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BRINGING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT

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Chill Out and Light a Candle
by Patricia Poore

“M y whole house is beadboard!” I gushed. That got Gordon over to visit my latest folly, a remuddled Shingle cottage that’s coming apart at the seams. No photo ops, however: I’d neglected to tell him that the beadboard has been cut into, water stained, and smothered under yellowing homasote.

Yes, dear friends, I have succumbed to old-house fever once again. After the last project, I swore I would spend my child-rearing years in comfort — if not a brand-new condo with wall-to-wall, then at least a well maintained house with no structural flaws, no falling plaster. I meant it! Life was too short to be consumed by a neurotic need to rescue abused buildings!

Yeah, well.

But I hav learned something, and it is such a Key to Happiness that I must share it with you. The lesson didn’t come easy; it might never have gotten through were it not for my husband Carl, who said, “Yes, we will buy this house and yes, I will work on it with you — but only if you chill out!”

By that he did not mean “slow down.” Lack of money was going to slow us down just fine. He meant “settle in and live.” Enjoy the house, not only for the restored gem it will be someday, but also for the crazy mess it is right now, and because it’s already our home.

Carl had reason to take a strong stand. When he met me, I was living (so to speak) not in a home, but on a job site. My living-room floor was covered with filthy kraft paper. There was no himiturc and no lighting. Smears of dried paint stripper covered the plaster walls around the staircase. My logic was thus: a mere creature comfort, when the tile roof needed replacing? Why invite people over to that mess when the house didn’t allow time for a social life anyway? Only a few months later, I rolled paper, hauled out the shop-vac . . . and Carl and I bought a Christmas tree, which we plunked down right in the middle of the empty living room. It was a start.

NOTHING LIKE AN ULTIMATUM FROM A loved one to push you into recovery. I did promise Carl that this renovation would be different. I even came up with a little slogan that flies in the face of my old ways: “Candles, fresh flowers, and throw pillows.” It works great. When candles are flickering, who cares if somebody once patched the cracks in the exposed subfloor with plaster of paris? Add a casserole and a bottle of wine, and you can have a dinner party amid the ruins. Which is exactly what we do.

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And so I cheerfully tell people the house will take ten years. I clean the rugs in unrestored rooms. Still, the house is so sad, it’s often hard for me to “just live with it.” Sometimes I have to take a deep breath and tell the Obsessive Renovator part of me that, indeed, at this moment, a walk on the beach with my two-year-old is much more important than plotting structural repairs to the leaning dormer. But it’s getting easier and — surprise! — old-house living is a lot more fun.
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different people look at buildings differently. Since, as the authors pointed out, preparation of a nomination can take weeks or even several months, there may be some turn-over in SHPO personnel.

—NAME WITHHELD
New York

THE AUTHORS RESPOND:
There's a valid point here. Even with a well-prepared nomination and with well-trained, well-intentioned SHPO staff and other reviewers, there's always an outside chance a Register nomination could be derailed on the way to listing. There's simply no way to eliminate subjectivity entirely or to guarantee agreement at every level on the historical and/or architectural significance of a particular property. Some states do, as our article noted, require formal preliminary assessments by both the staff and the review board, with early, written notification to the property owners. However, since these preliminary assessments obviously must be based on less evidence than a full Register nomination provides, they can not ensure a successful nomination (especially since, as the reader points out, there may be some staff turnover along the way). Nor is the National Register bound by the recommendations of the SHPO staff or review board; it may take a very different view of the property's eligibility for listing. There is a federal appeal process for both listing and delisting of properties, but be warned that unless convincing new evidence is presented, the outcome is unlikely to change — and appeals do cost additional time and money.

This being the real world, there is also, quite apart from valid differences of opinion, a myriad of political, bureaucratic, economic, academic, idiosyncratic, and/or downright egotistical considerations that have the potential to affect the registration of a property. All kinds of invisible agents could be (although fortunately they usually are not) at work on both sides of the issue — money, careers, reputations, egos, to name just a few. SHPOs are designated by their respective state governors; their appointments may be based on a) demonstrated com-

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should be aware that the National Fire Protection Association's Standard 211 (NFPA 211) requires the use of a non-water-soluble refractory mortar in the parging process.

Before beginning a restoration project of this type, the chimney should be evaluated. I would strongly recommend that your readers avail themselves of the evaluation services offered by a Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA) Certified Chimney Sweep serving in their area. (For information, send an SASE to CSIA P.O. Box 309, Olney, MD 20830.)

— JERRY ISENHOUR, CSIA
Olney, Maryland

**Prairie Plaster Uncovered**

We read with great interest the recent article on “Prairie Plaster” (January/February 1993) by Maya Moran. While removing wallpaper in our Oak Park, Illinois, home, we uncovered orange-and-terra cotta colored, untextured plaster in the finish coat of the parlor and bedroom walls. We have no doubt that this colored plaster, which matches the exterior sandstone, is original.

Our 1888 home was designed and inhabited by Wesley Arnold, a locally significant architect and precursor of Wright. His remaining works (circa 1888-1900) also include several churches in the Chicago area, composed, like our home, in the Romanesque Queen Anne style.

Oak Park is closely connected to the Prairie style, and there is no doubt that the use of colored and textured plasters gained wide acceptance through this style. The Wesley Arnold home suggests, however, that the use of colored plasters pre-dates the Prairie-style period.

— STEPHEN AND SUSAN KELLEY
Oak Park, Illinois

In Riverside, Illinois, a luminous and colorful wall of Prairie Plaster is uncovered in the Tomek House.


<br>

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**LETTERS**


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LETTERS

Tinting rough plaster walls was a popular early 20th-century treatment, but by no means limited to Prairie School-style houses. Staining, in general, was a regular part of a decorator's bag of tricks at the turn of the century, so its discovery in a late Victorian building wouldn't be surprising. We'd love to hear from other folks with further evidence or information on this technique.

— THE EDITORS

Lustron Love

MY LETTER TO THE EDITOR IN THE SEP-Tember/October 1992 issue resulted in over 125 letters from your readers in 31 states and the District of Columbia. They sent information on Lustron units, and many enclosed photographs of the houses too. (Quite a few people have even volunteered to go out searching in their areas if I could suggest towns with units or give them addresses.)

With the exception of California and Washington, which had no Lustrons, the replies tend to mirror the number of Lustrons [built] in each state. For the most part, your readers found plenty of the popular 02 Westchester, which has the notched porch cut out in the living room corner and two large windows in the front wall. But what was most surprising was the report of a whole town of the economical Newport model. Great Bend, Kansas, has at least nine of the Newport series in all four basic colors: Gray, Yellow, Tan, and Blue-green.

Thanks to you, Old-House Journal, and to your wonderful readers for expanding the list of known Lustrons by over 150 formerly unknown units.

—THOMAS FETTERS
Lombard, IL

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I would like to know what style of home we have. It was built in 1897 and today it looks exactly like the picture (below left), taken shortly after construction. I have done some research and think that the house is in the Princess Anne style. Can you confirm this?

— Nancy Klein
Olathe, Kansas

This is the kind of question that sets architectural historians ruminating on the uncertainties of a career as experts on building styles. Some historic homes are very clear about their stylistic derivations — a "temple" that could only represent the Greek Revival, for example, or a 20th-century half-timbered English Revival cottage. Most houses, though, are not so self-revealing. They don’t sing out either an unambiguous style or an obvious period of construction — or, for that matter, even a particular geographical location.

Take this photograph of an 1897 house in Olathe, Kansas, for instance. Fortunately for our reputation, we are told the date and the place right off the bat. We say "fortun­ately" because this is a house that could have been found almost anywhere in the United States and that could have been built any time within a decade on either side of the actual construction date. The owners describe it as a "Princess Anne." Now, "Princess Anne" is a lighthearted way of labeling small, simple, asymmetrical houses of the late Queen Anne period. In fact, OHJ coined this nickname in the early 1980s. However, it is not a formally accepted style term.

The house is clearly of the late 19th or early 20th century and is very attractive, even without the ornamentation a Queen Anne house would display. (Incidentally, we are fascinated by the handsome woven-wire fence around the property that shows in the old photo.) Sometimes houses like this one are called "vernacular," a term that has been [Continued on page 22]
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READING THE OLD HOUSE

A recent photo of the Klein home shows the simple lines and unadorned facade of the late Queen Anne period, nearly unchanged in over a hundred years.

[Continued from page 20] used — not always helpfully — to mean anything that is not high-style or architect-designed.

All this discussion doesn’t really answer the original question, but it does point out a major weakness in architectural terminology, since only a small percentage of houses are clearly related to a style. Here is where a catch-all term like “Victorian” starts looking good, although, as we all know, “Victorian” is properly not a style either, but a period. Perhaps we ought to just call such a house “a turn-of-the-century, two-storey, multi-gable house with a porch”?

Style consideration notwithstanding, many houses require documentary research, such as this dated photograph, and a careful physical examination of the house itself to pin down the construction date and the dates of any alterations and additions. This kind of good solid documentation is often hard to find, but worth the search.

CURIOUS ABOUT YOUR HOUSE? We welcome questions about house styles, provided you include a clear photograph, approximate age, and an estimate for return of materials. Send letters to Style Editor, The Old-House Journal, 2 Main St., Gloucester, MA 01931.

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Antique Peonies
by Scott G. Kunst

Though easy to care for, and long-lived, peonies are among the best-loved historic plants.

Deep red European peonies have been grown as herbs since the days of ancient Greece. The most common of these, *Paeonia officinalis*, was brought to this continent by colonists. Blooming in May, this is the "old red piney" once so popular for Memorial Day. Two other species deserve passing mention: the Oriental tree peony (*P. suffruticosa*, actually a small shrub) and the fern-leaf peony (*P. tenuifolia*). Though wonderful plants, neither has ever been widely grown in America.

Most garden peonies here today descend from the Asian *P. lactiflora*. Cultivated in China for over a thousand years, garden forms of this species were brought to Europe around 1800. One variety — 'Whitleyi Major' — can occasionally be found today. In the 1840s, tastemaker A.J. Downing included "Chinese White" and "Rose Paeonias" among a dozen choice perennials for a small garden. By the 1860s, French nurseries had created scores of new varieties, followed by the British. Late in the century, elegant single forms of petal-like stamens were introduced from Japan.

The early-20th century was a golden age for peonies. Hundreds of new varieties were created, many by American breeders. Whole books were published on the subject, and wealthy enthusiasts devoted entire gardens to them. For example, Clara Ford, wife of the automobile pioneer, planted 1200 peonies in a butterfly-shaped garden of nearly an acre. By 1942, the pages of *Standardized Plant Names* listed over 5000 varieties.

**Planting Peonies**

Growing peonies today is as easy as ever. Peonies do best where winters are long and frosty. In the South, consult a local nursery for advice.

The best planting time is early fall. Choose a sunny to lightly shaded site with good drainage, away from tree and shrub roots. Leaving a good three feet between plants, dig a generous "$5 hole." Enrich the soil with well-rotted compost, manure, or peat moss, and add a couple of handfuls of bone meal or bulb fertilizer.

Choose divisions with three to five pink "eyes" (buds) and several thick roots. These will reestablish themselves better than plants that are larger or smaller. Plant so that the eyes are no more than an inch or two below soil level — or, if you heed many old gardeners, so they show above the soil. Either way, refrain from deep planting, which reduces blooming (as does excessive shade).

Peonies require little care after planting, which is why so many of them survive at abandoned homesites and old cemeteries. Mulch through the first winter but not after that (peonies are hardy to minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit). "Peony rings" for supporting heavy flowers are sold at many garden centers, but inexpensive "tomato towers" cut in half work almost as well.

[Continued on page 26]

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Ants are no problem — but no help either, despite the folklore. Sometimes a botrytis blight causes stems to brown and shrivel. To avoid it, cut all foliage to the ground every fall and destroy. If it strikes, cut out all diseased parts and burn.

**Period Plumes**

Many fine old peonies are available today, and these ten are a good start. Though many catalogs include dates of introduction, remember that most plants do not become common in gardens until decades later.

- **P. officinalis**, Rubra Plena (by 1600) — Double red 'Rubra Plena' is the most familiar of this species, but there are pink, white, and single forms as well.
- **Humei** (1860) — Occasionally offered commercially, this is a large, late, cherry-pink double from the dawn of P. lactiflora breeding in Europe.
- **Festiva Maxima** (1851) — The Queen of Antique Peonies, 'Festiva Maxima' is still a standard of excellence and a top seller. It has enormous white flowers touched with crimson.
- **Duchesse de Nemours** (1856) — There is a mysterious glow of deep yellow in the center of this early blooming double white.
- **Mons. Jules Elie** (1888) — Despite lax stems, this free-flowering silvery-pink double is still very popular today.
- **Mikado** (1893) — The first Japanese peony widely grown in the U.S., 'Mikado' fit well with late-Victorian Japanese aesthetics. A few dark red petals frame a large golden center of petaloid stamens.
- **Philippe Revoire** (1911) — Some peonies are notably fragrant. The dark crimson petals of this still-popular double are heavy with the scent of roses.

**Minnie Shaylor** (1919) — A semi-double with an Arts & Crafts look to it, 'Minnie Shaylor' has a tuft of gold anthers surrounded by a delicate froth of pale pink to white.

**Elsa Sass** (1930) — One of the first peonies to win the American Peony Society's Gold Medal, 'Elsa Sass' is a wonderfully double creamy white.

**“Unknown Favorite”** (?) — Everyone seems to know one of these, a glorious beauty or family heirloom that has lost its name — as most old peonies have. No matter what the ancestry, enjoy, protect, and share it just the same.

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**Dinner Bells**

**Q** Any idea what this round plug is/was? Two long metal prongs attach to the cap. It's in the dining room of our 1899 house — we're baffled.

— MRS. M.C. MILLER
Albert Lea, Minn.

**A** Your plug is part of a 1920s-era electric call-bell system. Summoning devices such as buzzers and annunciators (display boxes using visual signals) were vital in the days when large houses were staffed like ships with cooks, maids, and other domestic help. These systems usually ran on batteries and included several stations. Ringing the kitchen from the dining room was a top priority, and push buttons were often placed discreetly in the floor. Your model appears to be such a button, except mounted in the wall and fitted with an extension plug and wire that once ran up under the dining table.

**Old Chestnuts**

**Q** My house, built in 1910, has chestnut moldings. I've removed five layers of paint and the grain is beautiful. I want to keep the grainy look when I refinish, but chestnut supposedly absorbs stain quickly. What should I do?

— KEN ROGINSKI
South River, New Jersey

**A** Chestnut is a light weight wood with a coarse, very open grain. In order to produce a smooth surface, these large pores are often filled with a paste filler before applying a clear finish, but they might be left open if a Jacobean or Mission effect is desired. As for staining, it's always wise to test the results of stains on a scrap before proceeding with the full project. The cut and condition of some old-house interior woods — particularly if they've been resanded — means they'll take stains heavily or unevenly. If this is the case, first apply a pre-stain controller product such as McCloskey's Stain Controller & Wood Sealer or try brushing on white shellac diluted, say, 1:4 with alcohol.

**Transom Trouble**

**Q** I am in the process of restoring the kitchen in my 1920s Dutch Colonial house, which consists of two 10' x 12' rooms — an eating area and a cooking area. I wish to connect these two rooms with a door-and-transom set-up. My problem is that it was completely lined with lead. It has a hinged wooden top and what looks like a ½" lead pipe that comes out one side. Was this box for a water system? If so, why is it in the attic and how would it have been filled?

— RICHARD REFFNER
Perry, New York

**A** Attic storage tanks were often a part of early fresh water plumbing systems. In houses not serviced by municipal water lines, placing a reservoir at the top of the system put gravity to work for on-demand water supply to the whole building. Such tanks were typically filled from a well or ground-level cistern by a manually operated force pump located near the source, but a few designs collected water from the roof as well. Stagnant water and leaks were regular threats with these tanks, and most were thankfully outmoded when electric pumps became practical.

**Tanks for the Amenities**

**Q** I own a tall stick-style house with a large attic built around the turn of the century. In the attic is a 3' x 3' x 4' wooden box. When we tried to move this box we found that it was completely lined with lead. It has a hinged wooden top and what looks like a ½" lead pipe that comes out one side. Was this box for a water system? If so, why is it in the attic and how would it have been filled?

— MRS. M.C. MILLER
Albert Lea, Minn.

**A** Attic storage tanks were often a part of early fresh water plumbing systems. In houses not serviced by municipal water lines, placing a reservoir at the top of the system put gravity to work for on-demand water supply to the whole building. Such tanks were typically filled from a well or ground-level cistern by a manually operated force pump located near the source, but a few designs collected water from the roof as well. Stagnant water and leaks were regular threats with these tanks, and most were thankfully outmoded when electric pumps became practical.

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This birch interior door with transom is plain but typical for the 1920s.

General-interest questions will be answered in print. The Editors can’t promise to respond to all questions personally, but we try. Send your questions to: Questions Editor, Old-House Journal, 2 Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930.
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THE MAIN ENTRANCE IS OFTEN THE SHOWPIECE OF AN OLD HOUSE. EVEN when the rest of a building lacked decorative details, early carpenters would invest extra effort at the front doorway. The owners of this c. 1800 late Federal-style house had such a door surround and knew it made a significant contribution to the architecture of their home. They wanted to preserve this character as well as improve the condition of the woodwork so it would be easier to maintain in the future.

It was clear this woodwork needed help. The heavy buildup of old weathered paint was very rough, and chipped off in places. At the surround bottom entire wood parts — notably the door sill and pilaster bases — were deteriorated and literally falling off. Sometime early in its history the entrance had gone without any paint maintenance for several decades. This weathered the surface of the once-flat boards in a deeply grooved, "corrugated" pattern highlighting the grain. Many grooves had developed into yawning checks or cracks, and a few went completely through the boards.

NEW LIFE FOR AN EARLY DOORWAY

Restoring a Federal Door Surround

The overall design of this rectangular surround is typical of the period in lower New Hampshire, but the mouldings and the unusual "sunburst" carvings around the louvered fan make it special. In restoring this doorway we took care to conserve these details by using a variety of wood repair, painting, and caulking methods that can be applied to many old-house exterior carpentry projects. Furthermore, we carried these methods a few steps beyond average needs in order to achieve a high level of weather resistance.

by John Leeke

OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

Photography by Steve Marzel
To determine how extensive the damage really was, we examined further. First, we carefully chipped and scraped away the paint at several spots to assess the moulding profiles and the condition of the wood.

High on the surround, where they were protected by the wide overhang of the cap, we found a few mouldings unweathered enough to provide the original profiles of mouldings used at other locations. Still, the lower panel mouldings on the door, the pilaster bases, and other original parts were completely missing. The existing bases were a 20th century replacement, as indicated by the wire nails and planing machine marks on the backs of boards and mouldings. A recent residing of the house front had obliterated any paint shadows or nail holes that might be clues about the original bases.

Even with careful preparation and additional coats the deteriorated paint surface would not provide an effective weather barrier for more than one or two years. Since the owners were hoping to reduce the maintenance needs of the woodwork, as well as improve its condition, we chose to completely remove the old paint in order to repair the woodwork and start anew with an effective three-coat paint system. The aged, weathered wood surface was now a part of the building so we decided to leave a lot of the texture showing. Preparation could then concentrate on stabilizing the weathered areas in order to make them more weather resistant.

Missing woodwork would be restored by making new parts of wood according to researched designs. All original and replacement parts would be back-primed before installation and caulked in place with modern flexible sealants. Parts prone to severe exposure, such as the pilaster bases, would be back-painted with a topcoat on all surfaces before installation. These measures would assure at least moderate resistance to water and decay even if the joints opened up and nothing was done to reseal them.

Work began with surveying the condition of the surround woodwork and carefully removing 200 years of failing paint. Carpentry repairs were made at the building site (we considered removing the entire surround to work indoors), retaining as much of the original fabric as possible.
SILL REPLACEMENT

The door surround is a framework that is independent of the house structure (see drawing). The frame fits into an opening in the larger timber frame of the house. In this surround the pilasters were tied to both the door frame stiles and the structural wall studs. Removing the entire surround to repair the worn sill would have meant taking apart the pilasters, so instead I decided to pull out the old sill while leaving the rest of the frame in place.

The first step in replacing such a sill is bracing both side jambs before removing the door or sill. I used boards 6” to 8” wide and drywall screws for their firm grip and to avoid shock to the woodwork from pounding nails. The jambs could also be braced to the house interior perpendicular to the door. The old sill is removed next. I begin with gentle prying and wiggling to locate nails, then I cut them with a hacksaw. If the old sill is not worth saving it can be cross cut with a circular saw and split out in small pieces with a heavy chisel and mallet.

Afterwards I measure and lay out the size and location of the structural sill timber, surround jambs, and other parts on a scaled drawing. White oak makes a long-lasting sill because it is strong and dense and has a cellular structure that blocks water penetration. Red oak or maple are not as water-resistant and may succumb to the fungal decay common in exterior door sills. In my woodworking shop I joined, planed, and ripped the oak plank to size. I also fabricated a threshold of oak and glued both pieces together with epoxy adhesive formulated especially for exterior woodwork.

Before installing this sill I strengthened the ends of the side jambs and frame stiles with epoxy consolidant and paste filler. Also, I fastened pressure-treated blocks to the structural sill to support the outer edge of the door sill. Next I tested the sill’s fit in the opening, trimming slightly until it slid easily into place. Then I removed the sill and set it aside to be painted. Deck enamel holds up well to abrasion so we coated the sill bottom and all edges with this paint. (Some deck enamels perform best with no primer so be certain to follow the manufacturer’s recommendations.) The interior threshold was varnished to match the unpainted interior.

Finally, I slipped the sill in place and inserted sawn shingle wedges between the structural sill and the threshold. This raised the inside edge slightly, seating the ends of the side jambs and frame stiles against the threshold top. I fastened the outer edge of the sill to two of the sill blocks with countersunk stainless steel screws, filled later with epoxy paste. The side jambs and frame stiles were fastened with screws in pockets carved with a sharp gouge.
Since we had no physical evidence of the original pilaster base design we wound up researching ideas in early books. The owners had already surveyed the town in hopes of finding original bases that could be a model for our work. While there were similar doorways, they all had replacements so we went to the books.

From one source came a page from a builder's style book published about the time the house was built, and I had a later book that showed the classical orders, including some pilaster bases. We used ideas from both books and other door surrounds to arrive at the final design. I sketched out ideas until I had two that seemed appropriate, but I left the final decision up to the homeowner.

Back in the shop we fabricated the base parts from thick, solid Eastern white pine. After sizing the blocks on the joiner and table saw we shaped the rounded part on the bandsaw and with a hand plane — less than half an hour's work. Once the parts were done, I trimmed them to fit in place. Next, I scribed the back edges with a compass and trimmed the wood with a sharp chisel to form a 1/4" gap. Then the parts were back-primed and back-painted with one coat.

During final installation each part is sealed in place with polyurethane caulk. The gap made earlier allows the sealant to stretch and shrink with movement of the parts, yet still maintain an effective seal.

Top left: Shaping the torus curve by saving out two 45 degree bevels, then planing these down with smaller bevels. Far left: Scribing the base parts creates a careful fit to the wall contour and a gap for sealant. Left: Flexible sealant fills all joints to exclude water as the wood moves.
Exterior doors are subject to severe conditions. Driving rain penetrates the smallest cracks and gaps, and the contrast between a cold, damp outdoors and dry, warm indoors puts the woodwork under tremendous stress. Besides serious weathering and loose mouldings, this door had cracked panels and a weakened stile where a succession of locks and latches had been installed.

To begin repairs I removed the mouldings, carefully recording their positions on the door with a number system. After removing all paint I cleaned out cracks in the panels with my special scrapers. Then I soaked the cracks with epoxy consolidant to insure a good bond with the epoxy paste filler that followed. Epoxy filler is formulated to match the strength and flexibility of the surrounding wood. This is an important consideration since the wood panels will continue to expand and shrink with their inevitable changes in moisture content. In door or paneling repair it is critical that the epoxy does not bond the edges of the panels to the frame. They must float freely to swell and shrink without splitting.

Door frames and panels frequently deteriorate when water seeps in behind the mouldings. Soaking the end grain of the panels and penetrating frame joints causes panels to split and decay within the joints. To prevent this deterioration I seal these joints with polyurethane caulk. Round foam backer rod (available at building supply houses) forms the sealant into an hourglass shape that is thin and flexible. If the gap were completely filled the panel might split because the sealant would act like a stiff adhesive bonding the panel to the frame. After after all woodwork repairs are complete — but before the mouldings are reinstalled — I prime and paint the door.

When it came time to reinstall the mouldings I fitted each piece and just tacked it in place. I used galvanized cut brads similar to the original brads, placing them away from the original holes so they would hold better. Then I removed the mouldings, brads and all, and back-primed them. (The nails provide convenient handles during priming.) When the paint was dry I nailed the mouldings back for good, applying sealant as I worked.

Since we were careful to keep the side jambs braced in their original positions hanging the door was an easy matter of fitting the bottom edge to the new sill. With the door in place and closed I scribed the lower edge to the new sill with a pair of dividers. I set the dividers to 1/4" — the thickness of the weather strip that would be installed — and then drew the dividers across the door, scribing the line. Next I used handsaws to trim off the excess wood. A power circular saw would mar the paint on the uneven surface or splinter off the edge of the door; hand tools give me more control. I used a fine-toothed crosscut saw (12 tpi) on the stiles and a rip saw along the bottom rail, finishing up with a hand plane.

A weatherstrip along the bottom of the door will keep rain and snow from blowing in and can be applied before the door is hung. For early doors I prefer spring bronze or stainless steel types that mount to the bottom because they are close to invisible.
EARLY SPOT SCRAPING AND CHIPPING PROVED THAT mechanical removal of the thick paint buildup would be difficult due to the rough and uneven wood surfaces, so we tested three different types of chemical removers: methylene chloride, solvent (without methylene chloride), and one of the new water-based di-ester ketone strippers. We started with 6" x 6" patches of each stripper at the bottom of the pilaster. Then, we selected the best performing product and applied two larger patches above with different methods. As it turned out, painting on the methylene chloride stripper and removing it with a stainless steel brush worked better on the rough surface than spraying and scraping. I recommend this rather formal testing procedure because it saves much time, effort, and expense later. Special scrapers made from reground linoleum knives removed paint from deep checks, cracks, and joints.

Safety is an important part of any restoration project, but especially critical when using hazardous chemicals. Methylene chloride is a suspected carcinogen so no safety precaution was overkill here, including protective clothing with long sleeves and pants, goggles, maximum fresh air circulation, and changing filter cartridges frequently when respirators were used. In addition to following the manufacturer's instructions, we obtained the Material Safety Data Sheets for the products and used their guidelines.

Stripping decorative carvings demands great care. We used wire brushes and shaped scrapers to remove the softened paint. The result was bare wood with only bits of paint left in the deep weather checks. Careful preparation makes wood repairs easier and assures good performance for the new paint coatings.

FINAL FINISHES

PAINT IS THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE IN PROTECTING EXTERIOR woodwork from the weather. We used a full three-coat paint system on all parts of the door, with the careful preparation invested at the start of the project making up at least 90 percent of this paint job. Each coat was gone over lightly with 120-grit sandpaper to provide "tooth" for the next coat, and parts that remained on the doorway were coated in place.

Both new parts and parts that were removed and preserved were primed and back-primed before installation. Parts prone to extreme exposure, such as the pilaster bases, were additionally painted and back-painted with their first top coat. This provides extra protection from the weather when the joints between the parts deteriorate.

One of the surprises on this project occurred during initial paint removal when we discovered that the surround originally had a multicolored paint scheme — an unexpected departure from solid green trim. While we didn’t do a scientific investigation and documentation of the paint history, we did save a few chips and make notes on where each color was used. For the first layer of new topcoat we tried these colors out just for fun. (If they weren’t satisfactory, we could change the scheme in later topcoats.) Since we just wanted to see the overall effect on the entrance we didn’t strive for a perfect color match, just the nearest standard colors in the local paint dealer’s colors. The comments around town ranged from "Wow! We love your door!" to "When are you going to cover the primer?"

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Rebuilding a Post-Victorian Porch Stairway by Jeff Greef

When my sister Susan Greef and her friend Sandee Reeds bought a circa 1920 Bungalow in Oakland, California, one of the projects that faced them was rebuilding the brick porch stairs. The wood supports had rotted and since they could not be replaced the brick had to go. This was no great loss, however. Brick stairs are rarely seen with wood-sided houses of this type, and these stairs were poorly designed.

To begin with, the last step was higher than all the other steps by one brick — one of the top no-nos of stair making. If the rise or run between steps is not consistent, the user becomes confused and can trip. Another problem was the bottom two steps, which slanted towards the house directing water into the wood substructure. It was no surprise to find rot beneath these steps and not others. Further inspection under the house showed that these stairs were not original.

We wanted the new stairs to be stylistically appropriate for the house. Since we had no evidence of what the originals were like, we looked around the neighborhood for ideas. Most of the porch stairs in the area are concrete with stepped walls, but we did see stairs with wooden walls that incorporated the same siding as the house. In Santa Cruz, where I live about 70 miles away, there are many similar houses with wooden-walled stairs. We concluded that this design would be our best choice given the information we had.

We opted to add concrete caps, in part because the porch floor is concrete. The edge of the concrete and the simple 1” moulding beneath it is visible along the perimeter of the porch and the best way to continue this significant detail was to use concrete on the walls. Concrete caps also seemed better for keeping water out of the walls than wooden caps, which would succumb to moisture and sun quickly. The owners wanted a handrail so the lower posts were necessary to accommodate it.

With our design determined the next consideration was how to build the two separate parts: the stairs and the walls. Our library produced a California State Department of Education workbook on stairbuilding that showed us how it’s done in the trade, but this included nothing about constructing the walls or the special concerns of weatherproofing and stability. Water tends to collect where the stairs meet the walls and with time would cause rot. How to avoid this? Also, how do you make a wooden wall rigid when it is connected to nothing but stairs and a foundation?

A local contractor friend, Tim Folger, had some answers. For stability, tie the walls into everything you can and sheathe them with plywood to make, in effect, a torsion box. For weather resistance, place flashing at heavy water points and build the stairs far enough away from the walls so that water can drain and air can circulate.

The Steps to Stairs

We began the project by laying out the stairs, and to do this we had to determine the unit rise and unit run of the steps (see box, p. 43).

1) The unit rise, usually around 7” for a comfortable and legal step, is a fraction of total rise necessary to reach the next floor level. The ground beneath our stairs was not level so in order to find our total rise, we extended a level board out from the porch to over the area of the stair foot and measured between these points. The sloping ground made the total rise on one side of the stairs 1½” less than the other side so we split the difference to arrive at a working figure. Our total rise of 61” when divided by eight gave us a unit rise of 7.625 — an even 7½”. When calculations don’t work out so neatly, figure the rise to within 1/32”.

2) The proportions for an average stair are often calculated by using one of several builder’s rules-of-thumb. A common rule says that the sum of the unit rise and the unit run should be around 17-1/2. Subtracting the unit rise from this figure will produce the unit run, and multiplying this by the number of treads will yield the total run.

In practice stairway layout is determined by the situation as well, and porch stairs typically have wider treads than, say, interior stairs. Since we knew our total run had to be
around 78”, we divided this dimension by seven to produce a unit run, or tread depth, of just over 11-⅛".

3) Once the unit rise and unit run are calculated they are used to mark out the first stringer. It is customary to make notched stringers with 2x12 lumber, and for our stringers we used common construction-grade redwood. Redwood heartwood is highly rot resistant, a quality we needed because the stringers would be exposed to moisture. Pressure-treated yellow pine would also have worked. The stock contained few knots, and we were able to locate most away from the lower section of each stringer that carries the lion’s share of the load.

Stringer length is determined not only by the number of steps but how the upper end of the stairway is anchored. There are three main methods (see drawing p. 43) and they can end the stringer with either a complete tread, a partial tread, or no tread at all. After selecting an anchoring method, the rough stringer length can be calculated using the Pythagorean theorem if it is viewed as the hypotenuse of a right triangle. For instance, a total rise of 3’ squared + a total run of 4’ squared = 25; the square root of 25 = 5’, the rough stringer length.

4) Stringer cuts are laid out by placing a framing square on the stringer and aligning the blade and tongue so that the unit rise and unit run dimensions fall on the edge of the stock. After the first step is marked, the square is slid along to lay out the next, taking care to locate each step accurately. When the first stringer is cut out, it can be used as a template to lay out the others and keep them uniform. Tread and riser dimensions follow the stringer without altering the step proportions.

It is important to leave extra stock at the top and bottom of each stringer. Exactly where and how these ends are cut...
depends upon how the stringer lands. The top anchor may require another 18" or so of stringer if it continues under the porch; if the foot lands on a finished floor or walk, the bottom riser will have to be “dropped” by the thickness of a tread to keep the steps consistent.

**New Walls and Porch Repairs**

We waited until we had a stringer to use as a storey board before laying out the exact dimensions of the walls. We wanted the steps to stay within the walls and not interfere with the moulding or concrete. We also wanted the line created by the ends of each wall step to be parallel to the line of the stair steps, and we couldn’t do this easily until we had a stringer.

The first phase of building the walls was assessing the condition of the existing foundations. They had been seriously banged up by the demolition men who removed the brick stairs, but despite an ugly appearance the concrete was still solid and capable of holding anchors securely. These foundations were 12" wide and about 10" thick, more than massive enough to support walls less than 5' high. We patched a mysterious void in one of the two foundations by preparing the concrete with a bonding agent and using ready-mix mortar. Then we bored holes in the foundations for expansion anchors to secure the sill plates.

The foundations slanted with the contour of the land, so, we constructed level reference boards from which we could take the necessary measurements. We then cut and installed the studs, securing the first set to the stud wall of the porch using galvanized drywall screws. Each stair wall was composed of two separate frames. When each of these frames was complete we attached plywood gussets inside to tie them together. We completed the framing by placing 4x4 posts in the walls for the handrails, then filling in the frames with short blocks. We used pressure-treated lumber for the sill plates and posts, as they would contact concrete and regular framing lumber for the frames.

As we worked we found there was deteriorated lumber on the porch where it met the stairs. The concrete above this point had cracked, probably due to foot traffic and lack of support, and moisture had gotten in at the crack, promoting rot. Luckily, we were able to replace the rotted sections of the concrete floorboards and install treated 2x4 blocking between the joists to reinforce the lead edge of the new board.

At this point we installed a 2x12 redwood plate against the studwall of the porch for the stringers to rest against. Next we covered all sides, tops, and ends of the stair walls with ½” exterior-grade plywood, using screws every 8” or so. The plywood skin braces the box in every direction. After it was on, the walls were as rigid as if they had posts going into the ground. Then we covered the walls with a layer of felt paper and on top of the walls went caps of flashing. We had the supplier put in the 90-degree bend that fit the long wall edges, but we made the other cuts and bends ourselves with tinsnips and hand tools. The
LET'S TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT STAIR BUILDING terminology. The treads are what you step on, and the stringers (also called horses or carriages) are the notched members that carry the treads. More finished stairs have risers, the vertical boards ahead of the treads. Nosing projection is the distance the tread extends out in front of the risers. The unit rise is the vertical distance between treads, total rise is the vertical distance from floor (or ground) to floor. The unit run is the horizontal distance from riser face to riser face, total run is the horizontal distance from first to last riser.

There are many ways to build stairs. In an open stairway the stringers are notched to hold the tread. In a closed stairway the stringers are mortised so that the ends of treads and risers fit into the faces of the stringers (or they can simply sit on cleats). Mortised stringers are considered superior for interiors, but outdoors the joints may collect water. Exterior treads can be a single board or multiple boards, which aid ventilation and water runoff. Stringer anchors will vary to fit the conditions of site and building. Check local building codes to find the permitted dimensions and tolerances for unit rise (typically 7-1/2"), unit run (about 9" for interiors, 11" for exteriors), nosing projection, and similar features.

For maximum weather resistance, treat horizontal areas with a water repellent before painting, and backpaint all parts before assembly. Caulk all joints. Ventilate the soffit area under the steps using grilles, lattice, or cut-outs in risers and spaces in treads. Cover any exposed end-grain in treads, floorboards, or posts with nosing, mouldings, or caps. Design railings and stair treads with a slight pitch so they shed water.
flashing is in two pieces that lap in the middle. We would have preferred to use a single piece, but we hadn't finalized the size of the walls when we ordered the flashing. We used a top-quality exterior gutter caulk to seal the joint.

Last, we stretched chicken wire over the wall tops, and secured it to the walls with "poultry nail" staples. The chicken wire adds mechanical reinforcement to the concrete and ties it to the wall so the slab won't slide off.

For these stairs, we attached the outside stringers to the studs in the walls. We used lag screws spaced out about ¾" with large washers to provide an air gap between stringer and wall. We also put flashing along the wall in this area. This arrangement was the wisdom of Tim Folger who held that you can't keep water from getting in there, so it pays to devise a means of letting it out. Two more stringers supported the stairs at the center.

On the ground all stringers rest on two 2x6 pressure-treated sills. If the stringer bears on just the short grain at the very end it will split in time, so I put in the second sill to support the entire width. I set these sills in fresh concrete on top of where the first step of the old brick stairs had been and left an inch channel at either end for water to escape.

**Finishing Touches**

WITH THE STRINGERS IN PLACE WE PUT IN THE TREADS AND RISERS. We opted for construction-grade redwood again and decided to wait a year or so to paint, if at all. Redwood heart lumber is used in many exterior applications with no finish, and it holds up well. We located the ends of the treads and risers about ¾" from the walls for water and air clearance, fitting the siding over the treads and in front of the risers. We found clear kiln-dried redwood siding at the local building supply that matched the V-groove lap siding on the house, but they had only the 7" width. We needed 3" width too, and this was easy to make by ripping some of the 7" down and copying the lap detail with a few table-saw passes. Siding was nailed on to match the house.

We bought mushroom-style handrail at the local building supply, but its small diameter was not strong enough to span the required 7' distance unsupported. Our solution was to glue and screw a 2x3 onto each rail using moisture resistant urea formaldehyde plastic resin glue. This not only doubled the cross-section, it made for a beefier appearance that was better proportioned to the solid dimensions of the walls. We lagged the rails onto the bottom posts and bolted them to the porch posts.

On top of the siding along the upper perimeter of the walls went the two stages of 1x trim. Then we nailed the concrete forms directly onto the trim and poured the concrete. Pouring concrete is another story, but what we learned is to mix the mortar just wet enough to work well, then trowel it back and forth repeatedly until it smooths out. Oil-based primer and a latex topcoat finished off all the bare wood.

Nearly a year later, the only problem my sister has found with the stairs is that they blend in so well, no one notices all our work.

After a full year, the finished stairs have yet to show problems and still blend well with the modest California bungalow.
Whatever you call them, beaded boards are familiar to most old-house people. You may recognize this homey lumber from your porch ceiling, or from the walls of your unremodeled kitchen. If your house used to be a summer-only cottage, beadboard may be hiding under virtually every interior surface, and peek out still in pantries, closets, and attics. Lumbermen and historians may call it different names, and different regions have their favorite names, too: beadboard, porch-ceiling lumber, tongue-and-groove, or just plain "wainscot."

Once, in the Victorian era of exuberant building and inexpensive wood, beaded boards, as moulding or panelling, were the ubiquitous finish surface, considered plain enough for kitchens, bathrooms, and servants' rooms. Over the years, old beaded board has mellowed from the effect of sunlight and dirt on its ambered varnish or orangey shellac. Unpainted old beaded boards today are considered a treasure worth uncovering, preserving — or putting back new.

Although beaded boards were most popular after 1870, you might be surprised to hear that beaded lumber has been commonly used since the colonial era, for cabinets, walls, and ceiling panels.

Beaded boards are relatively thin pieces of lumber, or wood strips, that have a side bead or convex moulding along one edge. Where the individual boards meet, various joints including the common shiplap and matched tongue-and-groove maintain the integrity of the surface. As the wood expands and contracts seasonally, the joints between boards also swell and shrink, and those beaded edges distract the eye from irregular gaps. In all their forms, beaded boards are essentially a kind of elementary moulding employing the simplest of classic decorative cuts — a semicircle and quirk (furrow).
The characteristics of beaded boards changed with improvements in planing technology, evolving from wide, random-width, hand-planed lumber to narrow, uniform-width, machine-planed millwork that could be manufactured quite thin. By the turn of the 20th century, the side bead was occasionally combined with other mouldings.

From the 1870s on, machine-planed boards were cheap and easy to produce, by comparison to earlier hand-planed boards. Widespread machine production and railroad distribution had made beaded boards available to most Americans at a relatively low cost. The lumber was popularized as an example of modern building technology, and the public wanted it. Beaded boards were particularly common in the service areas of the home, such as the kitchen, pantry, and bathrooms. They were employed, as always, as a wainscoting finish on the lower half of walls below the chair rail, but now their use spread to soffits and ceilings, to pantries, and even to kitchen cabinets.

By end of the 19th century, mass production and improved planing machines wasted less wood and could mill mouldings and beaded boards even faster and cheaper. Stock beaded patterns and related trim became uniform and were used everywhere, from modest homes to train stations, schoolhouses, and libraries.

The popularity of beaded boards spread to the South and West as planing-machine technology caught up with advances on the East Coast. Regional variants developed because different species of lumber were used. In Florida, for example, southern pine was abundant and a new variety of beaded-board patterns appeared following Florida's first boom in the 1880s. Local millwork catalogs today still carry many of the now historic profiles.

Southern pine and cypress were indigenous to Louisiana; beaded boards in these woods were common after 1900. Occasionally, 18th and 19th century vernacular Creole houses with French colonial bousillage walls (an adobe-like mixture of mud, Spanish moss and sometimes animal hair) were updated in the early 20th century with beaded-board interior paneling.

In New Mexico, beaded boards are known as "rail-
as "boxcar siding" because they are akin to the standard railroad-car siding used until around 1915, when the transition from wood to steel was made.

The thin (often only 3/8”) Victorian-era boards with flat, beaded edges endured for several decades in America. By the 1930s, however, headboard in general was beginning to lose its appeal as modern technology brought affordable, excitingly new materials such as plywood, concrete, stainless steel, aluminum, and plastics. Now headboard is back in style, both as an appropriate and available restoration material, and as part of the general love affair with wood products.

**Restoring Beaded Boards**

Beaded boards may not be a fine or irreplaceable material, but often the patina on them is worth pre-

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**Industrial Revolution-Era Boards**

The Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s marked the beginning of a century of change in building technology. The transition from hand-planing tools to planing machines started in England with the invention of the first planing machine by Samuel Bentham in 1791. Bentham's Reciprocating Planing machine worked like a hand plane, employing fixed cutters to smooth wood on a bed that moved back and forth. The second stage in planing machine development occurred when Bramah invented and patented the Transverse Planer (also known as the Daniel's Planer) in 1802. This machine worked by moving the cutters and the wood.

The Cylinder Planer, which uses cutters held in a rotating cylinder, was refined throughout the 19th century and is still standard today. In 1828, William Woodworth from Hudson, New York, patented a cylinder planing machine designed for planing, tongu-
serving. Or the particular beaded pattern may no longer be available. For those reasons, and because it's also cheaper to repair than to replace, you'll probably want to keep your old headboard. Beaded boards with a slightly damaged or partly missing beaded edge are often best left alone. However, you will have to splice in new material if the area of missing boards is large, or the damage is extensive.

To re-create a beaded edge yourself (on small or historical jobs), follow this sequence.

On hand-planed boards: An old bead plane with an appropriate size blade is ideal for re-creating a beaded edge. To re-create an irregular hand-planed beaded edge, another option is to make a "scratch bead" by drawing the sharply filed edge of a screw along the wood. (See photos above).

To "dutch" in a new piece Paul Kebabian prepares a fresh edge by cutting away the rough wood with a backsaw (A) and cleaning out the corner of the cut with a chisel (B). Next, he cuts a replacement block to fit from wood that matches in species and grain. Then, he sets it in place on the board, marking the profile with a pencil and shaping it with a block plane.

The scratch beader (C) consists of a hand-size piece of hardwood with a screw secured near one end. Filing the screw on the front sharpens it to make a cutting edge. Paul makes the "scratch bead" by running the tool along the edge of the new wood (D). Changing the amount of pressure when making the

A simple scratch tool, like a wood block and sharpened screw, cuts a v-grooved bead.

Made of iron and steel: Lane's No. 1 matching-and-joining machine.

ny had a worldwide reputation and was shipping their machines as far away as Brazil and Russia.

In the 1880s refinements to the planing machine allowed dimension lumber to be worked on three sides at once. Smaller moulding machines could mill four sides at a time and were capable of producing picture-frame mouldings. Machines, now often made entirely of metal, replaced hand planes for most shaping tasks except for fitting and high quality woodwork by craftsmen and master cabinetmakers.

Liz Pritchett is an architectural historian and conservator from East Calais, Vermont.

1860, that could mill moulded surfaces. The expansion of the Lane Manufacturing Company of Vermont was typical. In 1861, Dennis Lane, inventor and president, patented the revolutionary "Patent Lever Set" for feeding timber into a circular saw-mill by means of a hand lever. By 1860, that could mill moulded surfaces. The expansion of the Lane Manufacturing Company of Vermont was typical. In 1861, Dennis Lane, inventor and president, patented the revolutionary "Patent Lever Set" for feeding timber into a circular saw-mill by means of a hand lever. By 1870 the company was manufacturing an improved double-edger machine (to cut boards to a specific width after they came through the circular saw), and a matching-and-joining machine (for tongue-and-groove cutting). At the end of the century, the Montpelier-based company had a worldwide reputation and was shipping their machines as far away as Brazil and Russia.

In the 1880s refinements to the planing machine allowed dimension lumber to be worked on three sides at once. Smaller moulding machines could mill four sides at a time and were capable of producing picture-frame mouldings. Machines, now often made entirely of metal, replaced hand planes for most shaping tasks except for fitting and high quality woodwork by craftsmen and master cabinetmakers.
set-up fee. Experienced woodworkers with well equipped table saws or shapers sometimes grind their own knives, either from new blanks or old cutters, but this process requires making all knives identical and maintaining the steel temper.

It may be difficult and expensive to precisely duplicate machine-planed beaded boards. In fact, it may not even be advisable. If you like the museum approach or deem it appropriate to maintain the historical record, follow the current thinking of conservators: make your repairs or changes in a manner than will be evident in the future (aesthetic considerations notwithstanding).

Special thanks to Paul Kebabian of Burlington, Vermont, and Woody Scovill of East Calais, Vermont.

**Beaded Board Profiles**

**COLONIAL (COMMON UNTIL EARLY 19TH CENTURY):** Wide, hand-planed, random-width boards, about 1" thick with 1/4" to 1" side bead. Boards may be butted, shiplapped (detail), or otherwise matched.

**MID-19TH CENTURY:** Machined-planed, random or uniform width with matched (tongue-and-groove) edges. Beads appear at edge and center of board and on one or both faces.

**LATE-19TH CENTURY:** Machine-planed, uniform width with matched edges. Boards are thinner (3/4") and often mated other decorative profiles with bead. Curved boards available for special applications (stairs, for example).

**TURN OF THE CENTURY AND LATER:** Beaded boards most common as 3/4” to 7/8” tongue-and-groove “ceiling” used to finish a wide variety of surfaces. Profiles of one-, two-, three-, and four-bead multiples widely popular.
Repair Tips for Tongue-and-Groove Floors
by The OHJ Technical Staff

Wood floors are so common in old houses we tend to think of them only as surfaces and not what they really are—complex carpentry systems. Strip flooring, the narrow, interlocking tongue-and-groove boards produced by machines since the mid-19th century, is one of the most sophisticated types, creating a continuous wood "skin" that is strong, long-lasting, attractive, and widely used. Yet even strip floors get injured or wear out in spots and need a saw, hammer, and nails to set them right again.

"Kinks" are what they used to call carpenter's or machinist's tricks-of-the-trade in the days before income tax. Here's an assortment of kinks that have been around for years and are still good to try when you're repairing or fixing problems with strip tongue-and-groove flooring.

➤ Every carpenter has a favorite method for attting a defective strip out of a whole floor. Essentially they all work the same way. First cross-cut the strip at either end of the damage with a chisel, drill, or saw. (If there is no subfloor make these cuts over joists so the patch can be supported.) Then split or saw the strip lengthwise with the grain so the tongue and groove are released and the pieces lift out.

➤ Mending a tongue-and-groove floor often involves inserting a new strip between two fixed pieces. The common method is to "shoehorn" the piece in by cutting the bottom shoulder off the groove (figure 1). Saw or plane off the shoulder at a bias so it clears the previous tongue as the piece arcs its way in place. Flattening the bottom of the replacement tongue a little helps to get the strip started. Once the patch is in place it can be face-nailed or anchored with a screw (see below).

➤ If cutting the shoulder off the patch strip won't work, try removing the tongue (figure 2). The tongue is ripped off the strip at about a 45 degree angle and nailed to mate with the board ahead using 4d finishing nails. Then wood glue or epoxy cement is applied to the cut surface and the patch worked into place. This method avoids the cosmetic problems of facenailing and is serviceable for small repairs or low-traffic areas.

➤ Sometimes you have to reverse the lay of the floor in repairs or new work. In these cases, use a spline cut from a thin strip of hardwood to make a common tongue for two grooves (figure 3). This joint maintains the integrity of the floor.

➤ Avoiding nailing defects and blemishes, such as hammer "kisses" that show up on the top edge of the flooring, is an important part of good floor carpentry. Always drive the nail the last few blows with a nail set. The set can be used in the normal manner or, if it is a smooth cylinder, laid sideways right on the tongue. Drive nails into the tongue at about a 50 degree angle to draw the joints tight, and predrill oak and other hard wood to prevent splitting.
First floors tend to develop the most problems because they see the most use. Fortunately, they are usually over unfinished basements, which means there is access to the underside of the subfloor. If you are lucky enough to have such access, try to anchor flooring patches from below with screws (figure 4). Work directly under the fault and drive in one or more round- or flat-head wood screws no further than halfway through the finish flooring. Screws are also good for squeaky or spongy floors. Have an assistant upstairs walk the floor to locate the problem, then stand on the offending spot while the screw is installed.

The traditional nails used to install flooring are slender cut nails, which hold well in wood because of their rectangular profile. Though repairs are often easier with finishing nails, other fasteners such as barbed flooring brads, cement-coated nails, or rosin-coated nails are made to resist pullout and will increase the life of a floor repair.

Many flooring patches have to be face-nailed from above (figure 5). This usually means predrilling nail holes, setting the nail heads below the surface, and covering them with wood-colored filler. Filler is rarely invisible, however, and often falls out over time. As an alternative, try a fine woodworking technique. Pare back a sliver of wood with a sharp, thin-bladed chisel and drive the nail in this pocket (figure 6). First cut both sides of the pocket parallel to the grain (a razor knife works well), then gently peel up the flap with a chisel. After the nail is set below the surface, glue the sliver and weight it down. Sand flush when dry.

Single or multiple floor strips that have sunken slightly due to a defect in the subfloor or joist can be pried up by using a wood screw (figure 7). Turn the screw in as near as possible to the depressed area and just enough to grab well. Then place a wood block on a sound part of the floor as a fulcrum. Use a prybar to lift the boards back. Once the flooring is level, support it in place by driving one or more 8d finishing nails at an angle into the subfloor under the screw. Another approach would be injecting epoxy consolidant or silicone sealant if there is access above or below the fault.

Squeaks are sometimes caused by subfloor boards that work against a joist because they are loose. When there is access from underneath, driving a shim or shingle dipped in glue between the joist and subfloor is often a fix. Stronger measures require anchoring the subfloor with a cleat. At the problem area attach a roughly 2" x 2" block flush with the top edge of the joist using wood screws. Then screw the cleat to the subfloor while someone stands on the floor upstairs.

If it is only possible to work from the top, finish side, sometimes toenailing the floor to the joist stops the noise (figure 8). Starting at the "heart" of the squeak, drive a pair of finishing nails towards each other in a V so that they grab the joist solidly (opposing nails resist pull out). Repeat every half foot or so down the joist in both directions until the squeak is cured. Then set the nails and fill holes.

Squeaks in strip floors can also result from joints where tongues and grooves work against each other, nails slide in their holes, or flooring fits loosely because the wood has shrunk. Provided there is a subfloor, toenailing into these joints with a pair of nails may silence them.
In urban areas, where land is scarce and dear, the row house is among the oldest and most popular American residential forms. In old sections of our earliest cities—Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, New York—the row house still dominates the street scene. And today, in the suburbs ringing modern cities and towns, the great-grandchildren of the venerable row house, these newer ones universally called town houses, stand along countless cul-de-sacs, gathering small families, childless couples, and single householders into a familiar embrace.

The vertical, close-together houses in urban areas throughout the U.S. and Canada could properly be called row houses: San Francisco’s embellished wooden ladies come immediately to mind. But for now we’ll leave houses without common walls for another article. Here we’ll celebrate party-wall houses: those with shared walls, especially those built in multiple-dwelling rows. It’s easy to recognize the savings in square footage, and construction and maintenance costs, inherent in tall, narrow buildings without side yards. The street frontage of some antique row houses is as little as 12 feet, so many building lots could be sold per block. Cozying up to the neighbors at both sides also minimizes expensive heat loss through the walls.

The idea of a party wall shared with the next-door neighbor on one or both sides is older than America, as it is based on medieval English and European precedents. The first row houses (probably two separate houses built with no space between them) had a disconcerting tendency to go up in flames, sometimes taking whole blocks of neighboring structures with them. (That’s what happened in London’s Great Fire of 1666.)

It wasn’t long before urban building codes required the construction of firewalls—fireproof walls that project well above the roof line between adjoining buildings to discourage the sparks of a fire at one house from spreading.

In the United States, the row house is something of a regional phenomenon. The farther east and north you look for them, the more row houses you are likely to spot. However, the idea also made its way westward to industrial cities including Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Chicago, and even showed up on the west coast.
The earliest party-wall houses were designed and built one unit at a time, according to the architectural preferences of individual owners. The first builder on the block provided the walls his neighbors would later share. By the late 18th century, however, architecture began to reflect the philosophical influences of the Age of Reason. Acknowledging city dwellers' craving for more rational living conditions after centuries of unplanned chaos, speculative builders developed orderly blocks of row houses with a unified design. The houses stood along courts or squares, even marched down both sides of the narrow streets, like an artist's exercise in perspective drawing. Despite the density of site plans, row houses were quite different from tenements, the rental apartment buildings of the same era. Whereas a row house belonged to a single family, multi-storey tenements offered small, one-storey flats. (Tenements, by the way, could be perfectly respectable places to live; it wasn't until late in the 19th century that the word became generally synonymous with "slum.")

By its nature, the row house occupies the entire width of its lot at the front. (Occasionally, a narrow interior passageway at one side leads to the rear yard.) The house is one, rarely two, rooms wide, plus a hall. The interior plan is generally either two or three rooms front to back in the main block; if a center room exists, it is windowless. A narrower rear wing, perhaps with a stair hall separating it from the main block, might be extended on the rear. Row houses range are most often two to four or five storeys (a very few are only one-storey). The bottom floor might be a raised basement (also called an English basement) and there might be a cellar and an attic, all of which were put to maximum use as living or working areas. Sometimes a small cold-storage room or coal bin was dug out under the sidewalk in front of the house.

Chicago, late 19th century: Row houses could be made to look like a single large mansion, allowing several householders to imagine themselves the owner of a grand establishment. These ponderous Romanesque-revival houses on State Street are among the most elaborate row houses in America.

Gordon Row, Savannah, 1854: Most historic row houses are found in northern and midwestern cities; a few were built in the South, especially in Savannah, Richmond, and Charleston.

The Row House is a building type rather than a style, of course, so its architecture varies with date of construction. Row houses have relatively little wall and roof surface visible from the street; nevertheless, they reflect most of the trends that
touched American building in the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. By the choice of wall materials, cornice elaboration, dormers, belt and string courses, basements and foundations, and, especially, varied door and window treatments, the builder could use the facade to make an architectural fashion statement. The width of the building, measured by the number of windows (later, bay windows) across the front, the number of storeys (the higher the better), and the elaboration of ornament, particularly in the doorway, all contributed to the elegance of the house, and hinted at the status of its owner.

The earliest American row houses built by English settlers are believed to have been constructed in Philadelphia around 1691. The ten half-timbered, two-storey buildings with face walls of brick, known as Budd’s Long Row, were probably similar to those the colonists remembered from England. The end building was said to have been 12' x 22', probably one room wide and two rooms deep.

The surest clues to the date and style of a row house are its front door and windows. In the colonial era, windows were small and small-paned, the doors generally plain or with simple panels. Small rectangular fanlights brought daylight into the entrance hall, but sidelights were uncommon until the 19th century. Shed or gabled dormers lit the attic storey. Pedimented dormers were a mark of quality in more expensive houses.

Georgian houses tend to have rather elaborate doorways, or frontispieces. Some have pilasters and a pediment, perhaps even a massive broken arched pediment. Windows may have stone or brick lintels with keystones or (flat) jack arches, and stone sills. Decoration in the Georgian period, roughly from the 1740s through the 1780s, is generally heavy, projecting well out from the surface of the wall. Brickwork was sometimes laid in decorative patterns such as Flemish bond with dark glazed headers, for instance. Cornices at the roof line are bold, too, perhaps with toothlike dentils and modillions (decorative brackets). Double-hung windows became standard at this point, although only the bottom sash is movable. The sash configuration was generally nine-over-nine or eight-over-twelve panes. Gabled dormers, sometimes with their own pediments and colonnettes, were common.

Things calmed down considerably in the Federal (or American Adam) period, from about 1780 until about 1830. Walls were smooth and unobtrusive: brick with thin, barely noticeable

Philadelphia, 18th century: Corner houses offered options in floorplan, with more light and air. The entry could be moved to the long side, too, providing a gracious center hall. A cornice return creates a neat pediment.

Alexandria, Virginia, late 18th century: brick houses in the Federal or Adam style, each three storeys tall and three bays wide. Note the projection of the firewall well above the roofline.
Around the middle of the 19th century, the Italianate style ushered in the "brownstone era" as smooth walls of dark sandstone ashlar, accented by round arch doorways, became common. Later, Eastlake touches appeared in turned porch posts and incised decoration. Row houses in the Queen Anne style are relatively rare, but the examples that exist are striking. The Romanesque Revival style brought with it massive arches and a great deal of heavily carved stone and terra-cotta decoration. The formal lines of Academic Classicism — French or English influences played out in masonry — distinguish many a big-city row of the late 19th or early 20th century. Finally, in the early 20th century, the Colonial Revival style brought row-house history full circle. Even today, most town houses appear to be aiming at some form of Colonial Revival decoration.

From the 1830s through the 1850s, Greek Revival styling predominated. Small but highly assertive square porticoes with heavy columns and cornices were typical. The front door generally was topped by a rectangular light with three or more panes, and sidelights brought additional light into the entry hall. Six-over-six windows remained standard.

Although there are relatively few row houses in the Gothic Revival style, this competitor of the Greek Revival could make a considerable style impact with pointed arches at the door or in the tracery of fanlights above the door. Other examples, with simple square hood moulds over windows, are more restrained.

Row House Living
In more affluent households double parlors, which could be thrown together as a single large space for entertaining or, for more intimate use, separated by hinged or pocket doors between the two rooms, occupied the first or second floors. In 19th-century Philadelphia row houses, kitchens were usually placed at the back of the house, in a rear wing if there was one; in New York houses of the Victorian era, they were likely to be located in a raised basement.

Family and servants' bedrooms were on the upper storeys. The higher the room, the simpler the decoration and the lower the status of the occupant. Alternatively, servants might sleep on the second floor of the rear service wing.

Staircases sometimes ran straight up from floor to floor; sometimes they were dizzyingly tight little "winders" corkscrewing their way upward one floor at a time.

Above: Coiommade Row by A. J. Davis, New York CIty, 1836. A rare remaining example of a monumental classical portico unifying a row of individual houses. Left: Park Slope, Brooklyn, 1886s: In the mid-19th century, the Italianate style ushered in the "brownstone era," named for the dark sandstone used for facades. These brownstones lean towards Romanesque.
time; most often they turned off a landing near the top or bottom. Invariably they were steep and narrow. Such vertical living must have been a daily test of strength, agility, and organizational skill for the women who were charged with the care of these houses, whether mistresses or maids. Imagine the wailing infant on the third floor, the kitchen in the basement, someone calling at the front door, the single bathroom (if there was one) somewhere in between—and Madame in transit, negotiating dark, narrow stairs in her billowing petticoats!

Dark they were; in comparison to freestanding houses, row houses suffer from a marked shortage of light and cross ventilation. The situation was partially remedied in early houses by light wells for raised basements and sometimes, as in Philadelphia, “piazzas” in the center of the building to contain both stairs and a side door to the rear yard. Not surprisingly, such confined living frequently drove the inhabitants out of doors, to sit in privacy in their rear gardens or within hailing distance of neighbors. Baltimore’s famous white marble stoops, regularly scoured to shining perfection by conscientious housewives, were popular family gathering spots in fair weather. New Yorkers also took to stoop-sitting early on. By the early 20th century, front porches also were common in many row-house blocks; the vistas sighted past dozens of porch posts down the length of a city block are a particularly endearing aspect of row-house living.

In the 20th century, rear wings became simpler and smaller. They disappeared altogether in the Airlite row house, which first appeared between the world wars and became almost universal after World War II. The Airlite’s greater width (16 to 20 feet) could readily accommodate two rooms across the back of the house. The living room spanned the front of the first floor, with a narrow dining room and kitchen behind it; the second floor had room for a big master bedroom in front and two narrow children’s rooms in the rear.

Above: Philadelphia, 1894: Not all rows put conformity and rhythm first, as evidenced by this Victorian interpretation of Dutch architecture in brick, sandstone, and terra cotta. The grand scale allows an elegant center-hall plan, not common in row houses. Left: Washington, D.C., 1920s-30s: Popular “between-the-wars” row houses grew wider. These are probably Airlite houses.

Rowless Party Walls

A less densely urban type of party-wall house was the double house, called a “twin” in Philadelphia. Two homes share a wall, leaving three sides of each unit windowed, as in the pretty example, left.

In the 1930s, Frank Lloyd Wright designed the “Suntop” houses on Philadelphia’s Main Line (to the new suburbs). His quadriplex variation followed a form found in Philadelphia from the early 20th century. The Sun­top cube has a cross-shaped party wall at its center, with a two-storey residential unit in each corner. Thus, each dwelling has windows in one side wall as well as in the front, and a suburban-size yard (right).
When we asked for readers' stories of old-house living with cats, a deluge of letters arrived: tales of tabby tumbling into the ductwork, trapped on the rooftop, or ruining a tiling project. Cats and their adventures are common part of the restoration experience. In fact, it seems there are very few parts of an old house that kitty won't investigate, and many distressed owners have spent hours rescuing them from their feline escapades. Fortunately, curiosity hasn't killed any of these cats — although from some of the experiences recounted here, it's a good thing that they have nine lives.
**Cat On a Cold Roof**

OUR THREE-STORY VICTORIAN ROWHOUSE HAS no attic. Instead, the three adjoined houses share an undivided crawlspace spanning the 54' width above the third-floor ceilings. Since our house has but two skimpy closets, any found space, even the empty spot created by the 5' knee walls near the eaves, was immediately designated as potential storage area.

Here we installed a trap-style door, inconspicuous to all but our cat Spats. In her continuing quest to escape the menacing advances of our two-year-old son, Spats had finally found the ultimate solution to her problem: a private place to hide and sleep. She became so obsessed with this area that she would paw endlessly on the doorcatch, meow loudly, and throw herself against the door when the bolt was on. We always gave in.

One chilly November day, she disappeared. Twenty-four hours later, when she was still missing, we got worried and checked Spats' third-floor lair. Our calls were met with distant plaintive meows from somewhere way up above. Apparently, Spats had decided to explore the storage area and had climbed up the roof joists and through a cat-size opening directly into the roof.

She could have been anywhere in the rooftops of any of the three houses and there was no way a human being could get inside the roof, from either inside or out. Armed with a flashlight and a smelly bowl of cat food, my husband Terry squeezed his hand and arm through the opening and called. It was several hours before Spats came close enough for him to grab her and pull her down. She had been up there for two days.

Afterwards, we cleared out a nice space for Spats in a dining room cupboard, which worked for awhile. But every night around 3 AM she goes over to the door, paws at the door-catch, purrs loudly, and then flops into bed, in resigned acceptance of her lost territory.

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**Cats At Work!**

MY HUSBAND AND I HAVE TWO CATS, IO AND JORDAN. THESE CATS, who are not related but look strikingly similar, are involved in everything we do at home. It's impossible to operate otherwise. The cats survey every job and inspect progress as we go. Every project goes something like this: clear a work area and the cats appear immediately, knowing something is up.

The sound of power tools doesn't faze them in the least. They'll even jump up on sawhorses and fall asleep as we hack away. Cut a hole, and blink! a cat tail is sticking out. Try to hammer a nail — pound, pound, push the cat away, pound, pound, push the cat away.

Next thing I know, there's a cat on my shoulder.

We shut the cats away when the work is highly dangerous, but some projects take weeks or months to complete and the cats have to come out sometime. We've tried covering holes in the floor with everything short of 16-ton slabs of steel, and the

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**Cat-Astrophe**

MY CAT STINKER HAS SUFFERED MUCH DURING THE RENOVATION of our c.1889 Victorian. Her grey-and-white fur is now grey and grey, thanks to our on-going demolition work. Besides the usual episodes of getting lost in the ceiling and locked in the corner cupboard, Stinker endured one particularly harrowing adventure.

We had removed the remuddled textured ceiling from an upstairs bedroom, and Stinker learned to amuse herself by jumping up onto the joists and chasing the birds in the attic. I thought nothing of it — until one day when I was sitting at my computer. I heard what sounded like rocks falling in the next room, accompanied by frantic meowing. I ran over to see poor Stinker looking down at me through a hole in the chimney, which was crumbling under her feet. The more desperately she struggled to hang on, the faster the bricks broke apart and fell. I grabbed a ladder, propped it against the wall, and begged her to make a leap of faith. She landed on a joist, and I grabbed her before she had a chance to change her mind. Now, our house is back together, and Stinker roams around in relative safety. Parts of her fur are even turning white again — although that could be due to some of her experiences here.

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**Readers' Cat Stories**

Reader Joan Lee's cat Alice disappears into a plumbing hole — once a toilet, oddly situated in the middle of a hallway.

Alan Doyle and Io peer into the basement, trying to figure out how to support a new section of floor.

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cats just push the stuff aside. We put them upstairs to keep them out of the mess on the first floor. Suddenly, loose plaster is raining down in the kitchen as a cat tramples around between the floors.

We've given up keeping them out of holes and debris. Now we do a head count before we close up any holes. We also introduce the cats to the contractors we hire and stress that we would like to see two whole cats each day when we get home from work. We try to keep the cats in a room or on a floor the contractors won't need, so we post Cat Status signs, like “Cats Inside!” or “Cats on 3rd Floor.”

—— LORI DOYLE
Troy, New York

Kitty Mortar
WE HAD JUST MOVED INTO OUR 1877 VICTORIAN AND HAD decided to tile the bathroom floor. In the early afternoon, we laid down the cement-mortar bed, so that by the next day the floor would be ready for ceramic tile. Before we went to sleep, my husband Don went to see how the cement was hardening. Feeling no great urge to gaze at hardening cement, I got into bed. Within a few minutes, I heard a good deal of expletives coming from the bathroom. I ran to find out about the commotion. Apparently, our black cat had decided to use the entire cement floor as a giant litter box, clawing all the mortar up into a neat pile in the center of the room!

—— AMY HANDFORD-CUMMINGS & DONAVAN CUMMINGS
St. Paul, Minn.

The Cistern Cat
THREE YEARS AGO, WE MOVED INTO OUR CIRCA-1879 VICTORIAN, and shortly thereafter gutted the current dining room, leaving bare studs and floor joists. Unknown to us, we apparently broke a foundation window.

I usually leave home by 6:30 AM. I began hearing the cries of a cat in those early morning hours. This went on for several days, until my oldest daughter heard them, too. A search was conducted in the crawl space beneath the kitchen, and sure enough, there in the bottom of a ten-foot cistern was a cat.

The cat had been there several days without food and water. There didn't appear to be any easy way to rescue it, so we lowered food and water and dropped a blanket over the side of the cistern in hopes that it would climb out. Twenty-four hours passed and the food and water were consumed, but the cat did not come out. Convinced that we had an extremely agitated alley cat, my husband and son-in-law, armed with long-sleeved jackets and welding gloves to protect themselves, crawled under the house, dragging a long-handled fishing net bolted to a wooden handle from a tree-trimming tool. While my husband held my son-in-law by his belt, they attempted to scoop the cat into the net, but it lay perfectly still on the bottom. To force the cat to run around the cistern, my husband doused it with a bucket of water. The solution was effective and the cat, soaking wet and extremely angry, was nabbed. With welding gloves on, my husband grabbed the cat at the back of the neck, and did a tightrope walk across an open joist (in the dining room where the floor was torn out) to a window and dropped the cat outside.

Two hours later, we saw a neighborhood girl carrying the same cat. Woops — the cat was a gentle pet, and declawed. She mentioned that it had been missing for a week. I didn't tell her what it had been through.

—— CHERYL HUGHES
Greenville, Ohio

The Old-House Cat
IN JULY OF 1986, WE WERE IN THE PROCESS OF BUYING AN 1887 Italianate, and we were also in need of a cat. At the shelter we found a mature black one, whom we named Piewackett on the ride home. He adjusted to our mobile home and dogs, but remained aloof. Later, when we took possession of our grand old lady, Piewackett underwent a personality transformation. Curious about every nook and cranny of the house, he began to purr and shower us with affection. Was his original home a big old house? Whatever, he became a different “person.” Our fat, fuzzy fellow seems to have Victorian tendencies, so we like to think of him as a real old-house cat.

—— CHERI B. ANDERSON
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Hand Screws (Parallel Clamps) — Hand screws are the original woodworking clamps and nice examples of woodcraft in their own right. In traditional screws the hardwood jaws are connected by an all-wood shoulder screw at the center and a similar back screw at the rear. The shoulder screw passes freely through one jaw and is threaded through the other; the back screw is threaded through the opposite jaw and pushes against a socket in the mating jaw. In use, the jaws are adjusted up to the work with the shoulder screw, then forced tight with the back screw. Modern versions use steel spindles that swivel so the jaws can be closed in an offset or angled position, making it possible to clamp tapered or irregularly shaped work.

Hand screws are still widely used for cabinet work and similar carpentry. The broad wood jaws are gentle on soft materials and create a deep throat that can reach into a project or over several square inches of surface. If the threads of an all-wood hand screw become stiff, clean and lubricate them sparingly with wax—but never oil. Screws that have frozen due to moisture swelling should not be forced. Instead, place the clamp in warm sun or near a heat source to dry the wood gradually.

C-Clamps — On jobs such as metalworking where hand screws don't have enough strength or are too large, C-clamps take over. These tools are all-iron frames resembling the letter C that have a fixed jaw at one end and an operating screw and swivel head at the other. C-clamps are identified by their throat dimension and are made in sizes from 1” to 16” and over. Variations on the C-clamp are G-clamps (where one jaw adjusts by sliding on a bar) and eccentric clamps (that close the jaw through cam rather than screw action).

C-clamp threads must be kept lightly oiled and dirt- and rust-free for good operation. Swivel heads should operate freely too or replaced by prying open the crimps that hold them to the ball on the screw end. Overstressing a C-clamp will bend the frame or damage the screw; always use clamps of adequate size.

Bar and Pipe Clamps — Assembling multiple boards or large items such as doors, windows, and furniture requires clamps that can span several feet. Old-time cabinet maker’s clamps were wood rails with a movable jaw at one end and a fixed jaw and screw at the other. By the turn of the century, steel versions were being made in lengths up to 10’, and metal bar clamps are still common today in all sizes. Pipe clamps, which use owner-supplied black pipe as the frame, are popular because jaws can be mounted to custom-length pipes or moved between pipes. The weight of pipe clamps and older bar clamps can make them unwieldy, though, when several are attached; modern versions try to...
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Combination clamps can do the same job plus hold large mitered frames together. In these clamps two arms with swivel shoes close in on the sides of the work like a metal mosquito while the central screw applies pressure. When using clamps in finish carpentry be sure to protect the wood from jaw marks. Broad wood jaws are less likely to cause marring but metal jaws need to be cushioned with leather flaps or pads made for this purpose. Plywood blocks also help distribute the force and protect the surface. As the saying goes, you can't have enough clamps. A dozen in each size is not a lot in a working shop, but for old-house work never buy less than two of a kind. Clamps are most practical in pairs (for even force and balance) and working with just one clamp is kind of like trying to use a lone bookend.

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by Lynn Elliott

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**Mirror, Mirror on the Wall**

As a finishing touch to a dining room, a friend and I were asked to hang a framed, 19th-century mirror on the wall. The mirror measured 5' x 6', was very heavy, and the frame was somewhat fragile. Rather than try to secure hooks to the wall and actually hang the mirror, we found a way to rest the mirror on a shelf at the bottom.

We secured a piece of 4' long angle iron with several lag screws fastened into the studs in the wall, creating a place for the mirror to sit. Then, we rested the mirror on the angle iron and tipped it back against the wall. Since the real weight of the mirror was distributed evenly along the angle iron, the top of the mirror only had to be secured to the wall with eye hooks and framing wire (strong and tight enough to keep it from tipping forward). Most frames will conceal the edge of the angle iron, but more importantly, this method places less strain on the corners of large frames.

--- Charlotte Overby
Columbia, Missouri

---

**Tangent Tricks**

Measuring off tangent lines with a ruler and straightedge will lay out an ellipse.

---

**Glue Garotte**

Detaching the 1960s and '70s wall mirrors and mirror tiles that misguided do-it-yourselfers saw fit to glue directly onto plaster walls can be a challenge. Assuming that the mirror is attached with a non-hardening adhesive (which most are) it is possible to slice through this mastic without damaging the underlying wall. Using two short dowels for handles and a two- or three-foot length of 18-gauge solid wire, you can fabricate a sort of giant "cheese cutter" to slice through the adhesive. Simply slip the wire behind the mirror, pull tight, and work it gently down the length of the adhesive. Of course, another pair of hands is needed to catch the mirror, which can then be given to college-age relations as an artifact of the Disco Era.

--- Peter Lemos
Elliot, Maine

---

**On Your Mark**

Everyone who removes plaster lath has been bothered by the plaster marks that are left on the wood. An easy solution is to first dust off as much plaster as possible with a wisk broom or wire brush. Then, apply an oil stain to the wood. (You may have to mix a couple of stains together to get the color you want.) Since plaster dust absorbs stain readily, you'll forget you ever had plaster marks.

--- Tony Russo
Tulsa, Okla.

---

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.
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Historic House Plans

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

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

For the houses shown in this issue, blueprints include:
• Foundation plan for basement or crawl space. (Crawl space plans can easily be adapted for full basements by your builder.)
• Detailed floor plans showing all dimensions for framing, plus detailed layout and location of electrical and plumbing components.
• Interior elevations are included in some plans, showing interior views of kitchen, bath, fireplace, built-ins, and cabinet designs.
• Window and door schedule.
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Plan: BL-02-V1

Costs: $250; $330 (set of 3); $475 (set of 8)

Square Footage: 1,517' (total), 1,851' (first floor), 1,666' (second floor)

Ceiling Height: 10' (first floor), 9' (second floor)

Overall Dimensions:
- Width: 50'10"
- Depth: 61'10"
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Plan: CD-09-GA
Costs: $25
Square Footage: 216'
Ceiling Height: 16' (to ridge)
Overall Dimensions: Width: 12'; Depth: 18'

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Plan: CD-10-GA
Costs: $50
Square Footage: 384'
Ceiling Height: 16'8" (to ridge)
Overall Dimensions:
   Width: 16'
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| ALL RADIATOR STEEL ENCLOSURES |
| FOR HOMES, OFFICES, CHURCHES, INSTITUTIONS |
| Buy Factory Direct & Save! Easy to assemble. Many styles & colors. Baked Enamel Finish. |
| Send $1.00 for Brochures. Refundable with Order. |
| MONARCH Dept. OHJ |
| 2744 Arkansas Drive, Brooklyn, NY 11234 |
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| WOODEN FLAG POLES |
| Put the Spirit of 1776 in Your Front Yard. |
| A few of these prized wooden poles still grace mansions, schools and courthouses across America. We’re recreating this era for today’s caring home-owner with hand-made wooden beauties with the classic square-to-octagon-to tapered round design. Made of select Douglas Fir, they’re turned on a custom lathe and painted with ten coats to a gloss white finish. |
| Shipped to your home, ready to install on our rust-free steel base. Poles come with all accessories plus a brass customized-engraved and numbered owner’s plaque and 50-star and original 13-star flags. Our poles are made to order and guaranteed to last a lifetime. Can’t buy at retail. Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Write or call for free color brochure details. |
| TOLL FREE 1-800-285-2122 |

| VICTORIAN |
| 1822 S. Decatur Bt. Dept. OJ293 |
| Montgomery, Alabama 36104 |
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| THE BARCLAY SPIRAL STAIRCASE |
| Includes Victorian design |
| Modular components in a 5-7 ft. diameter |
| Rugged cast-iron construction |
| Available with brass or steel handrail |
| Send $3.00 for complete renovation catalogue. |

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| The Barclay Spiral Staircase |

| Learn "How To" Plaster by Video |
| "Plastering the Professional Way" |
| Segments include use of tools, how to mix plaster, application of plaster, smooth and textured finishes, much more information. |
| To order send $29.95 includes S & H to: |
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| Intervale, NH 03450-0738 |

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The advertisers in this issue have literature available, and you can get as many catalogs as you need just by filling out one form.

**Building Components**


69. Handmade Brick - Special shapes are a specialty. Patio pavers and fireplace kits also available. Brochure. $1.25. Old Carolina Brick.

73. Reclaimed - Imperfect glass is perfect for restoration work. Each sheet is made by using the original cylinder method. Free brochure. Bendheim Glass.

98. Non-Rotting Lattice - Keeping porch lattice painted is a real chore. Instead, use PVC lattice. It looks like wood without the grain coming in 11 colors, and can be cut, nailed, and installed like wood. Free color brochure. Cross Vail Inc.

125. Architectural Roofing Tiles - Roof tiles get better with age, never need maintenance. Don't burn, and can last 50-125 years. Free color brochure. Vande Hey Rafter.


401. Cedar Shutters - Clear, old-growth western red cedar shutters will outlast pine and plastic in looks and life. Five traditional styles in both Standard and custom sizes. Brochure. $3.00. Vixen Hill.


492. Design Records - Full color drawings with descriptions of custom crafted traditional kitchens, and a color brochure featuring on-location photographs of Kennebec's kitchens. $10.25. The Kennebec Company.


524. Antique Flooring, Millwork & Beams - Manufactured from recycled antique heart pine, oak, chestnut, white pine, and new woods. We work with our customers to assure complete satisfaction. Free literature. The Woods Company.

527. Antique Flooring - Antique wide pine flooring. Kiln-dried oak and chestnut are also available. Lengths up to 18', widths up to 14'. Free brochure. Northfield Restorations.


963. English Coal Fire - Now you can experience an authentic English gas coal fire. Most fire openings can be satisfied. Free literature. Grate Fires Inc.


128. Tin Ceilings - Producing richly ornamental metal ceilings in turn-of-the-century patterns using original dies. Center plates, borders, corner plates, cornice, and filler plates available. Catalog. $3.00. W.F. Norman Corp.


561. Victorian & Edwardian Historic Tiles - Suitable for any size and shape painted or scored, moulded and printed decorative reproduction glazed ceramic wall tiles for fireplaces, kitchens, bathrooms, and more. Color photographs and design information. $6.25. Charles Rupert Designs.


666. Antique Handmade Quilts - These beautiful quilts date from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. Each was handpieced, handstitched & quilted. Video tape catalog $4.25. Vanderkellen Galleries.

### Doors & Windows


32. Wooden Screen & Storm Doors - These doors have period look and are more thermally efficient than aluminum windows. Several styles and all sizes available. Catalog. $2.25. Old Wagon Factory.

53. Wooden Screen Doors - Blending function, fine craftsmanship, and style. Dozens of innovative styles ranging from the classic Victorian to the modern. Illustrated brochure. $2.25. Oregon Wooden Screen Door.


354. Windows & Patio Doors - Full-color booklet providing information on creating custom combinations of doors and windows. Energy facts, planning a project, choosing a contractor, and basic size charts. A complete
resource on patio doors and transoms. door. Free Andersen Windows.


534. Finishing Products — Paints, sealers, enamels, cleaners, stains, and more. For home and restoration projects. Free products are for the chemically sensitive and environmentally aware. Catalog $1.90. AFM Enterprises.


546. Decorating Supplies — Large stock of specialty paint, brushes, and decorating supplies. Specialty books and video tapes are available on graining, antiquing, marbling, and faux finishing. Catalog $5.20. Janovic/Plaza, Inc.

551. Cut Nails — The oldest nail manufacturer in continuous operation in the country. Different patterns of nails are offered, very useful in restoration work as well as new construction. Free catalog. Tremont Nail Company.


611. Paint Shaver — This patented, ecologically-safe power tool strips paint from walls, ceilings, and claddingboard. The dust collector allows encapsulation of debris for retrieval. Free literature. Randhill Tool Company.


643. Woodworking Supplies — Offering over 150 thousand pieces of traditional and modern domestic and exotic hardwoods, veneers, wood parts, specialty hardware, kitchen accessories, etc. Many exclusively. Free literature. King's Chandelier Company.


468. Cement-Based Mortars — No acrylic, latex, or metal additives. Free brochure provides technical information about examples demonstrating the restoration of deteriorated masonry. Cathedral Stone Products.


662. Wood & Metalworking Machinery — Tools for the professional craftsman & do-it-yourselfers. A complete line of saws, drill presses, grinders, Sanders, shapers & accessories is featured in the catalog. $1.25 catalog. Delta International Machinery Corp.


930. Cotton Shower Curtain — Suppliers of Victorian-style, tightly woven 100% cotton shower curtains. Duct gets wet, but water stays in the tub. These curtains are also offered. Catalog $1.25. N.O.P.E.


649. Custom Furniture — 18th century furniture and beds to order. This furniture is faithful to the authenticity of construction & finish. Free literature. Iron Company.


560. Early-American Lighting — Reproduction fixtures such as wall sconces, chandeliers, mirror brackets, and nautical items. Everything is handmade. Catalog $2.25. Gates Moore Lighting.


145. Spindles — Magnificent for Victorian Victorian settings. The beauty of cast iron, but not the weight. All components, except handrail, are available in standard castings of high-strength aluminum alloy. Free color brochure. The Iron Shop.


101. Shutters & Blinds — Colonial wooden blinds, movable louver, and raised-panel shutters. All custom-made to specifications. Pine or cedar, painted or stained to match any color. Free brochure. Devenco Louver Products.


294. Plaster Ornament — Handmade fiber-reinforced plaster. Do restoration work and can reproduce existing pieces if a good example is supplied. Complete catalog of 1500 items. $15.25. Fischer & Jirouch.

304. Wood Mouldings — Internationally recognized company with over 500 beautiful wood mouldings. 104-page catalog. $5.75. Arvid's Historic Woods.

PRODUCTS NETWORK

518. Custom Turnings — Newel posts, porch posts, column bases, fluting, spiral rope twist, etc. Custom on orders. Catalog. $2.75. Custom Wood Turnings.

543. Mouldings & Ornaments — Carved and embossed hardwood mouldings, embossed pilasters, cornices, curves, mouldings, corbels, sills, turnings, balusters, column bases, and more. Any pattern or profile matched. 32-page color catalog. $2.25. Bendix Mouldings, Inc.


647. Custom Shutters — Moveable louver, raised panel, fixed louver exterior plantation, traditional, raised panel interiors. White pine or oak, finished or unfinished. Hinges & hardware. Catalog $1.25. The Shutter Depot.

651. Custom Millwork — A prime source serving architects, designers, builders, & home owners nationwide. Custom specialties include spiral stairs, doors, bookcases & panel work. Catalog. $5.25. American Custom Millwork, Inc.


Plumbing & Hardware

18. Victorian Hardware — A vast selection of high-quality 19th and 19th-century reproduction hardware for doors, windows, shutters, cabinets, and furniture. Plus high-security locks with period appearance. 108-page catalog. $5.25. Ball & Ball.

49. Renovation Hardware — Hard-to-find supplies including brass cabinet hardware, lighting, weather-vanes, pedestal sinks, old-fashioned bathtub showers, and bathroom fixtures. Mail-order catalog. $3.25. Antique Hardware Store.


397. Hard-To-Find Hardware — Suppliers of scarce decorative hardware for doors, windows, furniture, and cabinets since 1918. Knobs, hinges, pulls, and fasteners available. All period materials during the 1930s. 227-page catalog. $6.75. Crown City Hardware.

538. Fixtures & Accessories — Bathroom fixtures and accessories such as door, window, and cabinet hardware. Lighting fixtures also. Catalog. $5.25. Renovator's Supply.

588. Square Drive Sockets — With over 200 sizes and styles in stock, virtually every desired socket is available in the high-torque square drive. Free catalog. McFeely's.

608. Original Architectural Items — Specializes in brass lighting, hardware and fireplace accessories, plumbing fixtures and accessories, windows, mantels, etc. Primary Vise, McFeely's, quality, everything is cleaned and refurbished. Leasing available and always interested in buying. Free brochure. Architectural Antiquities.

608. Showerheads — This big face, country style showerhead comes with a wide column of water droplets. Install into standard plumbing. Free brochure. Sunflower Shower Company.


Restoration Supplies & Services


35. Placeu Washers — These inexpensive washers can resecure loose ceilings and windows. Starter packet of 3 dozen washers with instructions. $4.75. Charles Street Hardware.


645. Metal Item Restoration — Stripping, painting, polishing & protecting all metal items in the home including registers, hinges, door knobs, brass beds, cold air returns, lamps, windows & door hardware, chandeliers and plumbing fixtures. Free literature. Strasser Plating.

560. Practical Ideas — For craftman housing, bungalows and arts & crafts enthusiasts. New magazine for restoring & enjoying your home. Sample copy of 4-Color issue. $4.75. American Bungalow Magazine.


664. Solvents, Paint Removers & Paint Thinners — A complete line of products for home

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Circle the numbers of the items you want, and enclose $3 for processing. We'll forward your request to the appropriate companies. They will mail the literature directly to you—which should arrive 30 to 60 days from receipt of your request. Price of literature, if any, appears after the number. Your check, including the $3 processing fee should be made out to Old-House Journal.

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REMUDDLING
[opinion]

Queen Anne Casualty

This month's remuddling from Port Townsend, Washington, has gone over the top—literally. Scalped during a 1960s renovation by a previous owner, the original hipped roof of this 1880 Queen Anne was replaced by a dead-level lid. Not satisfied with just attacking the attic, the remuddlers also removed decorative moldings from the windows and shingled over the shiplap siding to complete the motel-like makeover.

But there is hope for this flat-top folly. Current owner Julie Schachter writes, "The house retains its dignity inside [with] the 11' ceilings, oak flooring, pocket doors, and wainscoting that escaped the obliterating hand of our predecessor. With the roof flat and the outside moldings gone, the scale is very deceptive and people are always surprised when they enter the house for the first time. Some day we'll do this poor old home justice and give it a face to match its warm heart." Hats off to you, Julie!

WIN FAME AND $50: If you spot a classic example of remuddling, send us clear color slides. We'll award $50 if your photos are selected. The message is more dramatic if you send along a picture of a similar unremuddled building. Remuddling Editor, Old-House Journal, 2 Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930.

Without the original hipped roof and ornamental moldings, it's difficult to tell that this decapitated Queen Anne (below) was once similar to its neighbor (inset).
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LAT-FRONTED OR CANTED-BAY ROW HOUSES, ranging from the oldest Georgian- and Federal-style examples in Philadelphia to the grand versions of New York and Boston's Back Bay, are common on the East Coast. The distinctive, square-bay fronted row house, however, is only prevalent in Washington, D.C. Known as the Washington Row, over 8,000 of these modest houses were constructed in the slow-developing, industry-free Capitol.

The distinguishing feature of Washington Rows is the square bay, which projects into the public space front yards (bequeathed to Capitol residents by Charles L'Enfant's generously wide streets). The row houses are two storeys high plus a cellar and were mostly built during the late-19th century. Although they sit on narrow, 18'-wide lots, the economical side-hall, dog-leg floor plan allows for three large rooms on each level.

The essential modesty of the Washington Row, reflected in its size, cost to build, and absence of exterior stylistic ornamentation, was partly due to the city's poor economy. (Row houses in more affluent and thriving cities, like New York and Boston, were much bigger and very elaborate inside and out.) The influence of the Italianate and Queen Anne styles — immensely popular during the last decades of the 19th century — is only seen in diluted forms on decorative brickwork and cornices of the Washington row house. Many examples use pressed brick ornament to reflect the Queen Anne style, while others have distinctive cornices. But, most commonly, the Washington Row has such a minimum of ornament that it is considered astylistic.

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Judith Capen
Washington D.C.