote at length about how and why his own Craftsman furniture was finished:

It should be understood that our methods of finishing are for the purpose of getting the best possible results from the wood itself as well as the most pleasing effect on completing the color scheme of a room, and never for the purpose of imitating a more costly wood in the finish of a cheaper one. The beauty of each wood is peculiarly its own, and the sole aim of our finishing is to show that beauty to the best advantage.

Fuming is actually a method for accelerating the natural aging of wood. Aging occurs when ammonia, present in trace amounts in the air, reacts with tannic acid in woods to cause an overall darkening. Fuming introduces the ammonia in concentrated amounts, using airtight boxes or tents in the original method. The result is a light brown color that is even in tone throughout the wood. This is the only process that acts on the glassy pith rays as well as the softer parts of the wood, so that the wood is

varied only by its difference in texture, not color. The effect cannot be accomplished by stains alone and is in sharp contrast to poorly finished furniture, which often possesses a tigerlike look.

The fumed finish was not exclusively Stickley's either. Many other workshops — Bradley, McHugh, Roycroft, Cushman, Limbert and Gustav's brothers, Leopold and George — advertised the finish in their catalogs. The process is appropriate for most styles of Arts and Crafts furniture, built-ins in Craftsman homes, or new pieces of furniture in the spirit of the Mission or Craftsman style. While white oak is the most common wood for these constructions, fuming can be used on other woods. Any wood that contains tannic acid (woods that naturally darken with age) will take the finish with varying degrees of success, depending on the amount of tannic acid present.

## Re-creating a Craftsman Finish

Stickley's famous finish can be re-created even if the wood has been heavily painted or varnished. Using the following six-step procedure, you should be able to create a finish that closely resembles the one found on Craftsman furniture. As with all finishes, it is best to test them on an inconspicuous area before tackling the whole piece. Work

in a well ventilated area at a temperature between 60 and 80 degrees F.

### Step 1: Secure materials

- \* semi-paste paint and varnish remover
- \* tannic acid powder
- \* 28% ammonia
- \* aniline dyes
- \* amyl acetate
- \* denatured alcohol
- \* white shellac (3 to 4 lbs.)
- \* steel wool and/or medium-to-fine sandpaper
- \* small artist's brush, cotton



Ammonia, aniline dye, paint stripper, wax — the basic materials for reviving fumed finishes.



## Fuming Safety



Industrial-strength (28%) ammonia is much more concentrated than household ammonia. Its fumes are extremely dangerous if inhaled and can cause headaches, coughing, and severe lung congestion. Skin contact with the liquid can cause burns. The following precautions are necessary for fuming:

1. Work outdoors only. Keep pets and others who are unprotected away from the work area.
2. Wear a respirator equipped with an organic-vapors cartridge. (For added protection, cartridges specifically designed to filter ammonia fumes are available.)
3. Use eye protection. Swim goggles work best because they seal around your eyes. Do not wear contact lenses while using ammonia.
4. Wear heavy rubber gloves and clothing that covers your skin.

Amyl acetate is not as toxic as ammonia, but it is a wise idea to continue with the same precautions. When working with tannic-acid powder, avoid breathing the dust and making any contact with skin or eyes.

Most important, read the Material Safety Data sheets available where you purchase the chemicals for a complete description of the risks and recommended handling procedures.

rag and glass jars

\* safety equipment: respirator, swim goggles, and chemical-resistant rubber gloves

### Step 2: Strip the old finish

Hand stripping is the most effective way to remove paint and varnish from furniture or woodwork. Use a solvent-based paint remover for best protection of the wood. When stripping is complete, wash the surface with either denatured alcohol or lacquer thinner to remove any wax left by the remover. If you give the job to a commercial stripper, ask them to do the same. When the piece has been completely stripped, sand or steel wool the surface smooth. Don't be afraid to strip and sand — you'll be putting new life back into the wood.

### Step 3: Replenish the tannic acid

Stripping the old wood removes the effects of previous fuming and most of the tannic acid naturally found in the wood. To get a successful reaction in Step 4, you must put the tannic acid back. In a glass jar, thoroughly mix about three tablespoons of tannic acid with 1½ cups of warm water. Then wipe the solution on the wood, soaking the clean surface, and let dry (fig. 1).

### Step 4: "Fume" with ammonia

Once the piece is dry it can be treated with ammonia either by fuming or wiping. To fume you must create an airtight tent. Stickley used tarred canvas. You can use heavy-duty plastic stretched around a wooden frame. If the piece is small enough, a thick plastic garbage bag may work. The ammonia is placed on the floor in a small shallow dish. A cup or two in a 4' × 4' area should be enough. Check the

progress of the color after several hours — every piece reacts differently. A treatment of two days is usually plenty.

Good results can also be obtained without the difficulties of fuming by brushing or wiping the ammonia directly onto the surface (fig. 2). After letting the surface dry, check the color. If you want a darker brown, repeat the ammonia treatment. If the ammonia raises the grain too much, you can sand gently with steel wool or fine sandpaper to knock it down. While using ammonia, you must use a respirator and work in a well-ventilated area.

### Step 5: Add color

If the fumed brown is not exactly what you want, you can add color and depth to the wood with a light wash of aniline dye (fig. 3). Mix various dyes together to reach the desired color and then mix two parts of the dye solution with one part amyl acetate. (Denatured alcohol can be substituted for amyl acetate if necessary.)

Using the liquid dyes suggested, you can obtain a good Craftsman brown using three parts brown and one part yellow. Again, test the dyes on scrap wood — experience is the key. Black, red, and orange are also good colors when trying to obtain various natural browns. Wipe or brush the color sparingly on the surface, using a small artist's brush to get into difficult corners. Wipe the corners dry after using the brush so that the dye does not "pool."

### Step 6: Apply a finish coat

For the finish coat, mix two parts amyl acetate (or denatured alcohol) with one part clear or white shellac. Wipe solution onto surface quickly and sparingly, being careful not to dissolve applied color (fig. 4). The shellac dries quickly, helping seal color and give new life to wood. You can add dye to the finish coat for additional color.

### Step 7: Wax

Fumed furniture should not be varnished or french polished, only waxed. Craftsman catalogs mention the use of beeswax dissolved in turpentine as a final step to give the piece a smooth touch and satin lustre. Today, one coat of a good commercial paste wax will do the job well. I like Minwax's "Paste Wax for Dark Surfaces" (fig. 5). It doesn't color the wood or turn white when it dries in the grain, and it produces a light, dry finish.

If a more durable finish is desired, such as on table tops to resist water spotting, you can substitute a more protective finish. I use General Finish's Arm-R-Seal Oil & Urethane/satin, as it has the right amount of gloss.

Individual pieces of furniture and woodwork receive different levels of service over their lifetimes, so don't assume that every piece will need the full refinishing treatment. While pieces that have been destroyed by overpainting or varnishing will require the complete procedure, an original finish that is seriously worn but intact may need only Steps 5 through 7. An original finish that is slightly worn might revive with Step 7 alone. Finish conditions vary across the piece as well. In such a case a seriously worn top, say, will need the appropriate steps, but a base in good condition can get away with Steps 6 through 7. However, if you're fortunate enough to acquire Arts & Crafts furniture with a good-to-excellent original finish, all you should do is just blow off the dust.







## SUPPLIERS

The aniline dyes I recommend are produced by the James B. Day Company. They can be ordered from:

**Schreiber Paint Co.**

15835 E. Warren, Dept. OHJ

Detroit, MI 48224

(313) 884-3355

Tannic acid, 28% ammonia, and amyl acetate can be purchased through local chemical-supply companies or:

**Bryant Laboratory Inc.**

1101 Fifth St., Dept. OHJ

Berkeley, CA 94710

(510) 526-3141

**City Chemical Corp.**

132 W. 22nd St., Dept. OHJ

New York, NY 10011

(212) 929-2723



*The natural  
tone of a fumed  
oak finish.*

*Photo courtesy of Ray  
Stubblebine/David Rago Auctions*



# A BAY COMES BACK

By Gordon Bock



Photo courtesy of Traditional Line, Ltd.

To some minds, impressive woodworking means an intricate carving, a wall full of exotic panelling, or some other eye-catching construction. Restoration woodworking, however, is much subtler in its final form — in fact, the subtler the better. Though it may demand as much skill and effort as new joinery, the art to restoration woodworking is often repairing or rebuilding in such a way that the work can hardly be detected.

When I paid a visit to the folks at Traditional Line, Ltd., they were engaged in just such a project. The 1880s bay window in this once-sumptuous breakfast room has been piled with insults over the past century. Probably the worst was a 1960s renovation that banded the perimeter of the room with a continuous Formica-covered counter, blasting out large portions of the original window. After the decision had been made to return the room to its original grandeur, the task became to restore what was left of the window, and replace what had been lost.

No small order. Better than 50 percent of the original ash trim was missing, including lower casings, inner pilasters and their head carvings, plinth blocks, and baseboards. What woodwork remained was left with unsightly gouges, dents, and hatchet marks. In addition, the upper and lower mahogany sash had disappeared.

While waiting for the new elements to arrive, the repair phase of the project started to take shape. First, a solvent-based remover was used to strip all paint from the existing woodwork — 30 coats in some areas. After stripping, the woodwork was scrubbed with alcohol to wash off all traces of remover and to clean and open the pores of the wood.

With the woodwork completely bare, the next step was to survey the entire window and determine what

*At left: A Formica sink cabinet, the last part of the '60s renovation to go, and what was left of the 1880s window trim. Facing page (left to right): Window frame and trim receive a double dutchman to rebuild the location of a sash hinge mortise; sections of new millwork scarfed on to existing trim in a nearby window; a diamond-shaped dutchman repair made with identical wood — barely noticeable even before staining; this dutchman, highlighted with a quick dampening, illustrates how close a careful grain match can come to the existing woodwork.*



areas needed repair and what types of repairs to make. Basic to this process was deciding the "level of repair" to work towards. For instance, should the goal be to go after every bit of damage larger than 1/4" in diameter, to remake just the grossest defects, or do something in between? It is valuable to set such a standard on a job with a strong cosmetic nature like this, one where as soon as the "A-level" problems are put in order, the "B-level" problems suddenly loom just as bad. The decision on this project was to go as far as possible towards a museum-quality woodwork repair. The techniques used fell into three general groups: filling with putty, scarfed wood splices, and, chief among them, dutchmen patches.

### Dutchman Repairs

**A** dutchman, in restoration work, is any manner of interlocking wood patch that preserves as much of the undamaged woodwork as possible. The best dutchmen are made with stock that not only matches the species of the wood but also the grain as well. Over and above leaving the patch less obvious and thereby simpler to finish, using similar stock makes for the best mechanical repair because the new wood will expand and contract with moisture changes at the same rate as the old wood, and in the same direction. The ideal stock comes from the same board that will receive the dutchmen (a trimmed end, for example). Dutchman stock should always be lighter or equal in color to the surrounding wood — never darker. This way, the

new wood patch can be blended in with stains.

After the first couple of dutchmen on this window, Bryan Shaw developed a feel for how the new ash was taking stain and was able to select grain patterns that made the repairs almost invisible. Once the stock was selected, Bryan proceeded as follows:

**1) Cut the patch to size** — A dutchman can be any shape or size, but should be as small as practical while still covering the damaged area. Diamonds and trapezoid shapes are common. The patch should also be thick enough to permit surface trimming later.

**2) Scribe the outline** — Hold the cut patch over the



**Left:** Cardboard mockups of all sizes helped plan the new carvings and millwork. **Right:** Not exactly surgeons, the renovators left many scars such as this one where they had installed their cabinets.

All photos, except where noted, by Gordon Block







*Shaping steps (left to right): paring a dutchman flush with the moulding using a cranked-neck chisel; fine surfacing with curved*

*cabinet scrapers; using moulding planes to blend replacement trim where it joins the original casing; final dressing with sand-*

damaged area with clamps or tack it in place with finishing nails. (Predrill holes to prevent splitting, keeping them as small as possible.) Then scribe the outline of the patch with a sharp razor knife to mark its location.

**3) Clean out the mortise** — Chisel out the waste, taking care to stay within the scribed lines. Start with the end grain first to prevent splitting. A razor knife and straight-edge are often useful for cutting with the grain, but be careful not to let the grain run away with the tool. Use as big a chisel as is feasible to help maintain straight edges. Sharp tools are a must for working on hardwoods. On large dutchmen, Bryan used a router and trim bit to rough out the mortise, working against a piece of scrap clamped at the edge as a fence. He followed this up with chisels for the final dressing.

**4) Fit the patch** — The patch should be shaped so that it fits snugly in the mortise (perhaps  $\frac{1}{32}$ " larger than the hole) to minimize the glue line. It should not be so tight that it mashes the surrounding grain or is impossible to remove by hand. The mortise should have a flat bottom and perpendicular sides; back cutting leaves a gap that can show up as a glue line when the patch is trimmed flush.

**5) Glue up the patch** — Once the patch fits, the sides and bottom of both patch and mortise cavity are given a thin layer of glue. (Bryan gets good results with Elmer's brand aliphatic resin wood glue.) Working quickly, the patch is then set in the mortise and held in place with clamps or tape. At this point the dutchman should stand proud above the surrounding surface, but not so high that final shaping requires removing a lot of wood (which may change the look of the grain).

After the glue is dry, the dutchman can be pared down to match the surrounding contour. For a flat surface, Bryan uses a block plane. Bullnose planes, where the cutter is at

the front of the tool, work well in corners and other close quarters. He is also fond of cranked-neck paring chisels for shaping dutchmen. These tools have offset handles that allow the blade to lay flat on the work, and are well adapted to leveling and planing tasks.

Shaping a dutchman to match a moulded surface is basically the same process — careful paring in successive steps — but calls on other tools to help with the contours. Moulding planes are useful where they match the curves of the surface, as are semicircular gouges. Parting tools (V-shaped chisels) can help shape quirks and other sharp indentations. For some jobs, Bryan will also grind the profile of the particular moulding in a cabinet scraper and use this to finish the dutchman. Sandpapering with a variety of dowels and paper grits can't be overlooked either.

With a good eye, paring will take the dutchman right down to flush with the surrounding surface. After this, the repair is scraped until it is smooth to the touch. Scrapers remove shavings so fine they are transparent, and work on any grain pattern.

### Other Techniques

Some parts of the bay window and areas of lower trim on one of the nearby windows had large sections repaired by adding scarfs. The scarf joints used to

*Finishing (left to right): Staining with Brazilwood adds new color to the old mahogany (note dutchmen in frame); after pore-filling, complicated surfaces require meticulous cleaning, here with a toothbrush; the deep look of the newly varnished mahogany is set off by the ash (still to get final shellac coats).*







*paper and assorted dowels — simple but effective.*

attach such pieces can vary in design, but the most popular is simply a cut made at a bevel so that mating members lap over each other. This kind of joint is not only less visible than a butt joint (where the boards are cut square), but it also resists shifting as the joint ages. Scarf joints are also used to splice mouldings in quality finish carpentry for just this reason. On this project, the scarfs were made even less apparent by making the joint at a compound angle — this way, the cut ran across the grain at a bias.

Joints were then glued together and anchored in place, and moulded surfaces were touched up with sandpaper and scrapers after the glue dried.

Once the repairs to the existing woodwork were completed (including over 40 dutchmen), installation of reproduced elements could begin. An important part of this work was concealing the fasteners that held them in place. The new ash millwork had a dark, figured grain pattern that was very similar to oak. With this in mind, any finishing nails used to secure the woodwork were placed in these dark areas, then set and puttied over. This method not only hides the nailheads, but makes the putty easier to blend in later during finishing. Some larger elements were secured with trimhead dry-wall screws. These screws are less conspicuous to plug than the large, bugle-head screws.



## Finishing

The process of mating the new woodwork with the old did not stop when the window was ready for finishing. In preparation, all wood surfaces were cleaned again with a vacuum cleaner and alcohol wash (a construction site produces a lot of dust). Afterwards, the existing woodwork was sanded very lightly, taking care to retain the patina that it had gained over the years.

Perhaps the trickiest phase of the finishing procedure was "staining out" the dutchmen, putty, and other wood repairs. The effect of stains and clear finishes is, essentially, two dimensional, while a wood surface (and the look it produces) is three dimensional. What this means is that a finish match may work when observed dead on, but may be less successful, say, when seen from the side. The aim that Joe Michaud had here was to "fool the eye" under most viewing conditions.

Joe's technique was to stain the dutchmen to match the color of the raw existing woodwork. To facilitate matching, he set up his own kit of penetrating aniline stains, mixed to likely tones and in various concentrations. Joe prefers water-based stains over alcohol-based products for this kind of work because the grain tends to absorb alcohol-and-stain mixtures too readily. Before applying the stains, he sanded the wood with 120-grit paper, wet it to raise the grain, and then sanded again with 220-grit paper. After staining, all the existing woodwork was sealed with orange shellac (cut 3 parts alcohol to 1 part shellac). Later, new millwork, carvings, and large repairs were match-stained, using the sealed woodwork as a reference. Once all the ash was a uniform color, the remainder of the woodwork was sealed with cut shellac.





The project plan called for a historically appropriate, hand-rubbed, all-shellac varnishing. The steps Joe used to achieve this finish were:

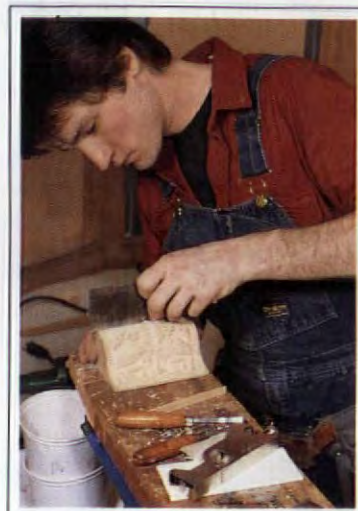
**1) Fill pores** — Pore filler is a neutral, wood-colored paste used to prepare open-grained woods such as oak and ash so that the surface is uniform and smooth for finishing. Although the filler's main purpose is to help produce a glass-like finish, it also speeds coat buildup.

Pore filler is applied with a brush, allowed to set over about 20 minutes, and then scraped and rubbed clean with cotton waste. The tricky part about this work is that all filler that does not find its way into the pores must be removed. At the same time, any filler that dries before scraping becomes very difficult to remove. It pays to work a section at a time, applying no more filler than can be cleaned before set up. Joe uses Behlen's Porolac brand filler and finds an old credit card is one of the best scraping tools for this procedure.

**2) Apply shellac** — For a traditional job, Joe brushes on eight coats of orange shellac. Besides being an appropriate finish, the orange shellac evens out the coloring between the old and new work. After every other coat, he breaks the glaze by roughing the surface gently with fine steel wool or 3M Scotch-Brite pads (which resist clogging). Vacuuming the woodwork after roughing and keeping dust down in the room are also very important.

**3) Rub and wax** — Finally, the finish is rubbed down

thoroughly with a progression of 3M pads, 0000 steel wool, and then pumice. After the pumice is vacuumed up, the ash is waxed and polished with a high-quality turpentine-based untinted (non-amber) butcher's wax.



*Fitting a new pilaster carving with scrapers and planes.*

## A Special Formula

The mahogany portions of the window, which included the newly-made sash, were also sealed and then pore-filled using red mahogany filler. The finish chosen was four coats of traditional oil varnish (for weather resistance). To complement the varnish and mahogany, however, Joe used a composite of several antique procedures to stain the wood:

**1) Wash with lye** — a warm solution of  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 teaspoon of lye mixed in 6 cups of water is brushed onto both old and new mahogany and allowed to dry. This step cleanses and slightly darkens the wood.

**2) Stain** — a warm solution of 1 ounce of Brazilwood (a powdered natural pigment) and 1 to 2 pints of distilled water is brushed on evenly. Under this stain, even bleached-out mahogany turns beet red.

**3) Mordant wash** — a warm solution of 1 teaspoon potassium dichromate (a color fixative) dissolved in 1 cup of distilled water, then diluted with 15 cups of distilled water and applied with a sponge. This last step is needed to make the dye last. (Note: potassium dichromate is very toxic and must be handled with proper safety precautions.)

This unique formula is the product of experiments on many projects and woods over several years, and takes experience to apply correctly. The results, though, are especially dramatic on new mahogany, and also work well on cherry. While time-consuming to apply, it brings out a deep, rich character in both old and new woods, and the stunning final appearance is typical of that produced by methods that were in use when the window was built.



*The completed bay window and its high-sheen finishes.*

## SUPPLIERS

### Old Mill Cabinet Shop

1660 Camp Betty Washington Road, Dept. OHJ  
York, PA 17402  
(717) 755-8884

*antique and modern stains and finishes*

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21801 Industrial Boulevard, Dept. OHJ  
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(612) 428-2199

*stains, finishes, woodworking materials and tools*

*Traditional Line Ltd. specializes in architectural restoration: 143 West 21st St., New York, NY 10011; (212) 627-3555.*



Nearly all of the American architectural styles begin at the top and sift downward, from expensive architect-designed, high-style houses to the homes of the less-than-wealthy. Gothic and Greek Revival touches, for instance, turned up as frequently in small farmhouses as they did in great city mansions, and the Queen Anne house was as democratic as the American flag. One grand exception to the trickle-down rule was Academic Eclecticism, also known as the Beaux Arts or American Renaissance style.

Strictly speaking, however, none of these terms really refers to any particular "style," but to a way of *thinking* about styles. Although it drew most heavily from Italian and French Renaissance design sources, Academic Eclecticism used many other historical European styles and periods as well. The peak of its popularity spanned the years from about 1890 until about 1917, although it actually began a bit earlier and continued into the 1930s. Allied with the City Beautiful movement, Academic Eclecticism seemed to its many admirers to herald a true "American Renaissance." It bene-

fited citizens at every economic level in scores of American cities by inspiring not only beautiful and impressive public buildings, but also sculpture and fountains, parks and tree-lined boulevards.

As applied to houses, though, Academic Eclecticism belonged to the very rich. It called for large, formal, expensive homes that were nearly always built of masonry and adorned with a great deal of sophisticated, carved, classical ornament.

### More Than a Style

The seeds of Academic Eclecticism were sown immediately after the Civil War, when would-be

American architects traveled abroad to study in European ateliers, particularly at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. By the end of the century, an entire generation of architects that had been trained at l'Ecole, by Beaux Arts professors in American schools, or by Beaux Arts architectural offices in this country — the first generation of professionally trained architects in the nation's history, in fact — were at work in the United States. In Europe, the students had learned to make exquisite architectural drawings while absorbing the theory and principles of design, as well as the nuances of the historical styles used by Italian, French, and northern European builders from the 16th through the 18th centuries. By the time

# THE BEAUX ARTS STYLE



*The entrance to the Marble House (W.K. Vanderbilt House) in Newport, Rhode Island (1888-92). Designed by Richard Morris Hunt, the Louis XVI facade features a grand portico that doubles as a porte-cochere.*

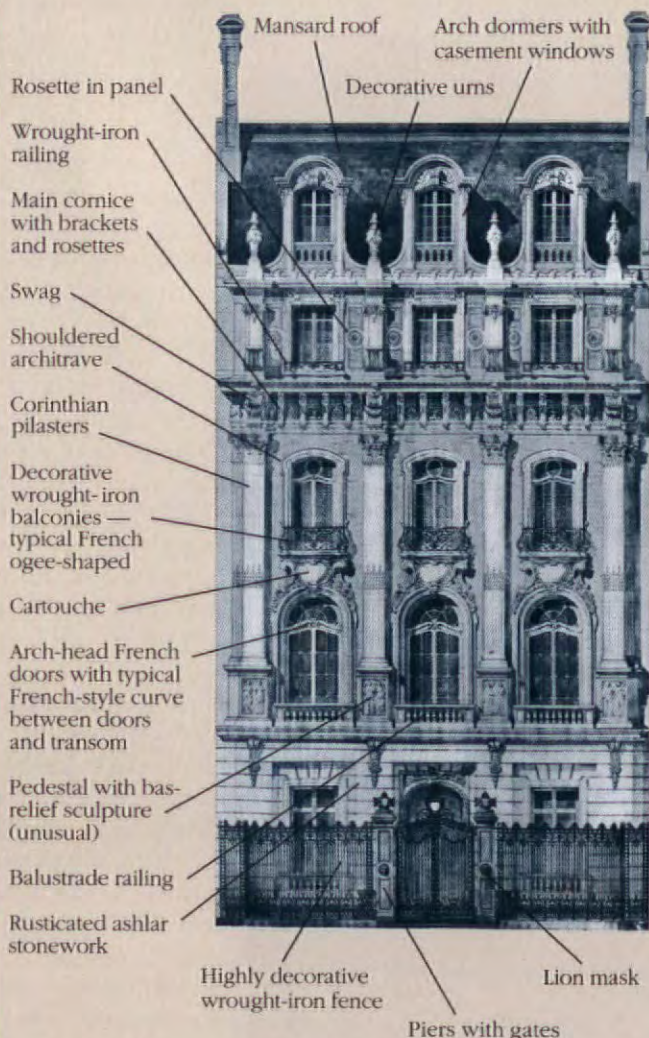
by James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell



## READING THE OLD HOUSE

# ACADEMIC ECLECTICISM

The most formal and elegant of the styles in the U.S., based on a thorough theory of design taught by the French *Ecole des Beaux Arts* to freely reinterpret the high styles of the past. Used by American architects in townhouses, country estates, large public buildings and institutions.



11 E. 62nd St., New York Abner J. Haydel, Architect

style as such, but for a way of integrating the best architecture of the past with modern uses, needs, materials, and technology.

All this might have remained no more than high-flown theory had it not been for the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World. (Yes, we know he came here in 1492 — centennials take time to organize.) The Beaux Arts-style exposition buildings were arranged in a lake-front grouping dubbed the "White City," a dazzling — and temporary — Never-Never-Land free of the poverty, filth, and disorder

that plagued Chicago and other American cities. Although the buildings were designed to last only a few months, they represented an ideal of urban beauty which struck a chord with the general public as well as within the architectural community. Could Americans become better, happier, healthier citizens simply by being exposed to beautiful public places? Why not?

Optimism reigned, and similar expositions were organized in other cities, spreading the gospel of the City Beautiful throughout the land, where it was eagerly received by civic leaders, architects, and the public. Almost overnight, Victorian designs became outdated — and the emerging Modern and Prairie styles were stopped virtually dead in their tracks as well. Only Academic Eclecticism, it was clear, could build the City Beautiful.

Nowhere was the idea more welcome, or more needed, than in Washington, D.C. The Capital City was, frankly, a mess — cluttered, unplanned, and unkempt. With improvement in mind, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed the MacMillan Commission, a blue-ribbon committee composed of two prominent architects, Charles Follen McKim and Daniel Burnham, and the nation's leading landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., to oversee



*In this five-storey New York City townhouse, iron balconies, all-over rustication, and a full-width stone balustrade at attic level provide horizontal balance as well as elegant ornament.*



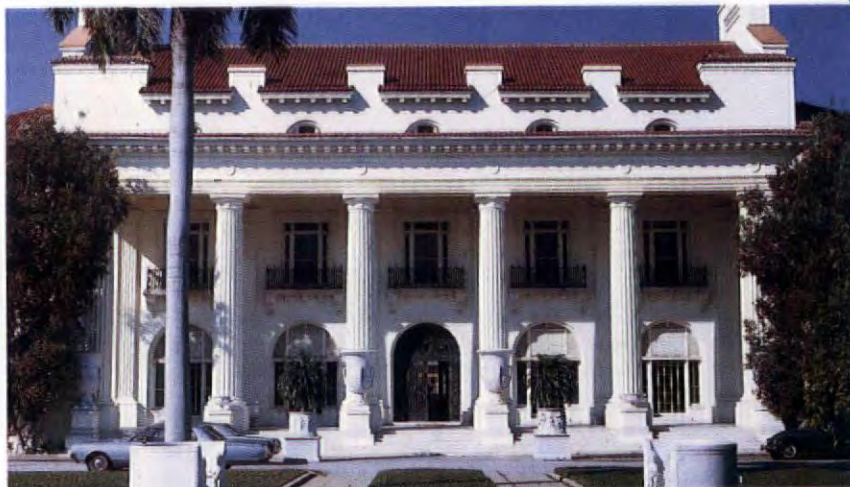
the updating and expansion of Pierre L'Enfant's 18th-century plan for the city. The MacMillan Plan permanently recast the appearance of Washington and set off a building spree that lasted until the Depression. Like the L'Enfant Plan, the MacMillan Plan was never totally built, but its successes were (and still are) very visible. They inspired other cities — from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati to San Francisco — to order their own plans.

With this emphasis on planning, architects in the Academic Eclectic style were interested in more than just individual buildings. As they saw it, there was a well-ordered scheme-behind-the-scheme: Every building part contributed to a coherent design appropriate for the building's intended use; each individual building related to its neighbors in size, color, and form; and, finally, the building context was as important as the building design. Furthermore, the context included not just the site of the building in question, or even its closest neighbors, but the entire area for blocks around — the entire city if necessary. Consequently, the design of urban squares, triangles, and circles, broad avenues, vistas defined by sculpture, fountains, street furniture, parks, and plantings were all part of the architect's natural concern.

One architectural historian has suggested that the gap that separated City Beautiful streetscapes from those of the late-19th century is the difference between the cozy clutter of the Victorian parlor, filled with bric-a-brac and interesting but unrelated objects of nature and art, and the cool elegance of the salon, a stately, well-ordered space designed for formal affairs and public gatherings.

### Mansions and Municipal Buildings

The Beaux Arts mode worked especially well for large public and institutional structures. In the early-20th-century drive toward social improvement, practically every town of any size had at least one such building on the drawing board. Thus, libraries, post offices, railroad stations, courthouses, city halls, and university



**Top:** An Italian/Mediterranean interpretation of the Beaux Arts in Palm Beach, Florida (Flagler Mansion, 1901). **Middle left:** The mansard roof is a hallmark of French-style Beaux Arts buildings, here in Washington, D.C. (Fahnestock House, 1909). **Middle right:** White marble columns, cherubim, swag, cartouche, and urns are typical of the sumptuous doorway adornment (DeLamar Mansion). **Above:** In the best Academic Eclectic tradition, the garden facade of Edwin Berwind's Newport summer home interprets rather than copies the small chateau on which it is modeled (*The Elms*, 1901).

buildings are Academic Eclecticism's most visible monuments. However, it was equally useful for houses, from large, freestanding mansions to smaller, but still sizable, attached townhouses, especially in cities like Boston,





**Top:** Built for grand-scale entertaining by Cornelius Vanderbilt and designed by Richard Morris Hunt, this Italian Renaissance-inspired Newport "cottage" is luxurious and efficient (*The Breakers*, 1892-94). **Middle:** Innovative Beaux Arts architects like Horace Trumbauer could adapt the style to almost any site, such as this triangular lot in Washington, D.C. (*Perry Belmont House*, 1909). **Above:** This New Orleans house — though large, formal, and elegant — is about as close to vernacular as Academic Eclecticism gets.

New York, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, and Washington. Suburban examples were less common, and small-town examples are nearly non-existent, except perhaps for the ubiquitous Carnegie library or a new post office.

Design inspiration came variously from France, Italy, Germany, England, Spain, or Holland (sometimes from more than one of these countries in a single building). Whether used for a French chateau or a Georgian mansion, however, the term Academic Eclecticism is best reserved for elegant, formal reinterpretations of earlier styles, not for line-for-line reproductions. Rich materials, elegantly handled, were the hallmarks of these substantial houses. They were nearly always built of masonry, often of smooth, light-colored, ashlar-cut limestone. Rusticated stone blocks with deeply cut edges were often used to emphasize the first storeys or the bases and corners of buildings. Sometimes the entire facade was rusticated, so that the horizontal lines helped cut the visual height of tall, narrow townhouses.

There was invariably an impressive, formal front entrance, usually with elaborate carving around the doorway. On many of the most pretentious buildings, the carved ornament stretched from the foundation to the chimney caps, as reclining cherubim, flower-filled urns, or other statuary adorned overdoors, cornices, or spandrels. Columns in the classical orders were extensively used, in colonnades across the fronts of buildings, as supports for arches and porches, or as colonettes grouped beneath the pediments of dormers. Balustrades of wrought iron or stone (or stone look-alikes in painted cast stone, terra cotta, or pressed metal) paraded across the tops of buildings.

Townhouses were usually built in three or four bays and were three or four storeys tall (frequently five storeys in New York). A low ground floor or "basement" provided service areas and entrances, but the real attention was centered one floor up, on the "first" floor, or piano nobile, where guests were entertained and families gathered. Often a mansard roof accommodated an extra half-storey at the top, particularly in French-inspired designs. Hipped or flat roofs were common in Italian models. Classical orders, classical ornament, mouldings, and cornices were universal. Like houses in the other eclectic revival styles of the period, these buildings clearly belonged to their own time and place. No matter how accurately individual features might reflect earlier eras, they were always reordered and revised to fit a 20th-century American aesthetic. In the same spirit of pragmatism, the symmetrical facades needed for a feeling of classical calm were rarely allowed to interfere with the efficient functioning of the floor plan.

If the exteriors were grand, the interiors were likely to be breathtaking. Commanding staircases of marble, with wrought-iron railings, specifically designed to allow theatrical entrances to social or state affairs, wound their way to the upper storeys. (Modern elevators made getting from floor to floor a snap when nobody important was around to be impressed.)



Coffered ceilings with elaborate figural paintings and plaster mouldings and cornices teased the eye upward — and up, and up, as ceiling heights often seemed dizzyingly close to stratospheric. Walls were often paneled in fine woods or painted with classical murals. Massive mantelpieces in marble or wood were more for ostentatious display than for warmth, since the latest models in central-heating systems did the heating.

The floor plans provided for masculine rooms and feminine rooms, rooms for sleeping, dressing, bathing. (Multiple bathrooms, often opulently fitted out and always with efficient modern sanitary facilities, were standard.) There were formal dining rooms and smaller breakfast rooms; sitting rooms for chatting with intimate friends; salons for chatting with worthy strangers; morning rooms and solariums; music rooms, game rooms, and billiard rooms. There were offices and service areas, servants' quarters, laundries, kitchens, and butlers' pantries. There were not necessarily all of these types of rooms in every house, of course, but there were usually enough rooms to make moving easily from one part of the house to another something of a problem for the servants, of whom there were obviously a great many. So floor plans required special attention to make sure they remained stylishly symmetrical yet allowed efficient circulation by family, staff, and guests.

### Academic Architects

This was perhaps the special genius of the American architect, and it was aided by his expanded opportunities for professional training in his own country. The first schools of architecture at United States universities were established soon after the Civil War, in the shadow of l'Ecole des Beaux Arts. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology led the way in 1865. Cornell, Syracuse, the University of Michigan, Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, Armour Institute (now the Illinois Institute of Technology), and Harvard followed over the next few decades. In addition, some architects, such as Richard Morris Hunt (the first American to attend l'Ecole des Beaux Arts), set up their own ateliers when they returned from their studies on the continent. By the end of the century, Beaux Arts-type training was readily available in American schools and architectural offices.

While it is true that houses in the Academic Eclectic mode were designed and built all across the country, there did tend to be a concentration of them in the northeastern and midwestern states, and certain pockets of Beaux Arts enthusiasm can still be identified to this day. Newport, Rhode Island, where Richard Morris Hunt designed many great mansions, is one of the most notable.

The two most influential firms in Academic Eclecticism, however, were McKim, Mead, & White (particularly Stanford White), who were noted also for their work in the Colonial Revival style, and Carrere & Hastings. Their design for the Villard Houses, a group of



*The grand spaces of Beaux Arts buildings are so suited to entertaining and public functions that it's no surprise many have been converted to diplomatic use, as with this Polish Consulate General (DeLamar Mansion, New York).*

six New York City attached townhouses placed around a central courtyard, helped to establish McKim, Mead, & White as the dominant specialists in the Italian Renaissance style. Carrere & Hastings, on the other hand, generally preferred to work mostly in a French idiom. Among their smaller commissions was Nemours, the Alfred I. du Pont house near Wilmington, Delaware, built between 1909 and 1910. Constructed in pink stucco over Brandywine granite, it has 77 rooms and extensive gardens in the French style.

The Philadelphia architect Horace Trumbauer was also responsible for designing some great mansions in Newport and elsewhere. Boston architects include Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge (successors to H.H. Richardson's firm), who designed both residential and commercial buildings, including South Station. In Chicago, the best known name was certainly that of Daniel Burnham, who had been in charge of overall design and planning for the Columbian Exposition.

The City Beautiful Movement did not transform every American city into a place of beauty and harmony, but it did change most of them permanently for the better. And Academic Eclecticism, while it could not provide a home for Everyman, did provide him with a standard for beauty and order that is still part of our national consciousness.





# VICTORIAN *with a* VENGEANCE



photo by Ken Cutler

BY CONNIE ARCHAMBAULT



**I** grew up in Baltimore, first in a brick row house and then in a small stone, slate-roofed cottage. I don't know where or when I fell in love with Victorians, but once my husband Peter and I started

looking seriously for our 'final family home' early in 1984, Tudors and Victorians were foremost. In casual Christmas-party cocktail conversation, we discovered that Dr. and Mrs. Adolph Franz would consider selling their house, as their kids were grown.

The house, set on 1+ acre, was built in 1865 by a local lawyer, George Austin Fay. That's Mr. Fay himself pictured in front of the fence, back when the house was still a Mansard-style structure (#4). It was Queen-Anned in 1895, when a library/law office was added with a three-storey turret and wraparound porch.

For eight years I had ridden by this Meriden, Connecticut, house and admired it greatly — even though the house, painted in olive, was very solemn and austere (#3). But for a person like myself, who always does at least two wallpapers in a room and thinks three is even better, the chance to paint an exterior in seven or more colors was most intriguing.

The previous owners spent considerable money upgrading the bathrooms, kitchen, and dining room, so we've concentrated on getting the outside restored. There is nothing that can beat being suspended on a 12-foot ladder in 95-degree weather, stripping paint by hand with the heat plate! (We still prefer the plate to the heavier heat gun.) Most of the stripping and tedious prep work we have done ourselves (#s 1 & 2). We're also updating the electrical systems and replastering and restoring the downstairs — that's me in the dining room (#8) after the wallpaper was all steam stripped.

Marty Zeiser (#6) of the Rick Reale Company did an outstanding job of marbleizing and gold-leafing the fireplace which is the focal point of the library. Marty's expertise added the accents to the fireplace's details (#5), bringing out its unique features. When we first bought the house, it had 20 layers of white paint





(#7), which we stripped ourselves!

The living room demanded a lot of work (#10), but the finished result (#9) is something of which we're all proud. One of the previous owners had added arches to that room (#11) as a framework for her organ. We stripped the arch columns of their white paint so they could be restored to a high-style, polychrome Victorian glory (#12), with colors that match the floral-print wallpaper in the adjacent dining room.

We haven't used a professional decorator, as we feel that if you live in the house, it should reflect your personality. However, we found the staff of two local paint and wallpaper stores — Butler's and Regal's — to be most cooperative and supportive in suggesting wallcoverings and color blends. In the end we made the final selections, and we're generally happy with the results. At one point, when the painters tried hard to sell us on a grey exterior body color, my husband threatened to pack his bag — he'd had enough of battleship grey in the Navy, and besides, there were already three grey houses on the street (including one next door). One neighbor came by with overdue library books of Victorian "Painted Ladies" and said he was most concerned over color as we were in his windows' path of vision. (However, he never showed his face during all the painting and scraping.)

On the first floor, we put a 10-foot Christmas tree in the turret-area part of the library. Now it is awaited by neighbors and passing drivers, who literally demand that we keep the tradition going. Otherwise, Christmas decorating, such as the punch bowl set up in the front ball (#13), is still left to us!

In its glory, Meriden was a city of proud silver-barons' mansions. But for the most part, our famed Victorians have bit the dust for commercial expansion. By default, our house — shown here in during the first snowfall of December 1988 (#14) — is one of the few remaining 'grande dames.' However, since we started working, our whole block seems to be an ongoing restoration project. It's nice to have been a motivating factor.



11



12



13



14





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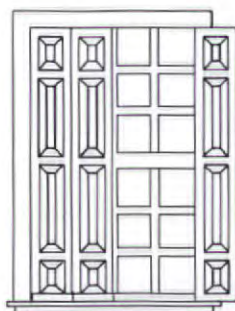
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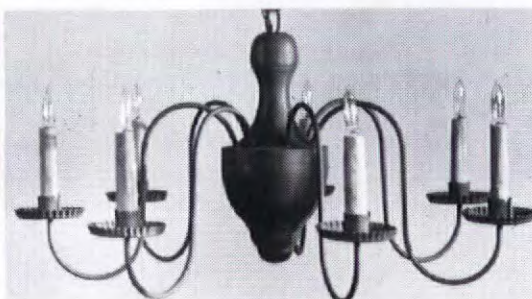


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by Gordon Bock

Before metal fasteners and modern adhesives, structures were held together using an arsenal of wood-working joints. One of the simplest joints, the dado, is still with us as a practical way to join woodwork, from bookshelves to door frames.

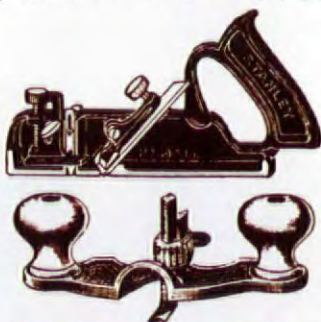
Simply stated, a dado is a rectangular recess or square-shouldered groove that runs the full width of a board. Dados are cut across the

grain of the wood for maximum strength and, in most instances, are designed to let in another board in a housed joint.

To cut a dado with hand tools, first carefully lay out the position and depth of the joint (typically, about 1/3 the thickness of the board)

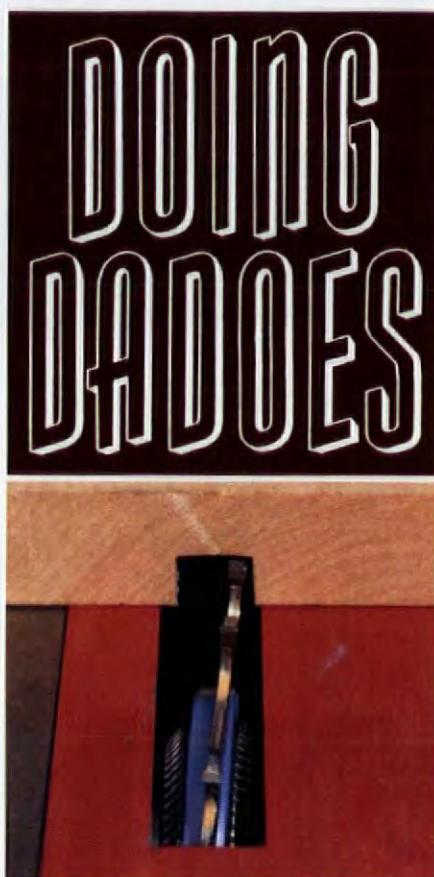
using a square. Make sure the cut is no wider than the mating board — a loose dado is useless. Next, saw the shoulders of the dado to the desired depth with a back saw, cutting on the waste sides of the lines. Then, clean out the recess, working from both ends towards the middle, using a chisel. Once the dado is clear to the desired depth, pare the bottom flat (using the chisel upside-down works well).

In the past, specialized planes were often employed to speed the dadoing process. Router planes, useful for dressing the recess bottom to a uniform depth, have a single, "old-woman's



**Top:** a cast-iron dado plane. **Above:** a router plane.

tooth" blade that runs below the sole of the plane. Dado planes cut dados without the aid of other tools. They



Rotating the side washers (in blue here) sets the cut of the wobble-type dado heads.

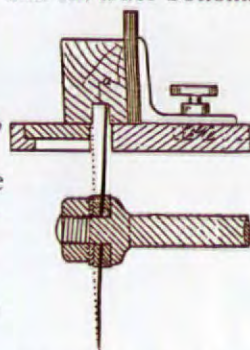
have have a scribing iron (ground with nickers at either side, which score the width of the dado) just ahead of the main cutter.

When circular saws appeared on the scene, making dados became quicker and easier. One approach was the "drunken saw," a blade mounted obliquely on the drive spindle so that some teeth cut one shoulder of the dado, some teeth the other shoulder, and the rest ate away the middle core. The main drawback to this trick was that the teeth travel an elliptical path, leaving the dado with a hollow bottom.

Modern wobble-type dado heads (see photo, top of page) still make use of this principle. In most models (priced from \$30 to \$90), the offset washers that

hold the blade are calibrated so that the dado width can be dialed in, usually to a 1 3/16" limit. Recently, twin-blades designs that cut truer bottoms have come on the market.

Multiple blades, though, are not a new idea. Stack-type dado heads — two blades sandwiching a set of chippers — have been around since the turn of the century, and are preferred for production wood-working. Dado width is determined by selecting chippers and shims of appropriate thicknesses, then ganging all blades together on the shaft. Stack-type dado heads are more expensive than wobble heads (often over \$100) but they have a greater width capacity. The resulting dado bottom is usually more refined than with a wobble head. For either type



The out-of-true "drunken saw."



A stack-type dado-head set from 1908.

of dado head, feed the stock slowly and carefully across the blade. Make deep dados in more than one pass, or the wood may tear out.

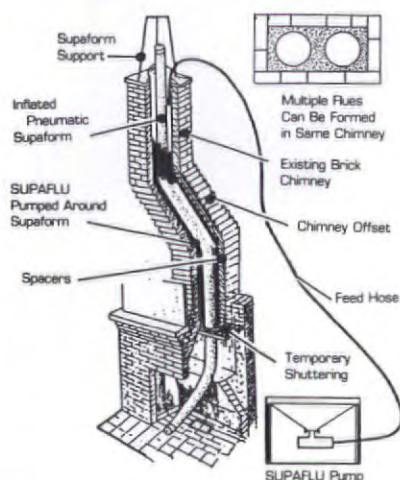
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by Lynn Elliott

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*The 29" Fairmount is shown with a brushed-brass finish.*



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*The base of the 21" Samish has architectural buttresses inserted.*



### Art Nouveau

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*Note the Monterey's gold-white art glass.*



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Anyone tackling a refinishing job will want to take a look at Constantine's Woodworkers' Catalog. It's a goldmine of hard-to-find items — from aniline dyes to pumice powder — for the wood finisher, including a selection of six brands of quality waxes for protecting new and antique furniture. Other traditional products available are shellac flakes in three grades, wood fillers and blending powders, and pages of stains, lacquers, and varnishes. Prices vary. For a catalog, send \$1 to Albert Constantine and Sons, Inc., 2050 Eastchester Rd., Dept. OHJ, Bronx, NY 10461; (800) 223-8087.

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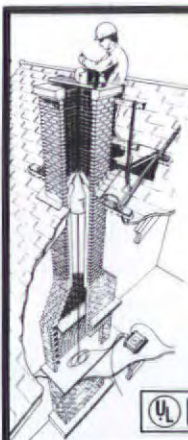


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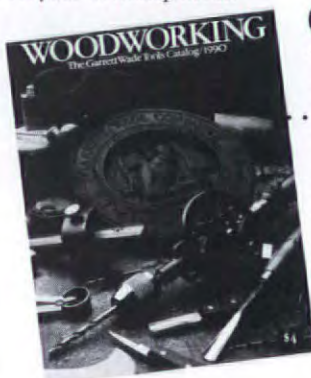
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- **Building cross sections:** cornice, fireplace, and cabinet sections when needed to help your builder understand major interior details.

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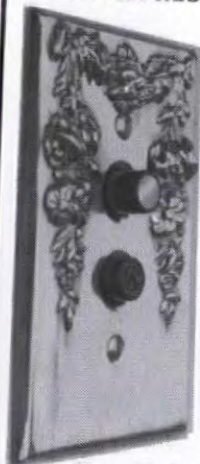
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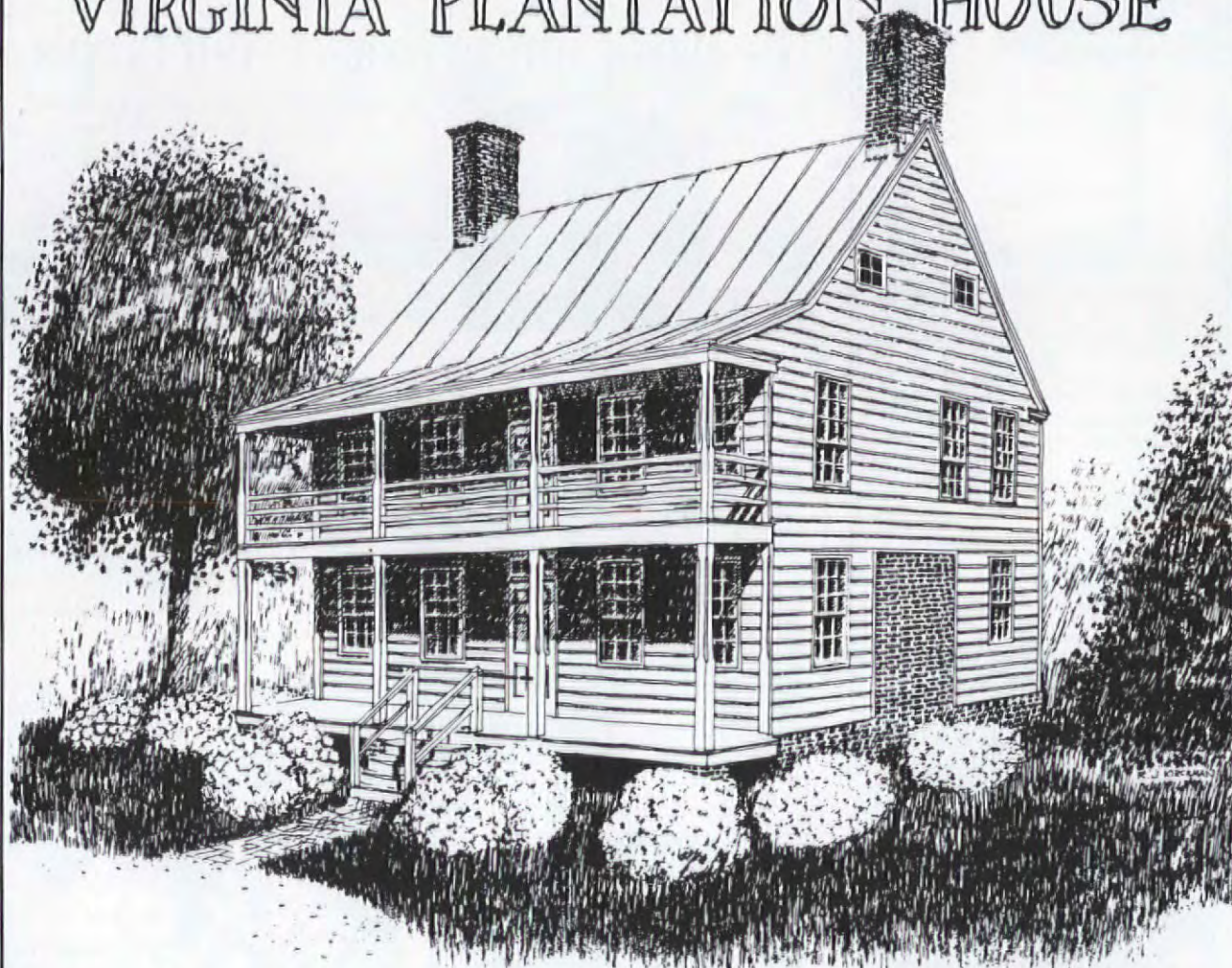
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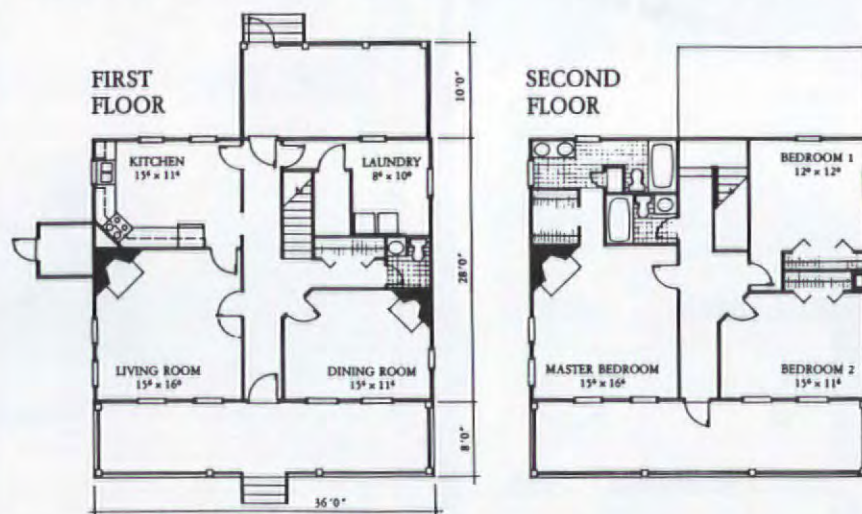


# VIRGINIA PLANTATION HOUSE



Tidewater houses, such as this plan, incorporate many Southern architectural influences, including expansive galleries and broken rooflines — traditional details of French plantation houses. Inside, an effi-

cient center-hall floor plan allows for well-proportioned rooms. Note the useful pantry and laundry room near the kitchen. Upstairs, the master bedroom boasts a fireplace and private bathroom.



## Plan E-08A-TA

Cost: \$200  
 \$280 (set of 5)  
 \$325 (set of 8)

SQUARE FOOTAGE ..... 2,052  
 FIRST FLOOR ..... 1044  
 SECOND FLOOR ..... 1008  
 CEILING HEIGHT  
 FIRST FLOOR ..... 9  
 SECOND FLOOR ..... 8  
 OVERALL DIMENSIONS  
 WIDTH ..... 36'  
 DEPTH ..... 46'



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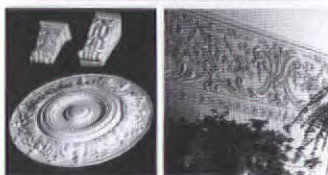
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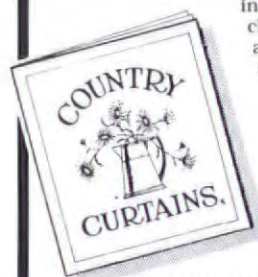
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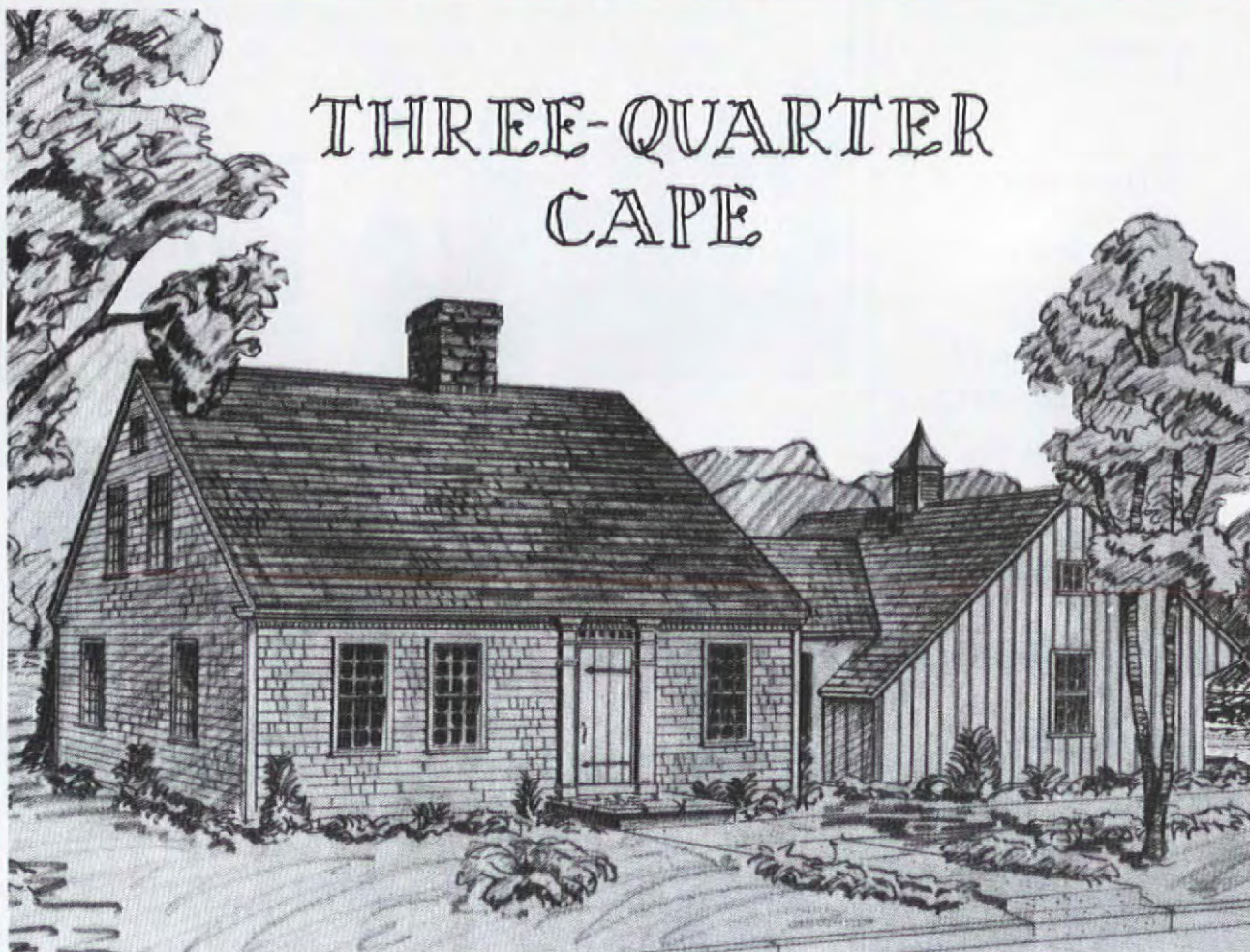
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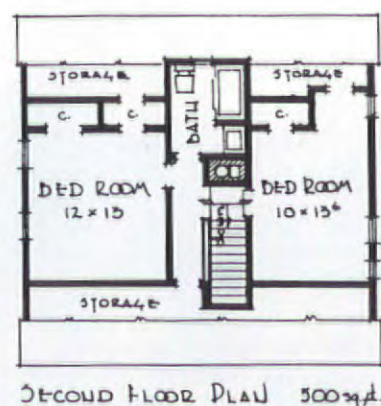
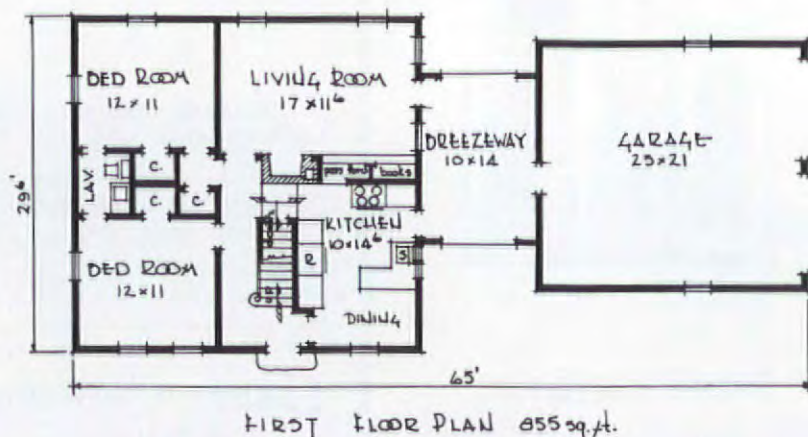
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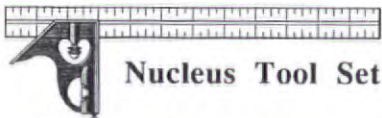
## Plan E-08A-EP

Cost: \$102  
\$156 (set of 5)  
\$186 (set of 8)

SQUARE FOOTAGE .....	1,355
FIRST FLOOR .....	855
SECOND FLOOR .....	500
CEILING HEIGHT .....	
FIRST FLOOR .....	7'8"
SECOND FLOOR .....	7'6"
OVERALL DIMENSIONS .....	
WIDTH (with garage) .....	65'
DEPTH .....	29'6"







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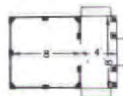
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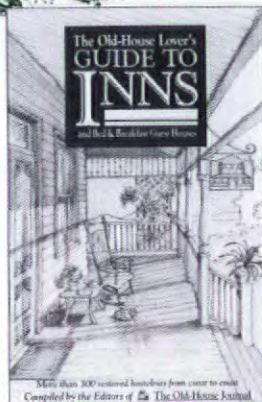
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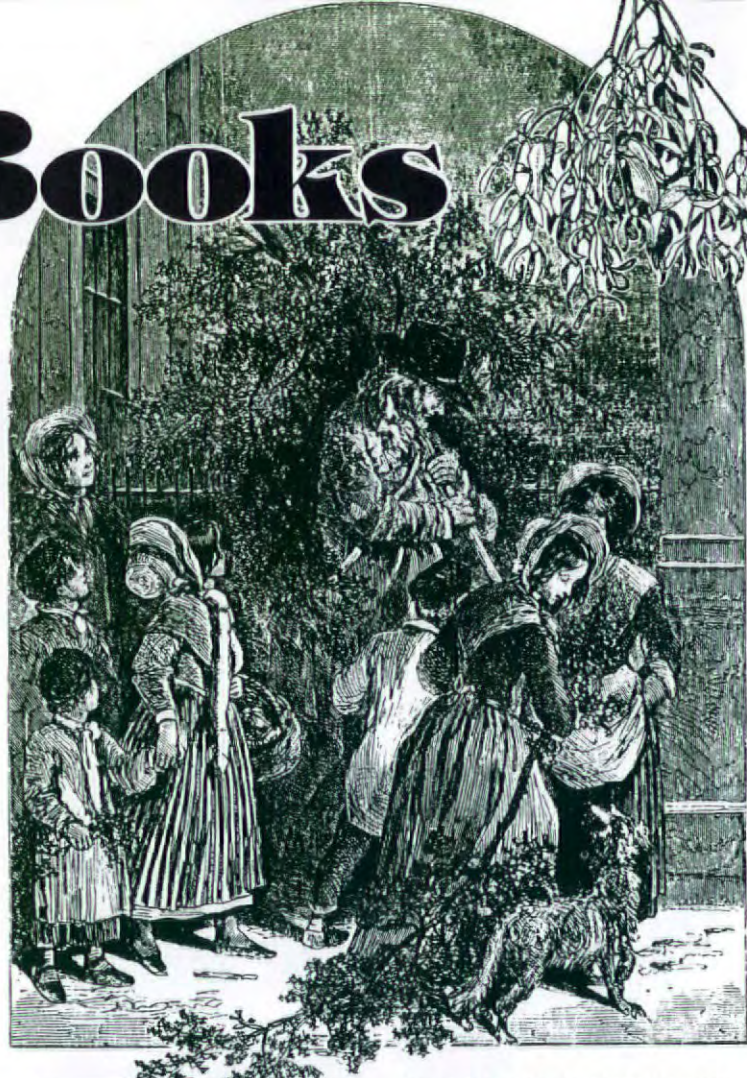
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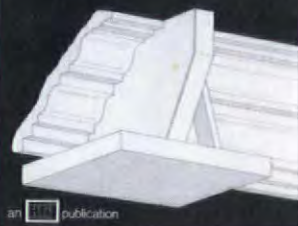
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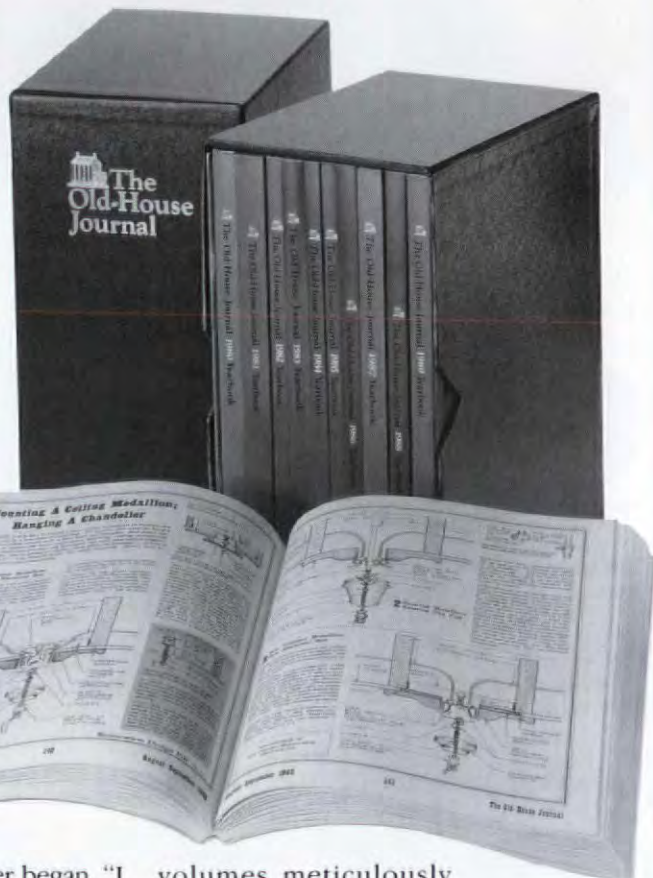
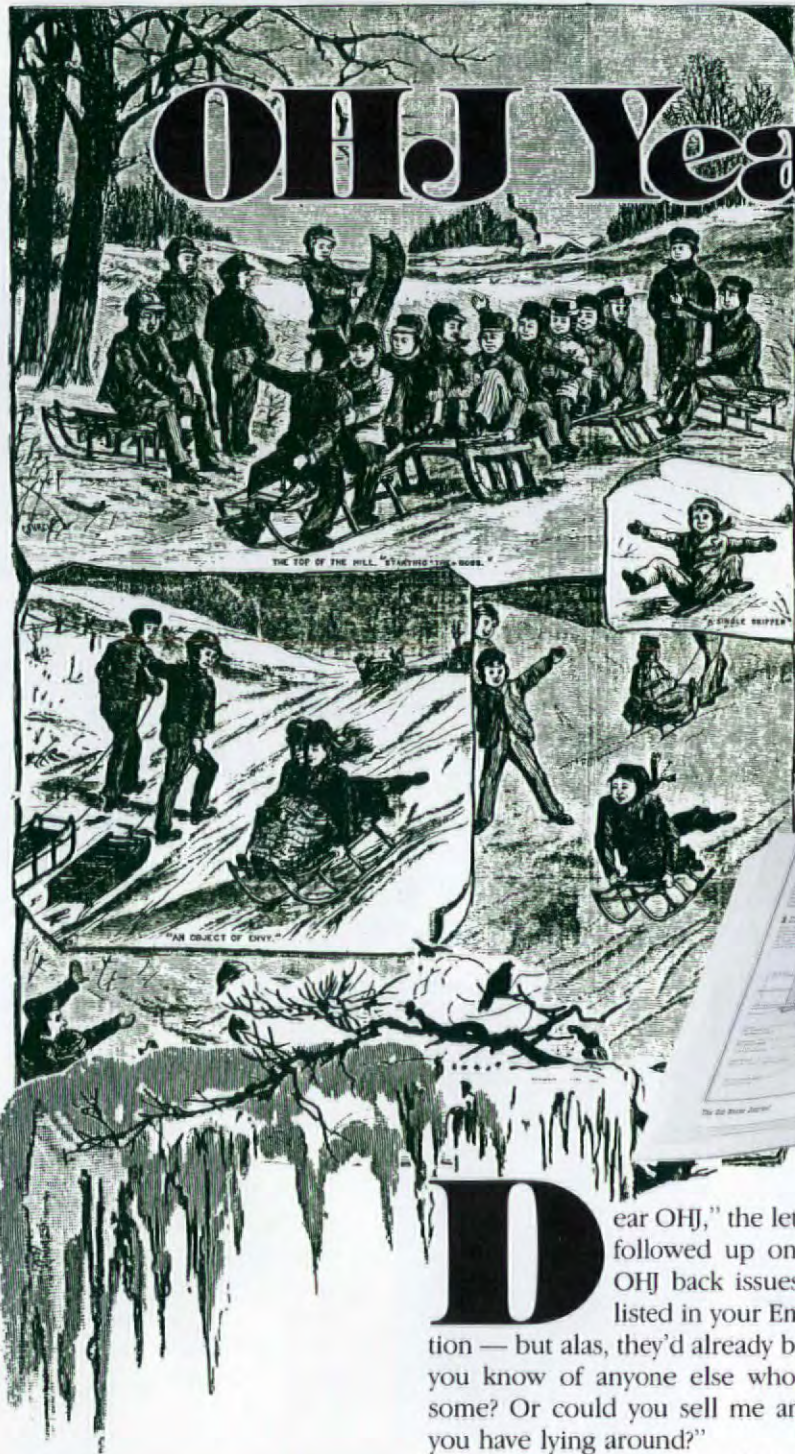


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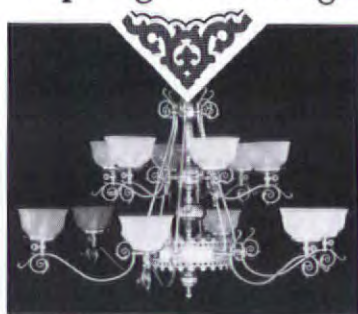
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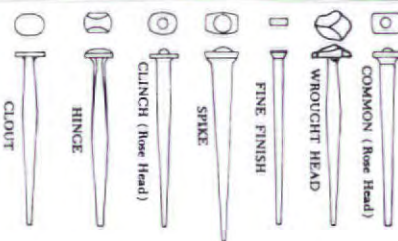
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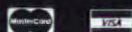
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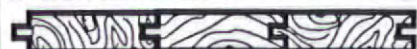


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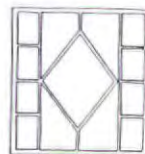
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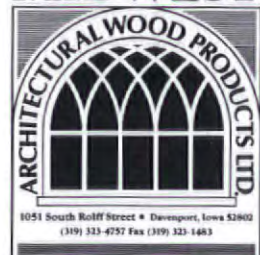
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**SAUTTER HOUSE FIVE** — Wallpapers of a German-American Farmstead. Text, color/b&w photos of wall coverings, 1860s-1916, Nebraska's pioneer period. Historically documented. 1983, 33 pp., pbk., 8-1/2"x11, \$8.50 plus \$2.50 shipping. Bulk rate available. Historical Society of Douglas County, PO Box 11398, Omaha NE 68111, (402) 455-9990.

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# ADVERTISERS' INDEX

Products Network No.	Page No.		
20 AA Abbingdon Affiliates .....	25	591 Delphi Glass Corporation .....	19
31 Abatron .....	9	101 Devenco Louver Products .....	24
Addikson Hardware Company ...	75	Driwood Moulding Company .....	47
23 Ahren's Chimney Technique .....	57	Durable Goods .....	63
Albany Woodworks .....	71	Donald Durham Company .....	71
354 Andersen Windows .....	15	487 Empire Woodworks .....	55
Anthony Wood Products .....	63	516 Epoch Designs .....	75
582 Appropriate Technology Corp. ...	63	55 Erie Landmark .....	57
500 Architectural Caricatures .....	19	Essex Forge .....	69
43 Architectural Components .....	49	221 The Fan Man .....	49
219 Art Directions .....	59	Fastenation .....	71
340 Arvid's Historic Woods .....	59	294 Fischer & Jirouch .....	17
583 August West Systems, Inc. ....	13	590 Fontaine's Auction Gallery .....	25
18 Ball & Ball .....	23	350 Fourth Bay .....	25
193 Bathroom Machineries .....	25	Funnybone .....	69
73 Bendheim Glass .....	17	533 Galena/Jo Daviess County .....	53
29 Besco Plumbing .....	12	553 Garrett Wade Company .....	57
27 Bradbury & Bradbury .....	20	560 Gates Moore Lighting .....	47
Brickyard, The .....	69	Grand Era Reproductions .....	69
22 Burrows, J.R. & Company .....	21	387 Granville Manufacturing .....	53
Campbellsville Industries, Inc. ...	61	355 Heat-N-Glo .....	21
Carlisle Restoration Lumber .....	63	580 Historic Floors Of Oshkosh .....	63
192 Carter Canopies .....	59	565 HomeSaver Chimney Liners .....	49
Certified Chimney Sweeps .....	55	Horton Brasses .....	63
242 Chadsworth, Inc. ....	23	571 Iron Apple Forge .....	11
35 Charles Street Supply .....	17	545 The Iron Shop .....	55,75
47 Chelsea Decorative Metal .....	24	309 JB Products .....	11
Chicago Old Telephone Co. ....	73	2 The Joinery Company	
City Visions, Inc. ....	63	..... Inside Front Cover	
26 Classic Accents .....	59	Kestrel Manufacturing .....	75
159 Conant Custom Brass .....	12	334 King's Chandelier Company .....	61
42 Country Curtains .....	61	MacQuarrie & Niccum .....	73
307 Country Iron Foundry .....	59	173 Mad River Woodworks .....	71
Country Lane Classics .....	75	540 Maple Grove Restorations .....	47
212 Craftsman Lumber .....	73	9 Marvin Windows .....	7
Crawford's Old House Store .....	75	215 Midget Louver Co. ....	73
98 Cross VINYLattice .....	71	16 Midwest Wood Products .....	71
397 Crown City Hardware .....	5	Monarch Radiator Enclosures .....	73
Cumberland General Store .....	71	N.O.P.E. ....	75
44 Cumberland Woodcraft .....	61	537 National Decks Inc. ....	69
Custom Hardwood Productions		113 National Supafu Products .....	53
.....	63	5 Nixalite of America .....	23
518 Custom Wood Turnings .....	21	128 W.F. Norman .....	53,55
245 Decorator's Supply .....	20	527 North Fields Restorations .....	11
		32 Old Wagon Factory .....	24
		303 Ole Fashion Things .....	19
		53 Oregon Wooden Screen Door ....	55
		114 Perma Ceram .....	71
		319 Perma Glaze .....	63
		532 Sandy Pond Hardwoods .....	75
		Reggio Registers .....	75
		538 Renovator's Supply .....	11
		Restorer's Supply .....	25
		365 Rutland Products .....	61
		1 Schwerd Manufacturing .....	3
		Shuttercraft .....	73
		15 Silverton Victorian Millworks ....	53
		30 Smith-Cornell .....	57
		Snelling's Thermo-Vac, Inc. ....	69
		584 Solid/Flue .....	57
		South Coast Shingle .....	73
		Southampton Antiques .....	61
		Steptoe & Wife .....	73
		539 Sterling-Clark-Lurton Corp. ....	49
		Touchstone Woodworks .....	49
		Tremont Nail Company .....	69
		588 Trendlines .....	59
		585 Tuff-Kote Company, Inc. ....	19
		400 Urban Archeology .....	21
		Van Dyke's .....	69
		125 Vande Hey Raleigh	
		..... Inside Back Cover	
		Victor Trading Co. & Mfg. ....	63
		576 Victorian Collectibles .....	23
		4 Victorian Lighting Works .....	69
		13 Vintage Wood Works .....	73
		Vixen Hill .....	71
		438 Ward Clapboard Mill .....	49
		Warren Electric Company .....	69
		586 Wedge Innovations .....	47
		284 Whitco/Vincent Whitney .....	17,47
		439 Williams & Hussey .....	25
		Williamsburg Blacksmiths .....	73
		The Wood Factory .....	75
		587 Woodmaster Tools, Inc. ....	55
		581 George Yonnone Restorations	
		.....	47
		589 William Zinsser & Co. ....	10

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# Split Decision



**T**his month's Remuddling, located in the borough of Queens, was submitted by New York architect Monty Mitchell. A unique solution to the real-estate crunch, the house actually moved Mr. Mitchell to verse:

*In the outer boroughs of New York City,  
Remuddling is often not very pretty.  
As real-estate values rise and fall,  
A two-family house is cut in half with a Sawzall.*

Alumicided or brick ed-over facades abound in that neck of the woods, but even for a street replete with remuddlings, this slice of life is unique. No one here has any explanation for this house's descent from bad (substitute siding; off-the-rack windows and doors) to verse. One thing is certain, however: To quote another bard, "This was the most unkindest cut of all."

*Whatever angle it's seen from, the house on the right still defies belief.*





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# Vernacular Houses



A rain porch is an architectural accessory that keeps driving coastal rain off a variety of building types, such as this c. 1900 Victorian house.

## Rain-Porch Houses

Alabama's Mobile Bay area is periodically lashed by hurricanes and tropical storms, receiving well over 60 inches of rainfall annually. Along the bay's east shore, wind and rain thoroughly soak any building exterior. To deal with this problem, Eastern Shore residents developed the *rain porch*: a full, extra porch that extends three to six feet beyond a recessed galerie (main porch). Supported by posts that meet the ground, a rain porch shields the galerie from climatic extremes, extending the life of the decking and making it possible to sleep outside during the summer.

It is uncertain exactly when the rain porch came into vogue. Several antebellum houses on the Eastern Shore have exaggerated eaves across their facades, which may have been the germ of the rain-porch idea. But by the 1890s, the long roofline had fully evolved into an extra porch. Indeed, one traveler in 1895 noted the rain porch as "a peculiarity of the houses along the shore."

Rain porches were attached to Eastern Shore houses regardless of their architectural style. They were added to older Greek Revival houses as well as the "newer" Victorian cottages being constructed at the turn of the century. In conjunction with slatted porch ceilings (for ventilation), full-length windows, and wide central halls, the rain porch made these buildings perfectly suited to their locale.

As property values soar and older houses are torn down for new construction, the rain porch slowly disappears. Now, only about 20 houses with this distinctive feature remain in the area.

— John Sledge

Mobile Historic Development Commission  
Mobile, Alabama



The extended roofline created by a rain porch can be seen on this 1895 Point Clear house (inset). **Above:** an interior view of that house's rain porch. Note the slatted porch ceiling on the galerie for ventilation.

