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#### MAYIJUNE 2001

VOL XXIX. NO. 3 ESTABLISHED 1973

Editor's Page Letters

**Old-House Living** 

BY JENNY CUNNINGHAM The deal was strictly business, and then they fell head over heels.

#### Journal

Nantucket interiors, dust corners, and Masonite's 75th.

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BY GORDON BOCK

Vertical, horizontal, or just pushed up in panels, wood wainscots are stars of old-house interiors.

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BY WILLIAM T. COX JR. Ladders that won't let you down.



ON THE COVER: Painted in stone grey and off-white, this Gothic Revival is the Hubbell House, a bed and breakfast in Seneca Falls, New York. Call them at (315) 568-9690, http://hometown.aol.com/hubbellhse/index.html PHOTO BY: ANDY OLENICK/FOTOWERKS



Online www.oldhousejournal.com



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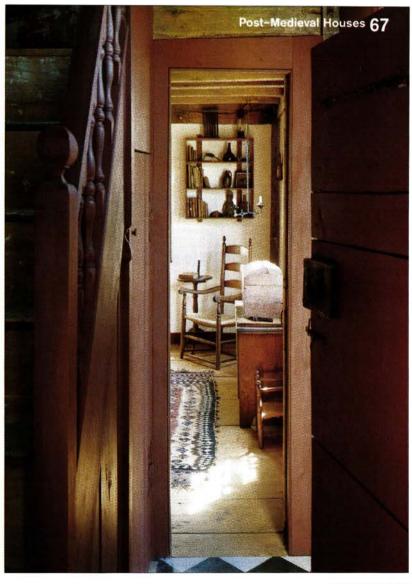
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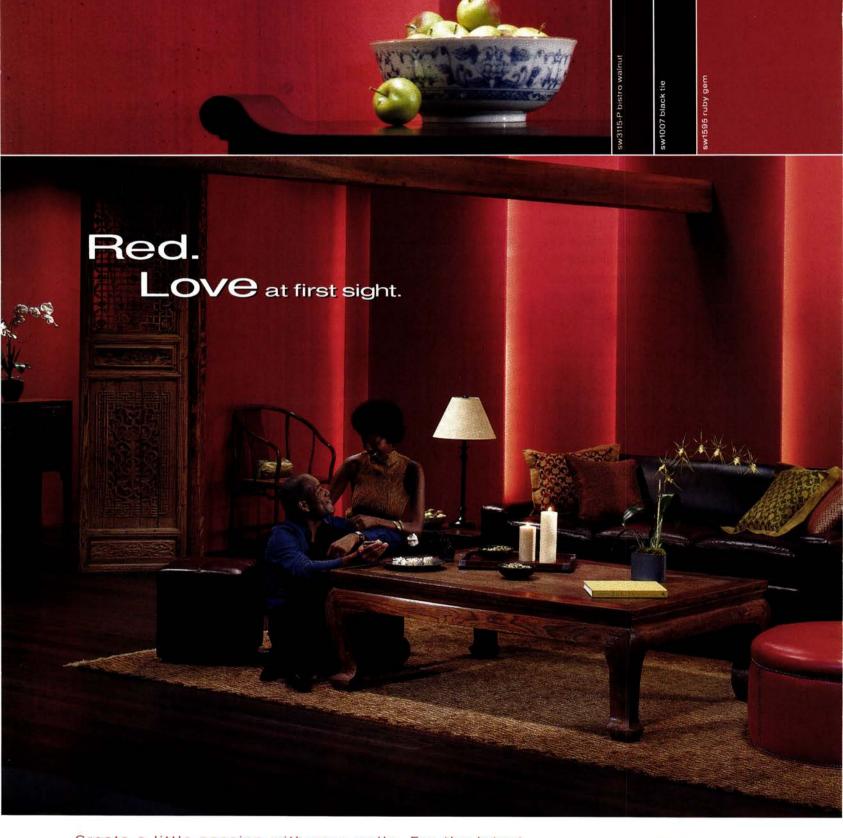
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### **Double Takes**

O YOU EVER CONFUSE THE NAMES of two individuals or ideas that not only sound the same, but also share a similar background or importance? I do, and it's a common tendency with the terms and nomenclature that describe old houses.

I'm not talking about a technical slip of the tongue, such as referring to a psychologist when you mean a psychiatrist. Medicine and science abound with words that stem from the same semantic roots, and they are easily scrambled by a lay person. What I trip over are relatively unsophisticated nouns that echo each other by sheer coincidence.

Many years ago the newspaper columnist George Frasier put his finger squarely on this vexing habit in his own way. If I remember correctly, when it came to Impressionist art, George said he had trouble keeping van Gogh and Gauguin separate in his mind. I'm not surprised. Though Gauguin painted idyllic images of Tahiti while van Gogh (the one with the ear thing) stuck to scenes of southern France, they both came out of the same avant garde art movement and, in fact, knew each other. The same might be said for painters Pissaro and Picasso shortly thereafter, novelists Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis in the 1930s, TV actresses Connie Stevens and Connie Francis in the 1960s. Pick your discipline.

When it comes to old houses, it's easy to transpose these not-so-identical twins:

A.J. Downing and A.J. Davis—This is the classic editorial mix-up in historic architecture between two seminal design

giants of the mid-19th century. Andrew Jackson Downing was the horticulturistturned-tastemaker who revolutionized American ideas about houses by writing a phenomenally popular series of books. Alexander Jackson Davis was the architect who designed Lyndhurst, perhaps the ultimate Gothic Revival mansion, as well as many other landmark buildings of the 1850s. With me so far? Then you'll have no trouble remembering that A. J. Davis drew on many of the same inspirations as A. J. Downing, and collaborated with him on some projects.

Muntin and mullion-This mindbender is from the world of windows. In a standard sash window, those small wood members that hold the glass and divide up the window into lights are the muntins. Now, suppose you have a room with a nice view, so you place three double-hung sash windows side-by-side to make, in effect, one big window. In between those windows you'll need to add supporting posts, probably covered by mouldings. Those are the mullions.

Lath and lathe—Another issue of material differences. In a traditional plaster wall, those flat wood sticks (later metal mesh) that anchor the plaster are the lath. If you were tuning round doorknobs or staircase spindles in a woodshop, however, you would use a large motorized tool called a lathe.

Now, if I could only remember that the *snath* is the fitting that holds the blade on a scythe.

GOLDONFOCIL

James Noel Smith

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Gordon H. Bock

ART DIRECTOR Judy H. Neighbor

Kathleen Fisher

MANAGING EDITOR Nancy E. Berry

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS Kristina Goings

Mojgan Hajmohammadali

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS James C. Massey

Shirley Maxwell

Marylee MacDonald

Steve Iordan

One Thomas Circle NW EDITORIAL OFFICES

Suite 600

Washington, D.C. 20005

(202) 452-0800

(202) 785-1974

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES (800) 234-3797

PUBLISHER John A. Pagliaro

DIRECTOR OF CIRCULATION Venus Bazan Barratt

SR. MARKETING MANAGER Holly Blumenthal DIRECTOR OF RETAIL SALES Chuck Tripp

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George Brown

DIGITAL IMAGING

Betty Kerwin

SPECIAL PROJECTS WRITER Melissa Dole

BUSINESS OFFICES Hanley-Wood, LLC

One Thomas Circle, NW

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TEL (202)736-3409

#### MAGAZINE DIVISION

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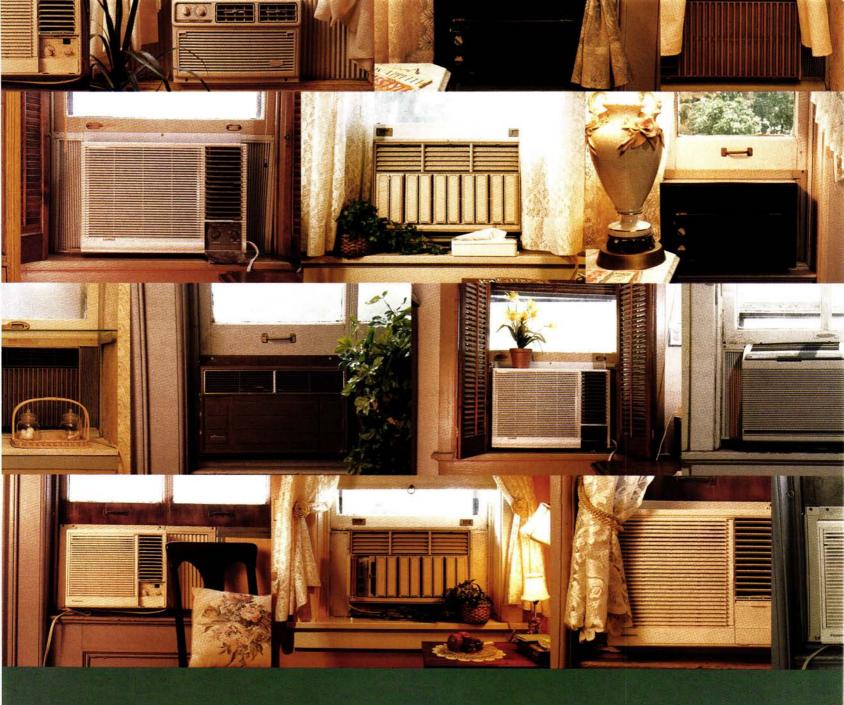
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#### THAT OLD CALCIMINE

READING THE ARTICLE ON CALCIMINE (March/April OHJ) reminded me why I love *Old-House Journal* so much. In our first house rehab, a while ago, I remember painting a closet, taking a break, and then coming back and finding the paint falling to the floor (and on my head).

I had no idea what was going on and, in tears, wound up scraping the mess off until I found a chalky white layer, which I scrubbed off for good measure. I was mystified and even Bob, the normally reliable old sage at the local hardware store, had no idea what it was. Research led me to discover that it was calcimine.

When I reported this to Bob, even he was amazed that there was still some left. Thanks for printing this article for those brave souls who are tackling their



first room with that odious calcimine.

Thanks also for the tip on using boiling water and baking soda to remove paint from brass fixtures. Our latest project is a 1910 bungalow where all the lovely brass fixtures still remaining have been slathered with paint. Even after rehabbing houses for a while, it's nice to learn something new.

—NIKKI VON Olympia, Wash.



#### REALLY STEAMED

YOUR ARTICLE ON CALCIMINE CEILING, the first one I've seen, was helpful, but I think I've found a better way to remove calcimine paint. Our 200-year-old post-and-beam house had all calcimine ceilings downstairs. When I noticed that the ceiling paint fell off in pieces mainly during hot, humid weather, and I reflected on the fact that calcimine is water based, I decided to remove the ceiling by duplicating humid summer weather with a wallpaper steamer.

It is a messy job, but relatively quick compared to other methods I've tried. On more stubborn areas (such as new latex paint applied to areas where the calcimine had previously fallen off), we used a vinegarwater solution and a scrub brush. The ceiling was then washed with TSP, skim-coated with plaster, and painted with Olde Yankee Towne Calci-Coat.

I have also dry-scraped calcimine ceilings (steak knives work well!), which is somewhat less messy than water but slower. The advantage, if one is not in a hurry, is that it can be done a little at a time, just by moving the furniture directly under where you are working and sweeping up the residue with a sweeper.

—JOYCE HIGGINS Charlestown, N.H.



#### ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

HEADQUARTERS

PUBLISHER John A. Pagliaro
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#### SOME LIKE IT HOT

YOUR ARTICLE ABOUT CALCIMINE left an important area unexplained. Because the binder in calcimine is animal hide glue, it—like its distant cousin, gelatine—reacts to hot water very differently than cold. Trying to loosen hide glue with cold water is extremely slow and tedious, but with hot water it loosens remarkably fast.

Also, in the article "Skilled Fixes for a Log House," there seems to be some illogic in the paragraph about chinking. If a log becomes smaller as it "shrinks," how can it possibly compress the chinking? Wouldn't it in actuality pull away from the chinking, cracking plaster that has been applied too soon or leaving gaps if not replastered?

—Maggie Podwell *Chicago, Ill.* 

Co-author Douglass Reed explains: Maggie Podwell's letter raises a good question about the nature of shrinking logs and the way they make the chinking tighter. Don't forget that the logs are stacked one on the other at the corners of the house. As the logs shrink, they fall one on the other at the corners, thereby trapping the chinking between the logs. (If the chinking should be stacked so tightly that no compression can take place as the logs dry, cracks would develop not at the chinking, but between the notched corner surfaces.) Therefore, the article information is correct.

As for calcimine, we should note it still has a place on ceilings since it doesn't build up and is easily renewed. The only source we know of is the Johnson Paint Co. in Boston, who sell 25-pound bags of powder for \$29.95. For Shipping information call (617) 536-4838. —Ed.s

#### RAISING 'EM RIGHT

I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH I enjoy your magazine. I always read it from cover to cover. One of my favorite features is the



Remuddling page, so imagine my enthusiasm when I saw the "Remuddling Medley" article in the January/February issue. I was reading it on the way to Virginia from Ohio when my 14-year-old son, who was sitting beside me, heard my comments on the outrageous things people do to their perfectly good old houses. He became interested and wanted to look at the before/after pictures too. Of course he asked questions such as what is correct and what isn't and why. He wanted me to cover the before pictures on the next page so he could guess what was wrong with the after photo. This was truly a history lesson for him. We have always lived in an older home and have no desire to live in a 21st-century home. Thank you for your great magazine and keep up the good work!

—JUANITA RICHARDS

Toledo, Ohio

#### PASSING THE CAT TEST

AS A FELLOW "OLD-DOG/OLD-HOUSE" owner I adored Tony Seideman's article (March/April OHJ). We also have one ancient kitty (19!) who



rules every other pet and person on the property. We've come to judge contractors by how well they get along with her (she knows no strangers). The better they communicate with our Holly, the better job they seem to do on the project at hand. The wonderful people who hand dug a full basement under our 1893 Eastlake Stick Victorian (without moving the house or ruining the original foundation) treated her like a queen and talked to her more than to us. Maybe I should check to see whose name is really on our deed.

—Kim M. Hohlmayer Mechanicsburg, Ohio

#### MAD FOR MIZNER

I OWN A MIZNER-DESIGNED HOME, the Frank Alderman House, which in downtown Fort Myers, is on the National Register. Your article ("Addison Mizner: Mad for Beauty," March/April) has served only to increase my appreciation of his work.

In 1995, as a single woman of 50, I took on the project of restoring this magnificent home, not for monetary gain, but for sheer pleasure. I have bequeathed the home to Lee County, Florida, because I believe it belongs to history, not to anyone or any specific family. The inside was in pretty rough shape when I moved in; it didn't even have hot running water. Everyone thought I was crazy to take on such a large project alone. But I'm restoring one room at a time and have never felt I made a mistake.

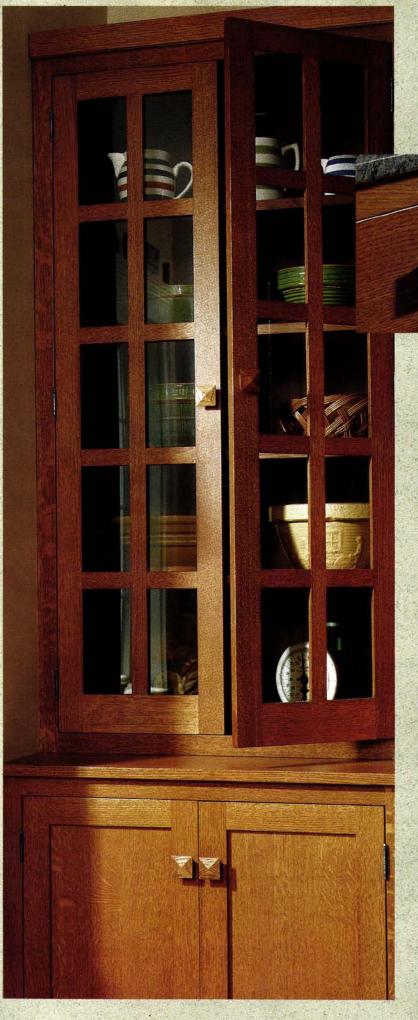
I was going to resurface the veranda.

However, the tile is accented with "Mizner blue" and after reading your article I completely changed my mind. Even though I had just repainted that area, I now plan to return it to its original color scheme to accommodate the blue, instead of the "Florida Coral" I was going with. And I will be restoring, rather than resurfacing the tile.

Once again, thank you for your article.

—ROSEALIE A. LESSER

Fort Myers, Fla.

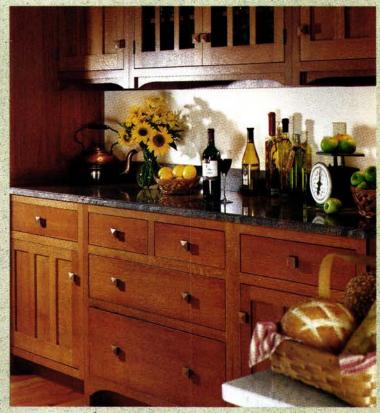


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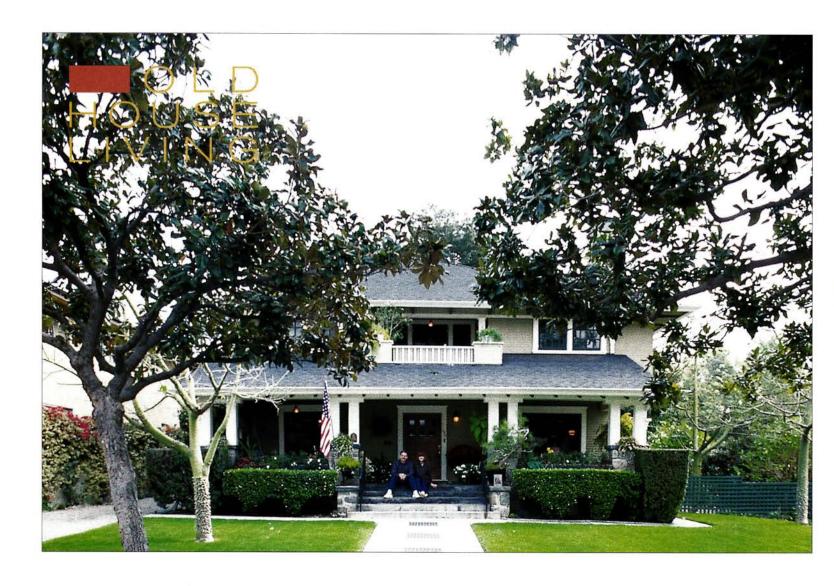




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City Historian Steve Baker (above, right) helped Larry and Barbara piece their house back together. The heavy front door is one of the touches that makes their wide front porch so welcoming (top).

## Love Among the Ruins By Jenny Cunningham PHOTOS BY ION CRISPIN

it does, it's probably not the giddy love-at-first-sight kind, but the slow, steady deepening of friendship. That's the kind of old-house love story we're telling here.

The setting for our tale is Monrovia in Southern California. About seven miles east of Pasadena, it's a city of 39,000 souls living on sun-soaked streets lined with Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Spanish Colonial homes. On one of those streets you'll find a Prairie-inspired bungalow: long, low, and handsome, the pride of its neighborhood. Hard to believe it was the scourge of the street when Barbara Simundza and Larry Stone first saw it.

Barbara and Larry had never been to Monrovia

before. They had no particular affection for old houses, and they weren't looking for a project. Instead, these two modern artists who paint large, bold canvases needed space for two studios, plus they wanted to be closer to shopping and nightlife. They're also both high school teachers—that is to say, not millionaires. So there they were eight years ago, clutching a classified ad promising "the ultimate fixer." As Barbara and Larry found out, it certainly was.

It seems a previous owner fell on hard times



Steve found the built-in buffet propped up in a back room. Reinstalled, it now houses a colorful collection of Arts & Crafts pottery.

and took the house down with him. That first day when Barbara and Larry pushed open the brawny front door, the signs of decline were everywhere: sledgehammer holes in the plaster, exposed wires, and the unmistakable look and smell of a kennel. "The former owner told me he left 13 chows in the house so no one would vandalize it," Barbara says.

For two years, potential buyers had all walked away holding their noses. This couple also had a strong reaction, but not the same one everybody else had. The house met all their requirements: it was big, and it was cheap. "We knew immediately that we should own this house," Larry remembers.



Today people gasp at the beauty of the interior; they once gasped in horror at the deterioration and stench.



Larry "wondered if we were being asked to join a cult" when Steve (center) took him and Barbara to their first preservation group meeting.

Then Larry and Barbara began to wake up. The place was in shambles and they didn't know the first thing about restoring an old house. In fact, they didn't even know what they had. They were starting to wonder if they'd made a terrible mistake when the city's historian called to ask what their plans were for the Monrovia landmark. Barbara recalled that they burst out laughing. "We said, 'Landmark? Are you kidding? It's a dump!"

Right about now you're probably wondering, "What makes this a love story?" So we'll digress a moment to introduce the matchmaker: the remarkable Monrovia Old-House Preservation Group (MOHPG). In a region of America famous for paving its past in a rush to tomorrow, Monrovia is a city where you can still get a sense of what greater Los Angeles looked like at the turn of the last century. That's when many people—including the Cornes family, who built Barbara and Larry's house in 1907—were lured to Southern California by the ad campaign, "Sunshine for health, oranges for wealth."

Barbara and Larry both paint in a bold, modern style, but now Larry paints smaller pieces more in keeping with his old house.

Today, Monrovia's historic core is nearly intact, thanks to MOHPG. The group formed in the early 1970s, the nascent days of old-house rescue, when the only publica-

tion dedicated to helping people restore vintage homes was a little newsletter called *Old-House Journal*.

MOHPG is now the largest organization in Monrovia, and its annual Mother's Day Tour the only reason many Los Angelenos have even heard of the city. Every spring, thousands of people snap up tickets to look inside some grand Queen Anne or big green bungalow with a wide welcoming porch. Yep, that's Larry and Barbara's porch today, but the spot could have easily become a parking lot.

#### 11th-Hour Rescue

Eight years ago the preservation group was steeling itself for a rare event: failure. MOHPG's efforts to find a buyer for the Cornes house hadn't panned out. The dumpster was out front and crews were prepping the house for demolition when the word went out: Somebody bought it!

That explains why the ink was barely dry on the deal when city historian Steve Baker whisked a

startled Barbara and Larry to a MOHPG meeting. When Steve introduced the new owners of the Cornes house, the room filled with applause. "I wondered if we were being asked to join a cult," Larry says. "Turns out we were, but it's a good one."

The preservation group did more than applaud. Steve was at

the door a few days later to show Barbara and Larry the features that made their "dump" a diamond in the rough. The trouble was, so many facets were missing.

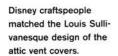
The house's luster was tarnished by that pack of chows, and its architectural details picked clean by demolition crews and neighbors trolling for souvenirs.

Barbara and Larry credit Steve with piecing the house back together, literally. He discovered the five-panel kitchen door in the dumpster, the glorious built-in buffet propped up in a back room, the buffet's beveled mirror hanging on a closet door. Whenever Steve would yell, "Get the tape measure!," the homeowners knew he'd found another piece of the puzzle.

Somewhere along the way, the magic happened. Maybe it was the glow of the unpainted woodwork by the light of the red brick fireplace, the muscular beams or a combination of factors. Whatever inspired it, these modern artists fell in love with their old house. "He got us into it," Barbara says of Steve, "and he made us do it right."

Larry and Barbara spent the next few years installing Steve's finds and, with the help of other MOHPG members, searching out period-appropriate sinks, tubs, and light fixtures. One replacement project stumped everyone. Under the wide eaves of the house, one-of-a-kind attic vent covers break up the soffit, but there was only one cover left and no modern craftsperson felt they could duplicate the fanciful design. It looked like something from Disneyland! And that's how Barbara solved the problem.

She remembered that Disney Studios in Burbank will occasionally accept unique outside projects, and the company agreed to take on the vent-cover







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#### OLD HOUSE LIVING



Preservation group members found Barbara and Larry a 1920s garage, then helped them move it to the site via flatbed truck.



Photo: Barbara Simundza

challenge. First workers figured out the recipe for the vintage plaster (it called for horsehair), then artisans duplicated the Celtic-knot design so perfectly that you can't tell the "Disney" covers from the original.

MOHPG member Jimi Hendrix (named long before the psychedelic guitarist got famous) helped install the vent covers. Then he spearheaded the biggest project ever attempted by the preservation group. Barbara and Larry wanted a garage, but not a modern one. When Hendrix found a stylish 1920s garage slated for demolition, he enlisted MOHPG members to load it onto a flatbed and move it behind Barbara and Larry's house.

Today people still gasp when they come into this bungalow, no longer out of horror but because the interior is so unutterably lovely. It invites comparison to the famous Greene & Greene bungalows in nearby Pasadena. The architect of the Cornes's house is unknown, but the look is Greene & Greene, with Japanesque built-ins gleaming in the amber glow of mica lamps. The transformation from dump to diamond is complete.

Barbara and Larry are transformed, too. Larry now paints smaller pieces more at home in his home. He's even served as MOHPG's president. And Barbara, who eight years ago didn't know a Craftsman home from a Craftsman saw, is a powerful advocate for old-house preservation. "This house has changed our lives," Barbara says. "It's like marrying into royalty."

JENNY CUNNINGHAM writes about vintage homes and wine from her own old house in Seattle.

#### IT'S A JUNGLE...

THANKS IN LARGE PART TO MONROVIA'S caring preservation community, this small town is a virtual library of old-house stories.

While Barbara and Larry's house tells a tale of gradual decline, the fortunes of another took a dramatic turn in about two seconds—at 7:43 a.m. on June 26, 1991—when the Sierra Madre earthquake knocked the Upton Sinclair House off its foundation. Sinclair, the muckraking novelist who took on the meat industry in *The Jungle*, clearly loved a good fight, so it's a pity he missed the tussle that nearly turned his house of 25 years into cosmic sausage.

After the quake, the owners hired engineers to declare the reinforced concrete home a structural failure. They wanted to demolish it and build a new house with the insurance money. Preservationists, including the Monrovia Old-House Preservation Group, fought back with their own more upbeat engineering report, the home's listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and a California provision that protects historic buildings damaged by earthquakes.

By the time the preservationists had prevailed five years later, the Sinclair House was an abandoned, cracked, graffitied mess. Yet buyer and contractor Vicky Novell turned it into the embodiment of California dreamin'—a pastel confection of arches and Romeo-and-Juliet balconies in the shadow of the San Gabriel Mountains. The buyers—Cal-Tech neuroscience professors Erin Schuman and husband Gilles Laurent—concede that their decision was a no-brainer. Gilles is French and his parents own a house in Cordes that dates from the 13th century, so this home is modern in comparison.

Hotel magnate Louis Vollmer had the Spanish Colonial Revival built in 1923, and politically controversial Sinclair bought it as a quiet hideout in 1942. His second wife had hung heavy velvet curtains in all the windows and his third almost turned down his proposal because the house was so gloomy.

Today it's hard to imagine a lighter, brighter house. Sunlight streams through numerous French doors, setting off a spectacular arched doorway, with mouldings and pocket doors carved from black walnut. The walls are pale yellow stucco, while the floors give you a new respect for the beauty of concrete. Even the bathroom is photogenic, with its original flower-motif tile.

Erin and Gilles, who live here with daughters Emma and Charlotte, didn't have to lift a finger inside. They did, however, bring back to life the garden Sinclair describes in his autobiography, "a half acre of land completely surrounded by Eugenia trees ... poppy beds that are a dream—and when I get tired of hammering on the typewriter I go out and pull weeds from the poppies."

Sinclair could have been talking about his house's fate in saying of his last marriage: "So this story has a happy ending."

-Jenny Cunningham





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#### **Gut Reaction**

ONG-TIME NANTUCKET RESIDENT CLARISSA PORTER first realized her home's 18th-century interiors might one day be prone to serious remuddling when a summer renter wanted to know when she was going to add a sauna and Jacuzzi upstairs. Later Porter witnessed the merciless gut rehab of an 18th-century house once owned by Nantucket's only known black whaling-ship captain, Absalom Boston. "After I saw what happened to the Absalom Boston house, I resolved that my home would not meet the same fate."

To halt these irreversible practices, the four-year-old Nantucket Preservation Trust (NPT) is doing what has been done in only a few other historic districts: protecting the interiors of privately owned historic homes.

Porter's concerns are not unfounded. The National Trust for Historic Preservation recently listed Nantucket as one of the most endangered historic places in the United States. Although Nantucket is the country's largest national historic land-

Photos courtesy of Nantucket Preservation Trus

Today a house museum, Nantucket's "Oldest House" is characteristic of the late 17th-century houses on the island.

mark (2,400 homes participate in its historic district), its weathered character erodes noticeably with each influx of new money and new construction. The recent wave of gut rehabs and tear-downs of antique structures threatens Nantucket's architectural landscape. It is the interiors of historic homes that are most in danger of being washed away by these "rehabilitation" projects. Hand-hewn wood floors, bull's-eye transom lights, well-worn stair treads, and simple Quaker mouldings-irreplaceable reminder's of Nantucket's past—are being lost to modern fittings.

Using historic preservation easements—voluntary legal agreements between Nantucket homeowners and NPT—part or all of a home's interior, exterior, and

## Cornering the Market

Steve Conant still remembers his first encounter with dust corners, a crude version in the historic Follett House in Burlington, Vermont. "A carpenter had filled in the corners of the stairs with pyramid-shaped pieces of wood," says Steve, the owner of Conant Custom Brass. Then about 15 years ago he saw metal corners in an antiques magazine. After calling all over the country to locate a source, he concluded that there might be a market for these gizmos, and created tooling to manufacture a similar pattern in solid brass. "Since then I've found six different types. Some press in and are held with barbs, and some are smaller or larger than ours." Conant's attach with a single center nail. Corners are \$3 each; the minimum order is 10. Contact Conant Custom Brass. 270 Pine St., Burlington, VT 05401, (800) 832-4482, www.conantcustombrass.com

garden spaces can be preserved. A flexible agreement between a property owner and a qualified preservation organization, the easement provision can be tailored to fit each property's interior

characteristics. Once recorded, the easement becomes part of the deed; it binds not only the current property owners to the easement, but also future owners. The incentive for homeowners is the possible tax benefits: charitable gift deduction, property tax reduction, or estate tax reduction. Districts already using historic preservation easements to preserve interiors include Ipswich, Mass-



achusetts, and Charleston, South Carolina. ceilings, and

After Porter read about NPT's historic interiors program in Nantucket's *Inquirer and Mirror* newspaper, she contacted Patricia Butler, NPT executive director, and they began to document the house, inside and out. Porter's easement includes all 18th-century gunstock corner posts (ver-

tical structural supports), wood floors, beam



Nantucket is losing 17th-century fishing shanties, 18th-century lean-tos, 19th-century Greek Revivals and early 20th-century cottages that echo its 350-year architectural history.

ceilings, and transoms; the 19th-century fireplaces in the southeast and west living rooms; and the early 20th-century parlor closets. "The house has been in my father's family since 1913 when my father's cousin, Mary Wilson Strong, and her husband, Austin, knocked on the door and asked the owner if he would entertain an offer," says Porter. In 1985 Porter inherited the Austin

## Out To Lunch

ost old-house restorers know Masonite for the Peg-Board that gives us a handy place to hang our tools. But did you know that the material itself is historic? If you own a house built between 1928 and the early '40s, chances are the original walls of the attic or basement were clad in Masonite. Made by exploding wood chips with steam and pressing them into a sheet, it was also popular inside summer cottages and even living areas of year-round homes before gypsum board became widely available after World War II.

Masonite recently celebrated its 75th anniversary with a special historic exhibit in its birthplace of Laurel, Mississippi. Despite the gubernatorial congratulations and impressive keepsake medallions, there was no escaping a key fact: The discovery of this eminently handy material was essentially an accident.

Engineer William H. Mason had come to Laurel in 1924 to conduct research on an experimental fiberboard press. One day he put a wood fiber mat in the press and left for lunch. When he returned, he

found that a valve had malfunctioned so that the mat had been under extreme heat and pressure. The result was an especially hard, dense, thin board that became a standard material for interior finishing. Incorporated as the Mason Fibre Company in 1925, the headquarters moved to Chicago and in 1928 changed its name to the Masonite Corporation.

When Masonite developed its more water-resistant Tempered Presdwood, they promoted it for exterior use, constructing an entire Masonite House for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago.

Into the '50s, it appeared in kitchen cabinets and flooring, and in the '70s, Masonite's Royaltile was an inexpensive alternative to ceramic tile for walls. Today they sell prefinished panelling and doors under the CraftMaster label. And Mason, who struggled to find investors for his accidental invention, saw the company named for him produce enough hardboard in one year to make a 4" wide sidewalk around the earth, five and a half times (that's 136,730 miles).

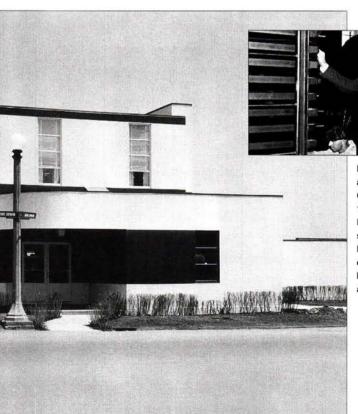


In a single year, Masonite has produced enough hardboard to build a 4'-wide sidewalk

Strong house from her mother, and she has maintained the ca. 1731 house since then. "I have such a long history with this magical place that I want to preserve what came before and do what is best for the home's future," says Porter.

The trust is currently working with the owners of a dozen other historic structures to identify, document, and preserve historic interior and exterior features. "Interior spaces including floor plans, wall paneling, doors, stairwells, early hardware, fireplaces, and windows are documented and preserved through preservation easements," says Butler. "We hope to show the importance of preserving historic houses."

Not every antique home qualifies for historic preservation restrictions. The home must be situated in a historic district or must be designated as historically significant through the National Register listing. For more information on the program as well as Preservation Week on Nantucket May 13-19 contact the Nantucket Preservation Trust at (508) 228-1387.



Masonite built an entire house (left) for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition. William H. Mason (bottom) created the first hardboard by accident.

136,730 miles 10

### Of Presidents and Kings

AN YOU RANK the six most popular historic house museums in the country?

A. Monticello, Home of Thomas Jefferson, Charlottesville, VA Thomas Jefferson, 1768-79, 1793-1809

B. Martin Luther King Jr., Birth Home Atlanta, GA Architect unknown, 1893

C. Biltmore Estate, Asheville, NC Richard Morris Hunt, 1895

- D. Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon, VA George Washington, 1785-86
- E. Hearst Castle, San Simeon, CA Julia Morgan, 1927-1947
- F. Graceland, Memphis, TN Architect Unknown, 1939



The answers are below, and come from *The Almanac of Architecture & Design 2001*, published by Greenway Consulting. The only comprehensive annual reference source for architects, interior designers, historic preservationists, and urban planners, the almanac includes such tidbits as the fastest growing firms, the top 15 schools of architecture, and the world's best skylines. For a copy of the almanac call (800) 726-8603 or visit the web site at www.greenwayconsulting.com.

D' 1' C' 5' E' 3' E' 4' ∀' 2' B' 6

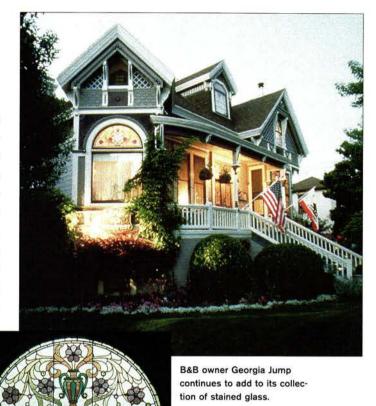
#### Arts & Crafts Education

F YOUR INTEREST IN THINGS Arts & Crafts includes exploring its origins, you may want to be in Chicago this June to attend "The American Arts and Crafts Movement in International Context." The June 13-17 conference is sponsored by the New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Among the many events complementing the formal sessions are visits to the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, the Robie House, and the Heller House. Speakers include Robert Judson Clark, Princeton University professor emeritus and curator/editor of "The Arts and Crafts Movement in America," and OHJ contributor Bruce Smith, founder of The Arts & Crafts Press. The cost is \$475 plus a \$20 non-refundable registration fee. For more information call NYU's Program in Arts (212) 998-7130 or email clara.guerrero@nyu.edu.

## 3&B Focus

LA BELLE EPOQUE. NAPA, CALIFORNIA

divorce in the mid-'90s led Georgia Jump to change A careers. She had sharpened her house-repair skills during years of running a lumberyard with her former husband in New Jersey, and found the B&B of her dreams in the Napa Valley of California. The Queen Anne-style house was commissioned in 1893 by a hardware merchant as a wedding gift for his daughter, who died in childbirth only four years later. For a while the house was headquarters for a bicycle club, but by 1981 it had become a B&B. Among its architectural highlights is an extensive collection of stained glass, both original and new. Georgia and her friend Bob Maquard recently restored the iron widows walk seen in a 1902 photo. If there's no room at that inn, Georgia may still be able to put you up in the Buckley House, a two-suite 1887 Victorian across the street that she bought in 1998. 7 rooms, \$160-\$295, 1386 Calistoga Avenue, Napa, CA 94559, (800) 238-8070, www.labelleepogue.com



## OHJ ON THE SET AT Today's Classic Homes

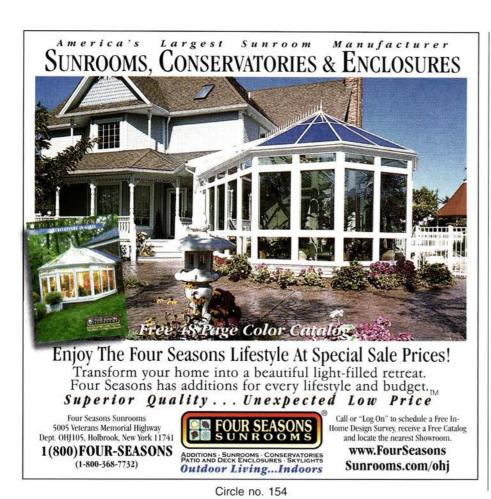
Host of Today's Classic Homes, Mitch McDaniel, checks work at the Kelnepa House.

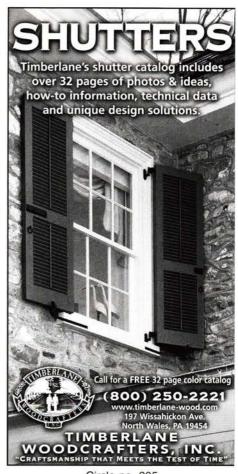
ith the third season of Today's Classic Homes due to air early this fall, the folks behind this 13part series-co-produced by Old-House Journal-

episodes. This season will document the resurrection of the Kelnepa House, a 1924 Mediterranean riverfront estate in Jacksonville, Florida. Built by the architect/contractor team of Bernard Close and Victor Zambetti, the house is an interesting spin on the villa style that was all the rage during Florida's 1920s building boom (see "Addison Mizner-Mad for Beauty" in the March/April). The construction is not just the ornamental concrete block familiar to most OHJ readers, but a novel mixture of cement and crushed glass called "Miami Marble" that Zambetti invented to give the appearance of gems shining in the Florida sun. Future episodes will explore the nature of this unusual material, and pick up the trail blazed by OHJ to the birthplace of the American garage. Look for more details in the next Journal section.

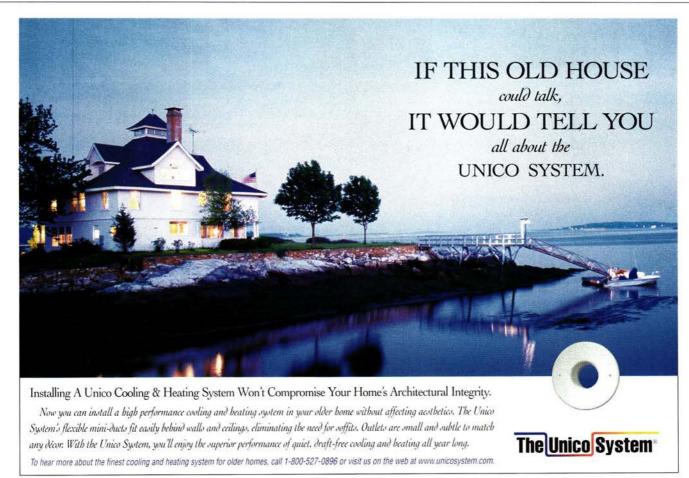
are already hard at work on the project house and the first







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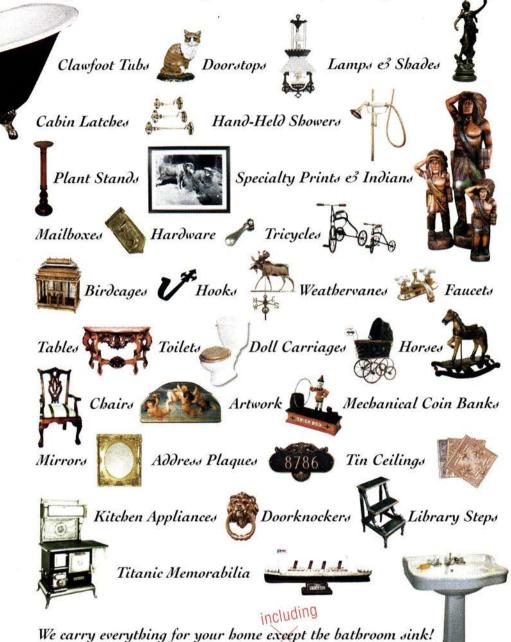
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## The Ways of Wainscots by Gordon Bock

often distinguishes old houses from their later cousins, and wood wainscots are easily among the most creative of these finishes. Dictionaries define a wainscot simply as a paneling treatment bordering the lower part of an interior wall. Though they can be made from any number of durable materials—from marble or ceramic tiles to heavy fabrics—wood wainscots, both painted and natural, are the most familiar types. In fact the term wainscot is derived, improbably, from wood wagon siding.

At their lowest, literal level, wainscots are extensions of baseboards or mopboards that run the perimeter of the room just above the floor. Common baseboards (up to 8" in width) are usually a single board moulded along the upper edge to make a decorative transition to a smooth plaster wall. For wider baseboards, however, carpenters find it more practical and attractive to finish the upper edge with a separate piece of moulding, typically in a more elaborate pattern. From here it is a short step to a deep baseboard or skirting composed of two or three horizontal boards, flush-matched to make a uniform surface 18" to 20" wide. When capped with a protruding rail moulding, this skirting becomes, in effect, a low wainscot or dado, a type often seen in the common rooms of pre-1840 dwellings, such as vernacular Greek Revival houses.

Customarily higher are the wainscots found in bathrooms and halls. In these relatively narrow, well-trafficked spaces, the wainscot is intended to protect as well as decorate the wall, making 48" or 54" a common practical height. By the mid-19th century, the favored construction for these service wainscots was a series of tongue-andgrooved boards running vertically (rather than horizontally) along the wall, and blindnailed in place like flooring. The most functional installations, such as bathrooms and back halls, used boards 2 ½" to 3 ½" wide on the face and beaded at the edge (and often in the face) to disguise joints—the ubiquitous beadboard or ceiling popular right up to World War I. More expensive work might call on boards decorated with v-joints, moulded shapes (often with different designs on alternate boards), or any one of the scores of other patterns widely available as machineproduced millwork. These vertical-board wainscots often extended directly to the floor without meeting a baseboard, and they were capped with a horizontal moulding rabbeted to fit over the tops of the boards.

Higher still is the level of wainscots that appear in many turn-of-the-century dining rooms. By 1905, tastemakers noted that

No matter which direction they run, wood wainscots rise in prominence with every succeeding era of old houses.

Understated in construction and design, yet powerful in presence, the wainscot in the dining room of the Emerson-Wilcox House in Old York, Maine, is typical of the low versions common by the 18th century. Three wide, horizontal boards are edge-matched to make a smooth, painted band about 32" high that is capped with a subtle moulding.





Photos: Brian Vanden Brink

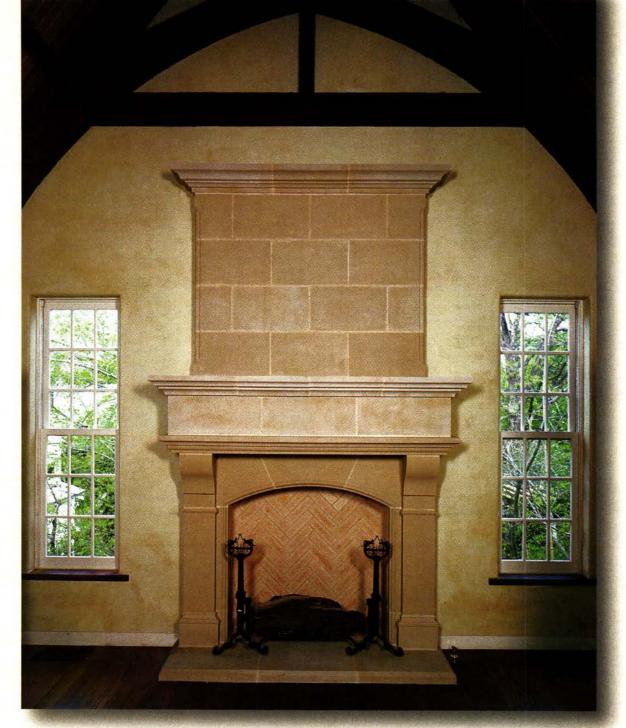
Steam-powered woodworking machinery of the 19th century poured out a cornucopia of wainscot components. Sections of raised panels (left) came knocked down from factories; vertical beaded boards (right) could be ordered by the bundle.

as much as 60"seemed to be the new standard, though wainscots could go a foot taller in a highceilinged room. This was the heyday of the Arts & Crafts movement, and even houses that did not, strictly speaking, share this aesthetic philosophy followed the vogue for strongly vertical wainscots in dining rooms. The now-legendary design called for large, flat panels, 18" to 24" wide, separated by flat, vertical strips about 3" wide. The panels themselves could be wood or, in the best Arts & Crafts tradition, coarse fabric, such as fine burlap, grasscloth, or heavy linen, often dyed in a rich color. As a finishing touch, the wainscot was capped with a 4" wide board supported by brackets and grooved on top to display decorative tableware—the standard-issue plate rail of bungalow dining rooms.

When turned to living rooms, wainscots were supposed to be a moderate height of 32" to 36". In front halls and stairways, however, the wainscot has long played a featured role. In grand Georgian houses, for example, front halls were central public areas, and the wainscot often defined the space as the primary wall decoration. Construction might be horizontal flush boards but, as early as the 18th century, raised paneling became the treatment of choice. Here the wainscot is a frame of interlocking stiles and rails constructed to hold a series of rectangular panels that float in this frame—essentially the same

system of joinery used to build doors. The height of front hall wainscots varies with each era, but they can easily rise to 50" to fit the proportions of a large hall or a staircase.

In fact, the higher they rise, the better wainscots look when they relate to, rather than run independent of, other architectural elements. A century ago, perhaps the golden age of wainscots, carpentry texts regularly advised that wainscoting should be of the same height as some other feature of the room—a mantel or bookcase, for example. Windows, which are an ever present interruption on outside walls, could be integrated by simply running the wainscot to their bottom level, then making the stool (the interior equivalent of the sill) continuous with the cap moulding. In houses where this strategy would not leave the wainscot high enough, the alternative was to run it to the top of the window. In this case the cap moulding would connect with the header moulding at the top of window and door mouldings or entablatures—a popular, but by no means exclusively Arts & Crafts scheme, especially where the wall extended a couple more feet before reaching the ceiling. This approach not only avoided chopping the wall into zig-zags of doors, windows, and wainscots, it played up the horizontal lines of the room-right in step with the open room plans and horizontally oriented houses that put their mark on a new century. 1



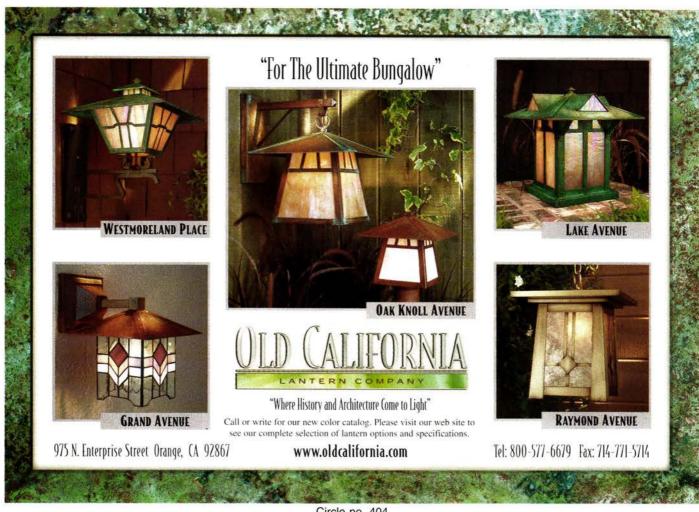
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## Victorian gardeners tried to outdo each other with elaborate patterns of colorful tropicals.

## A Floral Carpet Ride by JoAnn Gardner

NOTHING COULD BE too fussy and ornate for the Victorians, so gaudy flowers massed to look like Turkish carpets were the perfect outdoor expression of their tastes.

Bright-colored tropical plants discovered in the late 18th and early 19th centuries excited a public eager for novelty, and they bloomed to greatest effect in the flamboyant patterns of carpet bedding, so-called because it mimicked the geometric designs of oriental rugs. Diamonds, circles, ovals, and triangles were embellished with curlicues, scrolls, and crescents, framed by several "ribbons," or bands of alternating solid colors.

Landscapers often found a ready-made layout in existing parterres—geometric beds outlined with low evergreens, most often boxwood. The boxwood usually came out to make way for the ribbons of vividly colored flowers or foliage. Designs often included a low mound to afford a better view of the planting, which for added visual impact was set in an expanse of green lawn. The beauty of individual plants was sacrificed to neat habit, strong hues, and uninterrupted bloom. Champion bedders included purple verbena, brilliant yellow Calceolaria, and blue lobelia. The queen of carpet plants was the annual geranium (Pelargonium), favored not for its flowers so much as variegated foliage.

The lavish displays depended on the labor-intensive system called "bedding out."

Gardeners raised frost-tender annuals and perennials in hothouses, transferred them outdoors for a few weeks, then replaced them three or four times a season to maintain a perfect display. At summer's end they discarded the plants or tilled them under.

Detractors regarded the practice as wasteful and the style as ostentatious. Yet it was fueled by growing knowledge about breeding better plants and the technology for raising them by the thousands in glasshouses.

#### Carpet Beds in the U.S.

LIKE MOST GARDEN TRENDS, carpet bedding was imported from Great Britain, where it thrilled visitors to London's Kew Gardens in the 1860s. Americans were dazzled by a huge sunken garden of carpet plantings at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. But cool-climate flowers like *Calceolaria*, so wildly popular in England, weren't destined to fare well in the New World. In addition to stalwart annuals like geraniums, this display included silver-leaved perennials such as dusty miller (*Artemisia*) and golden feverfew, both guaranteed to endure hot, dry American summers.

Contemporary tastes called for large or double flowers. Among drought-tolerant bedders were natives like Drummond's phlox, a big-flowered low-growing western annual found on the 1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition, and gaillardia (aptly named blanket



Photos by Ken Druse except where noted

A strong vertical plant often accents carpet bedding, seen most often today in public displays (opposite). Bedding patterns relied heavily on a combination of continuous bloom and colorful foliage such as that of Alternanthera. Above are Alternanthera ficoidea 'Rosea' and A. 'Aurea Nana' with marigolds.

#### OUTSIDE THE OLD HOUSE

You can use ribbons of annuals to give a Victorian touch to a schrub bed (right). Masses of annuals were often planted inside low hedges or parterres of boxwood (far right).



Catriona Tudor Erler







Popular bedding plants included single marigolds (top left), annual geraniums (above), and ageratum (left).



flower for its orange and yellow markings), discovered in Louisiana in 1833.

The grower's art flourished during the Victorian era, driven by the demands of the carpet ideal. Gardeners zealously nipped buds from plants grown solely for foliage and vigilantly removed spent blooms from others in order to maintain uninterrupted, flawless color. Plants couldn't be allowed to grow beyond their allotted space because it would spoil the effect.

Ordinary suburban gardeners fell short of the ideal not for lack of skill but lack of time and room. With front yards too small for a full-scale show, the result was undistinguished shapes cut into the lawn. A strong vertical accent, preferably a stiff tender perennial such as canna, agave, or yucca, rose up from massed geraniums heavily beribboned with lobelia and sweet alyssum (still a popular edging combination).

These and other bright flowers lent themselves so readily to sweeping effects that they became overused. Gardening expert Shirley Hibberd warned against such stereotyped combinations. "The bedding system," he wrote in *The Amateur's Flower Garden* in 1871, "has its uses as well as its abuses."

Hibberd compared carpet beds to



fireworks in their transient eye appeal, and advised extending the season. Spring should be a mass of bulbs combined with coolweather bloomers like pansies, he said. These would be replaced in summer by hot-season annuals and tender perennials, followed by chrysanthemums, all displayed against a background of evergreen shrubs.

#### A Floral Legacy

ALTHOUGH VICTORIAN CARPETS and ribbons gave way to a more natural look in the early 20th century, Hibberd's planting rotation is still common practice in public display gardens. And while some Victorian carpet-bedders have virtually vanishedwho grows the blotch-leaved Alternanthera today?—others, like coleus, are enjoying a renaissance. Some tropicals used in those schemes are more popular than ever, thanks to breeders who have given grateful gardeners pansies that don't wilt in the heat and longblooming, more compact petunias.

A few are virtually unchanged. Signet marigolds (Tagetes tenuifolia) were first introduced in the early 1800s from Mexico, and the seed strains still available—'Lemon Gem', 'Tangerine Gem', 'Little Giant'—differ little from marigolds popular in carpet plantings.

Even critics of carpet bedding found either its plants or some elements of its style irresistible. Gertrude Jekyll, champion of the perennial border, was a devotee of the Victorian novelty annual, dusty miller (Senecio cineraria), which she used to mark long borders and walks. In America, author Louise Beebe Wilder couldn't resist setting off a mass of bright red Salvia splendens with a classic Victorian ribbon of white and mauve sweet alvssum.

"It requires some fortitude in this day to express approval of the bedding-out system," she observed, "...yet it seems to me that there are times and places where we may still 'bed out' with propriety and even grace."

#### Growing You Own Carpet

Bedding plants, even modestly massed, are still an effective foil for Victorian style

- Try compact geraniums, available in red, orange, pink, salmon, and white, with multihued (zoned) leaves.
- Look for carpet designs in old periodicals or garden books. Start with a simple one and work it out on paper first. Surround it with lawn in front of the house.
- Silver-leaved plants make eye-catching edges and combine wonderfully with purple foliage or flowers. Good ones include Artemisia stelleriana 'Silver Brocade' and Senecio cinerarea 'Cirrus'.
- Blue lobelia and white sweet alyssum are still the plants of choice for framing or creating ribbon edgings. Plant them around a Victorian cast-iron planter that features period cannas (now enjoying a revival) or 'Bishop of Llandaff' dahlia (1927) with burgundy leaves and scarlet flowers.
- The Victorians included purple-leaved beet varieties in their carpets. You might try 'Bright Light' chard, which has multicolored stems and purplish-green leaves, or one of the compact purple basils.

#### Carpet & Ribbon Plants circa 1870s

#### **Flowers**

Ageratum, floss flower (Ageratum houstonianum) Blanket flower (Gaillardia pulchella) China aster (Callistephus chinensus) Crested and plumed celosia (Celosia cristata, C. plumosa) Cupflower (Nierembergia caerula) Drummond's phlox (Phlox drummondii) Edging lobelia (Lobelia erinus) Garden balsam (Impatiens balsamina) Geranium (Pelargonium X hortorum) Heliotrope (Heliotropium arborescens)

Lantana (Lantana camara) Nasturtium (Tropaeolum majus) Pansy (Viola X wittrockiana) Petunia (Petunia X hybrida) Pink (Dianthus chinensis) Portulaca (Portulaca grandiflora) Sweet alyssum (Lobularia maritima) Verbena (Verbena X hybrida) Wax begonia (Begonia semperflorens) Zinnia (Zinnia X hybrida)

#### **Foliage**

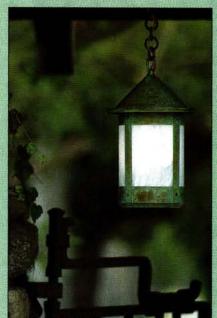
Amaranthus (Amaranthus tricolor) Beefsteak plant (Perilla frutescens) Beet (Betula vulgaris) Coleus (Solenostemon scutellariodides) Cocksfoot (Dactylis glomerata) Dusty miller (Senecio cinerarea) Hen & chickens (Echeveria spp.) Geranium (Pelargonium X hortorum) Golden feverfew (Tanacetum parthenium 'Aureum') Joseph's coat (Alternanthera ficoidea)

#### **Vertical Accent**

Century Plant (Agave spp.) Canna (Canna X generalis) Dahlia (Dahlia X hybrida Yucca (Yucca spp.)











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### THE WHIRLS OF SUMMER Even on the shadiest of

porches, the gentle zephyrs of summer occasionally fail us. You may want to be prepared for those unforgiving afternoons with an outdoor fan, UL listed to stand up to rain or the humidity of that seaside gazebo. Hunter Fan Co. has three new outdoor models, all with five blades and a 52" span. Model 28130 has cherry blades and a raw copper housing. Other models are aluminum with bleached oak blades or solid white. Suggested retail is \$390. Contact Hunter Fan Co. at (800)-4HUNTER (4486837), or visit www.hunterfan.com, Circle no. 3 on the resource card.



Screw up your courage and consider a water feature for your garden this summer. All fountains add a pleasant splishing that masks outside noises; a wall fountain can fit on a patio or pillar in the smallest of

gardens. The cast iron Ironzilla Wall Fountain-available in classic gray, antique white, rust, and patina green-already looks well aged and will pick up more patina with the years. The mouth is predrilled for plumbing.

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would hand deliver right to the door-ringing twice to let the addressee know the mail had arrived. The decoration on this mailbox evokes such Victorian-era service with a gracious woman bidding welcome as the letter carrier tips his hat. The wall-mount design is cast aluminum with a polished brass letter slot. Available in white, black, or verde, it's 20.5" tall, 15.5" wide, and 5.5" deep, and retails for \$199.95. Contact Custom Home Accessories, (800) 265-0041, or visit www.custom-mailboxes.com. Circle no. 5 on the resource card.



#### ISN'T IT IONIC?

Well, the makers call it Corinthian: perhaps it's more a composite. Both styles were common for column capitals on neoclassical buildings of the first half of the 20th century. You can echo those exterior design elements with this cast stone shelf in a study. or with a towel bar in the bath. Each piece-you can get a matching tissue holder, soap dish, and robe hook, or a towel bar without a shelf-is sealed for protection against staining and mildew. They come in nine different colors and either a smooth or rough finish. Price for the combined shelf and towel bar ranges from \$398 for a 26" model to \$454 for 38". Contact Homestone, (888) 678-9933, www.homestoneinc.com. Circle no. 6 on the resource card.



#### **BUNNIES & BATCHELDER**

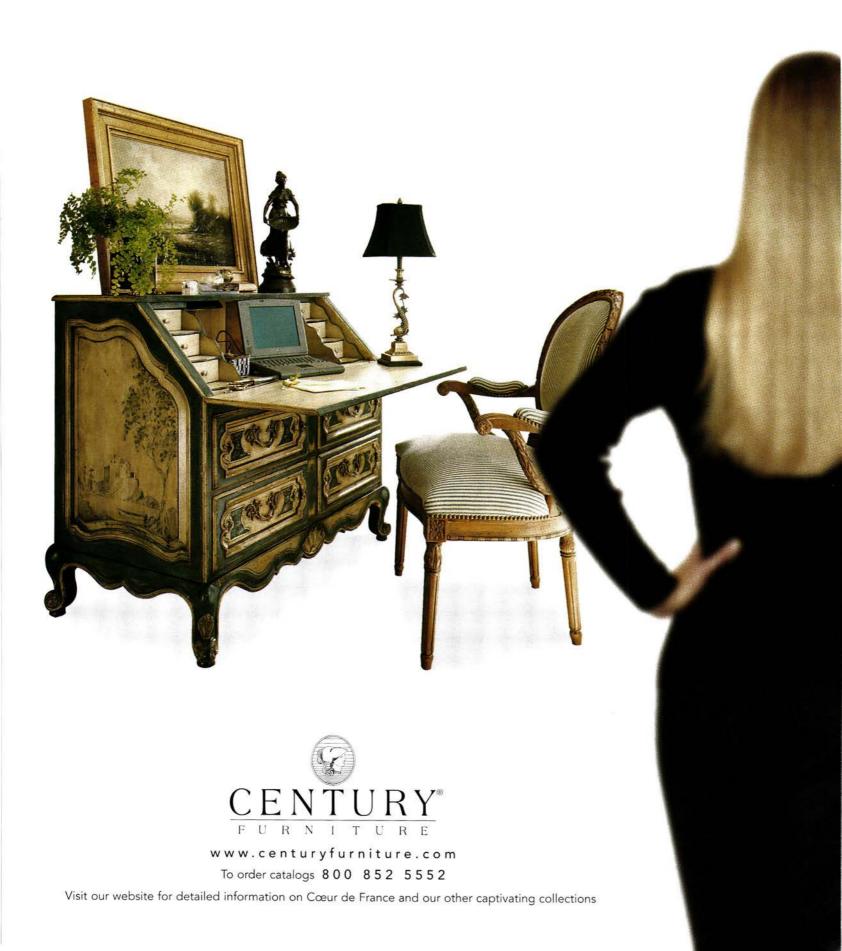
Arts & Crafts tilemaker Ernest Batchelder, who set up shop in Pasadena in 1909, created molded relief patterns in muted shades of brown and gray green. The Depression and fashion shifts put an end to large-scale production of the handmade tiles in the 1930s. Today you can buy reproduction tiles reflecting his style and many of his favorite motifs\_Japanese-influenced trees, birds, deer, and his personal symbol, a rabbit. One of the tiles' most popular applications was as a fireplace surround, but these unglazed tiles can also be sealed for exteriors, backsplashes, or baths. A 4"X4" decorated tile sells for \$50.70. Complementary undecorated ground tiles are available for \$10. For the name of an outlet near you contact Waterworks at (800) 899-6757. Circle no. 4 on the resource card.



#### **Grand Glow**

Old California Lantern Company's new Pasadena Series includes 10 Arts & Crafts-inspired designs, each named after an address in that Southern California city where architects Charles and Henry Greene hung out their shingle in 1893. This is 50 Grand Avenue, which combines the classic style of the craftsman lantern with stained glass. The lantern is available in three different "window" patterns and either the chain mount seen here or your choice of two wallmounted styles. This metal finish is "rust," but you can also choose from bronze, bronze patina, new verde, antique nickel, old brass, old penny, and textured black. Old penny and antique nickel finishes add \$32.70 to the price of \$218. Contact Old California Lantern Co., (800) 577-6679, www.oldcalifornia.com. Circle no. 7 on the resource card.

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NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM

Circle no. 502



## Ladders at Large by William T. Cox Jr.

OOD AS YOUR TYPE 1A STEPLADDER may be for interior work, it will run you ragged outdoors. Besides being built for light jobs, a typical 6' stepladder adds a maximum of about 3' to your reach, and you will spend more time moving the ladder than working. For painting or repairing the exterior of, say, a two-storey Victorian house, you'll want a variety of exterior ladders and accessories.

Start your collection by buying a single well-built extension ladder rated Type 1A (300 pounds capacity) or Type 1 (250 pounds). Not only are these types better built than other ladders (see "Next Ladder, Best Ladder" Sept./Oct. '99), they're required by OSHA regulations if you plan to add accessories for a quick scaffold. Aluminum is the most popular exterior ladder material. Fiberglass is more expensive, but light, strong, and nonconductive if you will be around electricity. Buy a ladder long enough to extend 4' beyond the eave line of the house, not so much for climbing onto the roof, but to provide a hand-hold when climbing down. You may believe you'll never have to get up on that slate or ceramic tile roof (they last forever), but what about inspecting gutters and flashing, or repointing the chimney years from now?

#### Accessories

FROM HERE, START FILLING OUT your equipment. You don't need to buy everything at once; I buy or rent as specific jobs come along. Just start with quality products.

When the time comes to reglaze a window on the second floor, buy a stand-off bar to hold you in the center. Without it, no matter where you put that ladder, the work will be just out of reach. Please don't try using a gutter or the meeting rails of the window sash to support an extension ladder. By the time you climb to the top, you may find yourself back inside picking through a

window catalogue. But remember you won't be able to reach into corners if you keep the stand-off bar on the ladder. Ladder mittens are a must too. Using an extension ladder without the mittens will scrape or gouge the siding.

Once you have learned to handle that first extension ladder like a fireman, buy a second one along with more mittens. Then invest in a pair of brackets to hold a walk board. The first time I climbed onto this precarious looking staging I was surprised how comfortable I felt. It greatly improves access without moving your equipment, and the set-up time is minimal.

Check out both aluminum and wood for walk boards. Wood 2x12s must have an OSHA stamp to be used as walk boards. Before the days of regulations, I would handpick my boards at the lumberyard and pay



Photos courtesy of Werner Ladders

Aluminum extension ladders (top) remain the popular balance between weight, strength, and cost for outdoor work. Mittens (above) are inexpensive accessories that protect siding from ladder ends, here on a fiberglass model.

Stand-off bars (right) mount to the upper rungs so that the ladder has a wider support base--say, for straddling windows. Brackets or "jacks" (far right) can turn a pair of extension ladders into a scaffold suitable for low-level work.



a premium to do so. Then I would set the boards between two sawhorses and bounce on them to see if they split. Those that wouldn't pass I would square off and band at the ends to prevent splitting. We always needed a few short boards when erecting scaffolds.

#### Scaffolding

LARGE HOUSES ARE OFTEN the scale of small commercial buildings, and the most efficient way to work around either of them is with metal scaffolding. For restoration carpentry, most contractors use frames that are 5' high by 5' wide with a 7' span. Each section comes with two end frames, two cross braces, and four pins for stacking, plus you will always need leveling jacks, base plates and/or casters. When you position two sections end-to-end, they are



As you assemble a scaffold, remember to keep the rungs on each frame (far left in photo) positioned on the same side so that they make a continuous ladder.

just the right length for a couple of 16' walk boards. (Nail a cleat at each end of the boards and they aren't going anywhere.) You shouldn't need more than four or five sections of scaffolding unless you find it more economical to scaffold the entire house. The math says that a stack of four 5' high sections plus jacks should put your head at an elevation of 28'. When working that high, rent three aluminum planks. These "cat walks" are a little over 19" wide and 7' long and made especially for spanning the 7' spread of the scaffold frame. Also, rent handrails and toe boards when working at the very top. I like to use one plank as a worktable and backboard (to prevent me from accidentally backing off the scaffolding), while using the other two planks for standing. This way, I have a frame at each end secured with one crossbrace and my work totally unblocked. Having a frame at the ends makes it easier to grab hold and crawl through the hole and climb down the ladder rungs.

When erecting your scaffold, make sure you always line up the frames, hole over hole and ladder over ladder (photo left). This way you'll have an infinite number of adjustments. I've always rented scaffolding as I needed it because I lacked storage space; otherwise I would have no problem buying scaffolding. Should I want to sell it later, used scaffolding brings a premium price. I've been to many auctions of closed-out contractors and scaffolding always sells for near retail! Casters and leveling jacks are costly too, but sell just as well as scaffolding.



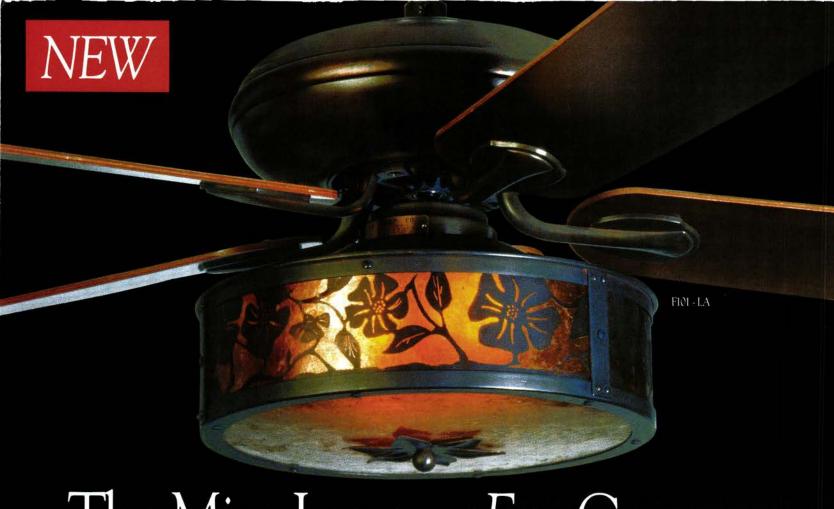
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If you have the room to move a small vehicle around your old house or maybe just along the sides, look into renting a one-man lift or scissors-lift truck. Though these devices have their costs, they can save money by saving hours on a project. If you are acting as your own general contractor, planning to hire skilled labor, give them the best and safest work platform you can afford. Carpentry goes much better when carpenters feel safe.

WILLIAM T COX JR. is based in Memphis.





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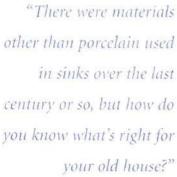
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# OLDHOUSE JOURNAL





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### May/June 2001

"The tradition for creating a stonelike appearance with paint, stucco, and techniques that mimic stone can serve as a guide for understanding colors that work with a wide variety of old houses."

-page 46

"The arcane art of stripping paint has come a long way in the past decades, with old-house restorers sharing favorite tricks and tools while manufacturers develop better or safer stripping products."

-page 58

# The Story On Stone Colors Exploring the Tradition of Farthy Exterior Paints and Schemes BY STEVE JORDAN PHOTOS BY AND OLENICK 46 OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL . MAY JUNE 2001



With modern paint companies offering palettes varied enough to fit anyone's tastes, the choice for an old-house owner often boils down to three options: 1) recreate the original appearance using available evidence; 2) create a historic interpretation using modern colors; 3) ignore all rules and evidence, then follow your impulse. Basic as these options may sound to us today, they represent a lot more range in color selection than what homeowners have enjoyed in the past.

Why Stone?

Well into the 19th

century, the best paint pigments

were imported and

therefore expensive

Reddish-brown

earth pigments

however, were

making these

even today.

relatively plentiful and easy to obtain,

colors ubiquitous

Traditionally, the options for paint colors were based on two factors-fashion, tempered by the availability of pigments to make colors. Most paint pigments used during the 18th and early 19th centuries were inorganic earth pigments—naturally occurring minerals produced by the degradation of iron-rich rocks. Their quality, purity, and color consistency varied greatly, but they were very colorfast (stable) compared to many of the organic and synthetic pigments available during the same period. These natural earth pigments include raw umber, burnt umber, yellow ocher (sienna and burnt sienna), and red ocher (Spanish red and Spanish brown). When used alone or combined with proportions of white lead, lampblack, or each other they offered a surprisingly vibrant range of hues. Today no less than in the past, these "stone

colors" are long-wearing and therefore highly practical for painting exteriors. Generally, they are also historically and aesthetically compatible with many old houses because they are the color of traditional—

that is natural-building materials, and they have been used, to a greater or lesser extent, through many of the architectural eras of the last two centuries.

#### Classical Colors (1760 to 1840)

During the colonial era and the early years of the republic, fashionconscious, affluent homeowners looked to England and Europe for direction on the latest in architecture and design. However, Europe

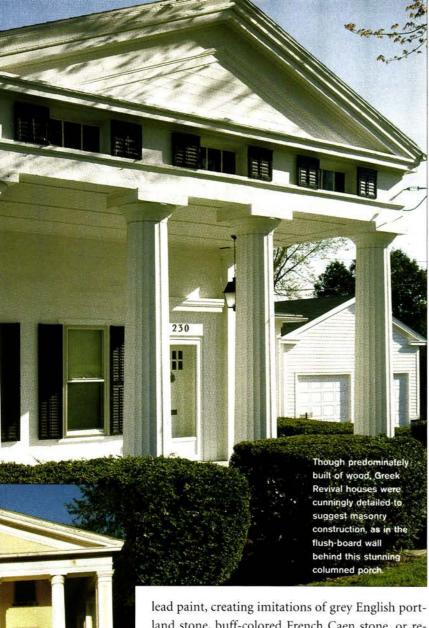
was 3,000 miles away, and here the most plentiful sources of building materials were not quarries, but virgin forests. As a result, when the elegant solid-stone houses and public buildings of the continent were copied here, they were built in wood with siding incised to resemble fine, flat ashlar masonry. Carpenters would carve decorative details, such as quoins, lintels, and brackets, in remarkable imitation of the stoneworker's art, then painters would finish the rusticated siding and decorative elements in colors imitating the appropriate stone. In many cases, they added carefully selected sands to the wet painted surface to enhance the deceit (see "Sanded Paint," next page).

The Federal style, which ushered in the 19th century, and the Greek Revival, America's first homegrown style, took full advantage of these techniques and materials. Built to stand apart, often majestically above their surroundings, the largest of these houses trumpeted a grand purpose or an owner's success. Although frequently painted white—perhaps the easiest color to keep uniform in the age of handmade paint—buildings from this period were also painted or detailed in ways that imitated local building stones or masonry. Painters added lampblack and earth pigments to moderate harsh white





Bright white, the symbolic color of marble, is not the only paint compatible with a classical revival house. Ochers and yellows (above) are equally redolent of stone construction. Grey looks natural on this brick Greek Revival (top) because it emulates granite or marble



lead paint, creating imitations of grey English portland stone, buff-colored French Caen stone, or regional varieties. Taking the idea a step further, in temple-front Greek Revival houses it was common to construct the wall behind a columned portico using flush-board siding that mimicked marble. This was, after all, the public side of the house. Other elevations were often clad simply in clapboards.

## Downing and the Romantic Era (1840 to 1870)

By the mid-19th century, the use of white as an exterior body color quickly became passé. As early as the 1840s, white was widely condemned by architects and authors across the country—chief among them Andrew Jackson Downing who sounded a public call to paint houses in the subdued colors found in nature. Downing and his adherents advocated picturesque architecture—particularly the Gothic Revival style—that harmonized with the natural environ-

#### SANDED PAINT



HOULD STONE-COLORED PAINT and clever carpentry not suffice for approximating the look of stone, then sanded paint could create a nearly indistinguishable imitation. Used by George Washington at Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson at Monticello, sanded paint produced a realistic stone finish that, according to 19th-century authorities, was durable as well. Records describe simple bellows devices devised to blow the sand onto the wet painted surface. Sand could, however, be simply thrown in place and the surplus brushed away.

Among the best and most extensive examples of sanded paint is the Jeremiah Lee Mansion in Marblehead, Mass. Built in 1768 by Col. Jeremiah Lee, a prosperous ship-

ping merchant and revolutionary patriot, this timber-frame house is patterned after refined Georgian-Style mansions in England, down to beveling the wide-board siding to simulate ashlar stone blocks.

In 1994, the Marblehead Historical Society, the building's owners and custodians, re-

searched the actual color and original treatment of the exterior. Though some evidence was sketchy due to severe weathering in the early 1800s, paint analysis indicated that the entire main façade of the mansion had been covered with sanded paint—and very likely the other three sides as well. Using this research the Society replicated the treatment as part of its exterior restoration program. The results are amazingly true to the texture and appearance of real stone.

The Jeremiah Lee Mansion is open to the public June 1 to October 15. For information call (781) 631-1768.



Top: Convincingly effective, sand applied over warm-grey paint. Middle: Contractors immediately followed the wet paint with air-blown sand. Above: The completed Mansion.

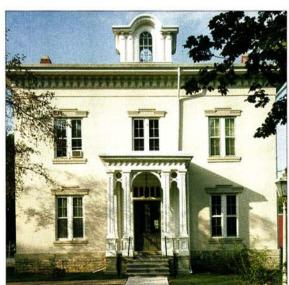
Photos courtesy of the Marblehead Historical Society

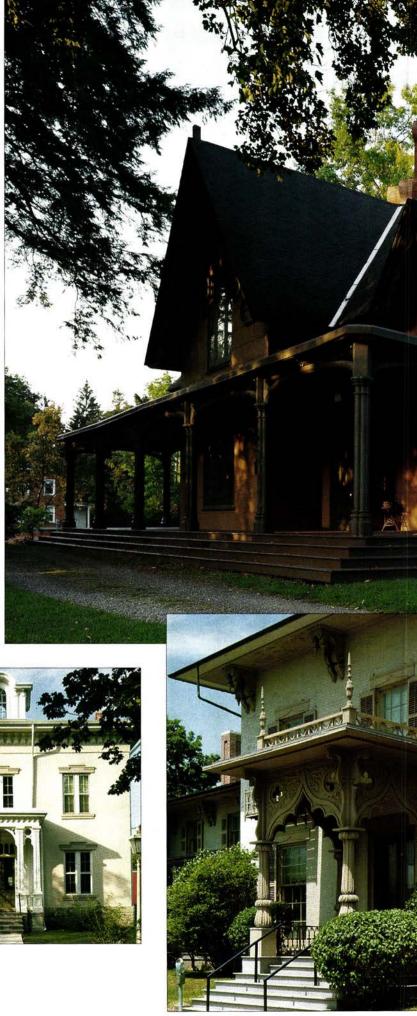
ment, rather than stood apart from it. In their view, white, a color uncommon in nature, did nothing but clash with the surroundings. This aesthetic prevailed for the next 30 years, with critics such as pattern book publisher George Woodward admonishing that "a house painted in white can never be an agreeable object in any landscape."

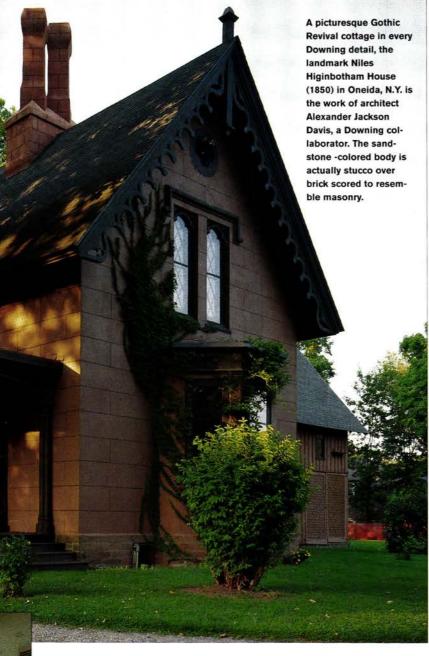
To help popularize his crusade, in 1842 Downing included an extensive discussion of paint colors in Cottage Residences, the second of his highly influential books. According to his theory, houses should copy the colors of building materials—soil, rocks, wood, and bark—and to make the point as clear as possible, he included one of the earliest paint color charts published in a book. Three of the colors Downing shows are warm shades of grey, clearly evocative of slate or bluestone. The other three are shades of brown or fawn color that could emulate wood or one of the mellow-colored stones. In fact, one of Downing's favorite colors was a blend of white, yellow ocher, and Spanish brown that recalled the warm gold of portland stone, an English freestone (sandstone).

Another popular method of creating the solid look and texture of masonry was stucco, which could be applied over brick, rubble stone, or lath on a wood frame. Mid-century architect Samuel Sloan recommended stucco for his design for an ornamented villa,

Stucco completes the stone conceit on this brick Italianate. Note the interesting paint scheme is essentially three shades of the same fawn color.







Sandstone brown sets off the magnificent carved Italianate entrance porch of the 1849 Henry Brewster house. specifying that the exterior walls be "rough-cast, tinted, and pointed." Like painting and sanding common lumber in imitation of fine masonry, stucco duplicated stone in both color and texture because is was basically a mixture of sand and lime. The effect was often enhanced by scoring the damp stucco to simulate mortar joints. Although some 19th-century architects and writers viewed this practice as sham decoration, stucco use prevailed throughout the century on modest and expensive homes alike.

The Gothic Revival was not the only picturesque style to take root during this period. The Italianate style became equally popular as an informal, rural-looking alternative to classical houses, such as the Georgian or Greek Revival styles. Just as the Gothic Revival was a residential, often wood-frame inter-

pretation of stone church architecture, Italianate houses emulated the large stone villas and palaces in the Italian countryside, but often in brick masonry or stucco over wood. Though these romantic interpretations were a loose mix of the forms, details, and materials of the European originals, more often than not, they took a great deal of imitative skill to pull off. Stone colors—typically buff or straw for the body and brownstone for trim—helped complete the effect. Adding sanded paint to porches or other faux stone features was a not uncommon finishing touch.

At this point it's worth noting that, until manufacturers perfected pre-mixed paints in the 1870s, choosing and mixing colors was a hit-or-miss affair. Although painters could mix paint within a desired palette-say, to achieve "portland colored" paint-it was much more difficult to match an existing color with the accuracy we are accustomed to today. The choice of pigments was limited and their quality was uneven. Furthermore, pigments were ground in oil by hand and imprecisely mixed with linseed oil, dryer, and turpentine. With this in mind, those who want to create a realistic pre-1860s paint scheme should limit their choice of pigments and attempt to mix the desired color with as few combinations of tints as possible. Remember too that color schemes were relatively simple; more than two colors or shades was a lot.

## Victorian Innovation (1870 to 1900)

Though Downing's ideas and the subdued colors he promoted remained popular almost to the end of the 19th century, houses and the ways they were painted changed greatly after the Civil War. As the Industrial Revolution bloomed, it brought not only the complicated architectural styles of the Victorian era, but also manufactured paints and a new spectrum of manmade colors. The controlled production conditions of a paint factory made possible paints with richer colors in a reliable variety of shades. Innovations in chemistry, such as coal-tar dyes, led the way to entirely new pigments and colors like mauve. The result was a fashion for elaborate houses

painted in sophisticated combinations of multiple colors—the eye-popping polychromy of the Queen Anne and Stick styles.

The bold, deep, contrasting colors and schemes of the Victorian era often had little reference to the natural world, but even though upstaged, the stone colors of browns, buffs, and greys still had their place. In their 1885 literature the Devoe Paint Company noted that "The more natural we can make our buildings appear in associating their decorative effects with their surroundings ... the nearer we come to the truest form of artistic decoration." While the second storey of a Queen Anne might be painted an "old gold" color and the third storey in "amber," the first storey was anchored to the earth with a coat of "brownstone." Neither did the appeal for sanded paint slip away. An 1871 color chart from Harrison Brothers & Company's Town and Country Ready Prepared Paints included the following sanded finishes: Connecticut Brown Stone, Seneca Stone, Nova Scotia, Dorchester, Berea Stone—similar to Franklin Stone, Masillon Stone, and Ohio Sand Stone, or Cleveland Stone.

#### New Century Shifts (1900 to 1920)

During the last years of the 19th century, as the dark colors of the late-Victorian period started to fade in impact, the emerging Arts & Crafts movement once again changed the way North Americans built and decorated their homes. In a move away from Victorian aesthetics, the de-

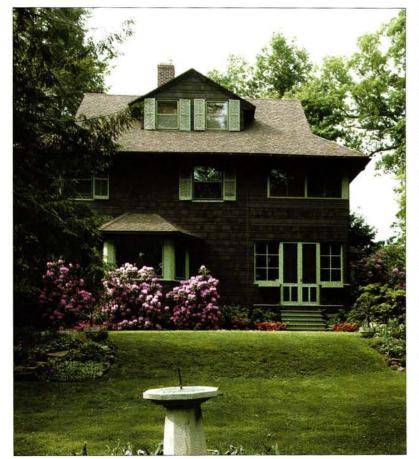


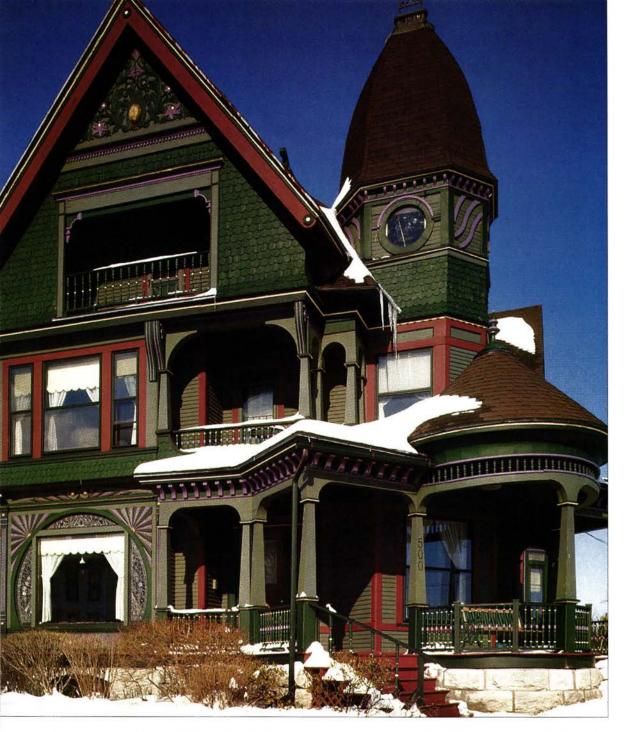
Even at the height of the Victorian polychromy, many houses stuck to two-tone paint schemes that were more practical to apply and maintain.

signers placed a renewed emphasis on architectural harmony and natural materials. Stone walls melded into stone foundations with siding and shingles painted or stained to blend with the masonry. Where the Victorians shunned subdued colors for the boldly dark, disciples of the Arts & Crafts ideal embraced them. Though their emblematic hues were mossy greens and weathered browns—unDowning, but natural nonetheless—they also favored the seasoned grey, brick, and terra-cotta colors of earth-derived masonry materials.

At the same time the Colonial Revival movement, which gained wide appeal in the 1890s, flaunted a return to the glaring whites, off-whites, and yellows of the 1790s that stood out from their surroundings—the very antithesis of the Arts & Crafts aesthetic. Until the 1920s, hundreds of new suburban neighborhoods were both segregated by these divergent house styles and their colors, as well as integrated by their architectural variety. Interestingly, from 1900 to around 1940 stucco returned to pop-

Arts & Crafts
influenced houses
rejected Victorian
complexity for solid
body paint
schemes that
reflected the colors
of the houses site
and building materials, including stone
and brick masonry.





ularity, due in no small part to promotion by portland cement manufacturers. New spins on traditional mixes added tinting pigments, colored aggregates, and even brilliant mica chips to enhance the stone resemblance, sometimes to theatrical levels.

Should you think all this looks like signs of yet another fashion cycle, you're right. Decades of Colonial Revival brightness may have reached their ultimate limit as architectural blandness in the mid-1950s. Now 50 years later, we're once again abandoning nearly ubiquitous all-white houses for the harmony of subdued color palettes, many of them naturally cast in stone colors.

With its multiple porches and shifting wall treatments, this 1894 Queen Anne, the John Truesdell House in Syracuse, N.Y., helps explain the relationship between Victorian house styles and paint colors. Each change in material or shape, from decorative shingles to incised carvings, is designed for picking out combinations of rich, deep colors.

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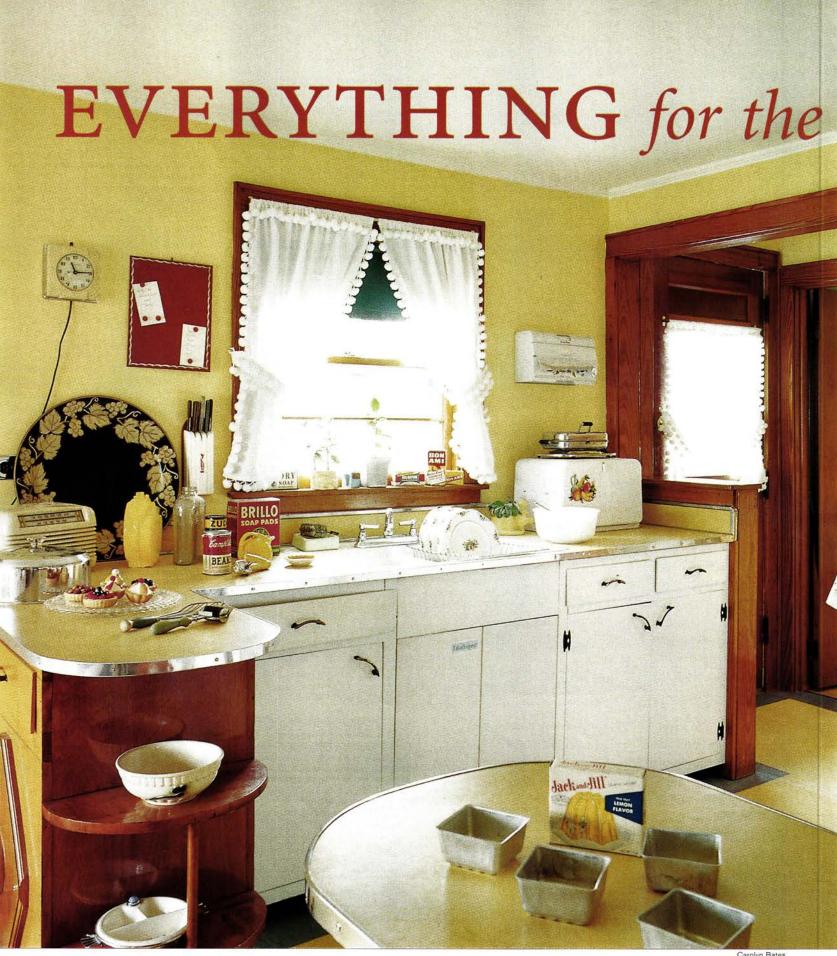
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Carolyn Bates

# Kitchen Sink

ADVICE ON PUTTING YOUR COUNTER ACCOUTREMENTS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT.

By Kathleen Fisher

VEN THE MOST EXACTING old-house owners-determined that every last spice jar and cup hook in their kitchen should be genuinely historic-may quail when it comes to choosing an appropriate kitchen sink. Salvage dealers often stock only a handful, compared to dozens of clawfoot tubs and lavatories. "I don't get a lot in," says Tom Sundheim of Architectural Artifacts in Denver. "The kitchen was always the first room that anyone remodeled." Unlike the bathroom lavatory, which might have been made of marble or china with fluted edges, the kitchen sink was likely to be prosaic in both shape and material, and to have become chipped and stained over the years. So when it came time to update the rest of the room, off it went to the local landfill.

When you do find kitchen sinks at a salvage yard, they're predominantly the white enameled cast iron kind that graced a majority of kitchens from roughly 1900 to the 1940s. There were other materials used over the last century or so, but how do you know what's right for your old house?

Keep in mind that no choice is radically wrong. Our forebears were apt to use any number of materials, depending on available local resources, and these all changed over intervening decades. However, you can make some assumptions based on region (heavy stone was expensive to ship from New England quarries, for instance) and technology (stainless steel wasn't widely available until the 1940s).

#### Make Mine Metal

When our great grandparents first brought running water into their homes in the 19th century, they often pumped it from a supply tank, usually into bowls or buckets set in a dry sink—a metal trough built into a wooden cabinet. Many of the first wet sinks, like dry sinks, were metal lined.

Two of the earliest available materials, used for butler's sinks in wealthy

turn-of-the-century houses, were copper and nickel silver (a copper, nickel, and zinc alloy often called German silver). Nickel silver was harder and stronger than copper and, by varying the nickel content, could take on yellow, green, pink, and blue tones. Copper, as any of us who've invested in copper cookware know all too well, doesn't retain its blinding shine without a lot of elbow grease. Most old-house owners are content to let it take on the dark brown patina of an old penny.

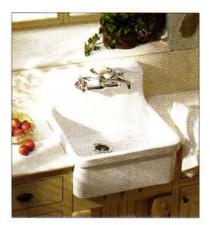
In the 1920s, an ore with a naturally occurring mix of copper and nickel (with a dash of iron, manganese, silicon, and carbon) was tapped to make Monel, a corrosion resistant, lightweight white metal.

These metals were supplanted by stainless



Carolyn Bates

The porcelain sink and laminate counter at the Shelburne Museum in Burlington, Vermont, (opposite) perfectly captures the feel of a 1950s kitchen, while the cast iron sink and zinc surround at Billings Farm, southeast in Woodstock (above), was handmade to be true to 1895.





The retro look is "in" for kitchen sinks, but not always in the original material. Exceptions include the vitreous china Gilford, (above) and the enameled cast iron Dickinson, (below), both from Kohler.

#### SUPPLIERS

**CUSTOM SINKS BY RACHIELLE 257** Sleepy Hollow Road Pittsburgh, PA 15216 (888) 880-9469 www.rachiele.com Circle no. 30 on the resource card. GERMAN SILVER SINK CO. 5754 Lodewyck Detroit, MI (313) www.germansilversink.co.com Circle no. 31 on the resource card, SHELDON SLATE 38 Farm Quarry Road Monson, ME 04464 (207) 997-3615 www.sheldonslate.com Circle no. 32 on the resource card. SINKWORKS.COM P.O. Box 19 Nazareth, PA 18064 (877) 746-5967 www.sinkworks.com Circle no. 33 on the resource card. VERMONT SOAPSTONE P.O. Box 168 248 Stoughton Pond Rd. Perkinsville, VT 05151 (802) 263-5404 GET 800 No! www.vermontsoapstone.com Circle no. 34 on the resource card.

steel after World War II, when copper and nickel were needed for the war effort. Stainless steel, a blend of several different iron and chromium alloys, was studied as early as 1821, but until 1909 no one knew how to make it corrosion resistant. The material took off in the 1940s and '50s, not only for sinks but in countertops.

#### Stone and Ceramics

When the Neanderthals needed a water basin they probably used a big rock that had been eroded into a concave shape by centuries of rain. All the rage today is the apron-front,

squarish farmhouse sink, which echoes the shape of stone sinks made in America for some 150 years. Yes, soapstone and slate sinks were found in farmhouses, but probably not in the Midwest or on the West Coast. Soapstone is quarried exclusively in Vermont (although some today come from Brazil). Slate has more widespread sources, along the Appalachians in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, Vermont, and Maine.

"I would say it hasn't been until the last 10 or 15 years that our sinks have found their way clear across the country," says John Tatko, general manager of Sheldon Slate in Monson, Maine.

In this region you may have a prayer of finding a salvaged slate sink. But buyer beware, says Tatko. The sinks may harbor hidden cracks from years of exposure to the elements, and you'll have to custom build your cabinets to accommodate their odd sizes.

Porcelain enameling, the process of applying ground glass to hot metal, has been used for ornament for hundreds of years, but it wasn't until about 120 years ago that manufacturers figured out how to fire it onto heavy cast iron. By the 1920s cast iron was by far the most popular material for sinks. Early models were supported in front by iron legs, shaped to re-



Carolyn Bates

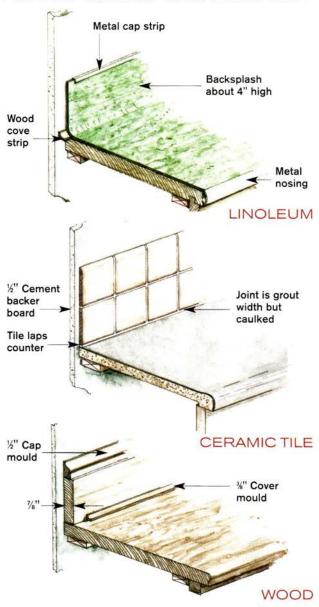
Designer Gary Crowley was going for a '20s feel when he chose a stainless steel sink for this kitchen. Monel, a white metal no longer common, might have been a more likely choice of that era.

semble furniture legs. Of course they were all white, as befit the national mania for antiseptic surfaces. Next came wall-mounted sinks, and then those built into the countertop in a manner similar to dry sinks. Although color was introduced to porcelain fixtures in the late '20s, most kitchens sported nothing more daring than a mottled oatmeal color even into the '40s.

In the 1920s, plumbing fixture catalogs also mentioned earthenware sinks. These sinks had a base of solid ceramic, rather than cast iron, and were often enameled white inside and glazed brown on the exterior. Like the cast iron sinks, they came with either flat or rolled rims. Always heavy, they were more likely to be found in commercial kitchens and laundries. A ceramic material used in some reproduction sinks today is fire clay, which has a high melting point and is more commonly used to make fire brick.

Buying a reproduction sink in any of these materials means you're more likely to find plumbing hardware that will fit its dimensions, especially hole spacing. If you're lucky enough to find a salvaged sink with its original fixtures, remember that you'll probably need to fix a leak or two and find adaptors to hook it up to your plumbing system.

#### PERIOD BACKSPLASH DETAILS



Illustrations: Rob Leanna

#### WHAT SINKS COST

You can get a reproduction sink custom or "off the rack." Farm-style sinks come in copper, brass, fire clay, and Corian (developed in the mid-1960s), as well as the original soapstone and slate. Some retro-looking sinks have matching corrugated drainboards.

 Material
 Cost Range

 Nickel Silver
 \$3,500-6,500

 Copper
 \$2,000-5,000

 Fire Clay
 \$600-900

 Soapstone
 \$700

 Slate
 \$1,200-2,000

 Stainless Steel
 \$1,000-3,000

 China
 \$650-1,000

 Brass
 \$2,000

 Enameled Cast Iron
 \$330-900

#### MAKING A BIG BACKSPLASH

once you decide on a sink you'll need to consider not only the countertop, but also the backsplash—generally, any protective material behind the sink and counter.

As with sinks, any number of materials were used at any given time, but there are historical patterns in the use of metals, wood, ceramics and stone, and laminates.

#### METAL

The earliest metal sinks often had backsplashes of metal, possibly zinc or lead. Copper sinks found their way into the butler's pantry because they were less likely to chip crystal than were stone sinks; there's little evidence for matching counters, although copper is being adopted for counters now.

Also being marketed for backsplashes today are metal ceiling tiles. While there's no proof that they were once a popular backsplash option, it's easy to imagine a Victorian homeowner with a few of the decorative tiles left over applying them to the wall behind the kitchen counter. Monel and stainless steel sinks often had integral backsplashes.

#### WOOD AND CERAMICS

A material that definitely did find its way from ceiling to backsplash was beadboard. Originally custom made, it gained popularity in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for walls in vacation cottages and other less formal structures and rooms.

Homeowners were at first content to varnish their beadboard or other wooden walls, but as concerns with sanitation grew at the turn of the century they covered kitchen walls with glazed white tiles, usually 3" x 6" "subway tiles."

White tile was frequently used behind coal-burning ranges, where it made the wall easier to clean, so it was logical to extend the tile to the sink area. Painted or sculpted tiles played an important decorative role early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, primarily around the fireplace, but weren't common in the kitchen until the late 1920s.

While marble makes a smooth, cool surface for rolling out pastry dough, it stains too easily to be practical for general food preparation. It could serve handsomely, though, in the less rigorous role of a backsplash. Granite, probably today's most popular high-end counter material and one often used in "period-inspired" kitchens, would have been rare in early 20th-century houses. A process to cut granite slabs as thin as 1" wasn't discovered until the 1930s, and the material remained prohibitively expensive until the 1960s.

When porcelain sinks came into fashion they usually had their own built-in backsplash and often integral drainboards as well.

A common companion for stainless steel sinks was laminates. The Formica Company developed its first light-colored faux wood-grain laminates in 1927, and their popularity grew as the material became more water- and heat-resistant. In the seven years following World War II, about one-third of new kitchens were dressed in Formica. Into the '60s, laminates continued marching pinkly around American sinks. Today at least one company, Wilsonart, will match old laminate patterns by scanning them and reproducing them digitally.

-Kathleen Fisher

#### SUPPLIERS

TIN CEILING TILES AA-Abbingdon Affiliates Inc. 2149-51 Utica Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11234 (718) 258-8333 <a href="https://www.abbingdon.com">www.abbingdon.com</a> Circle no. 35 on the resource card. CHELSEA DECORATIVE METAL CO. 8212 Braewick Dr. Houston, TX 77074 (713) 721-9200 <a href="https://www.thetin-man.com">www.thetin-man.com</a> Circle no. 36 on the resource card. LAMINATES Wilsonart International P.O. Box 6110 Temple, TX 76503-6110 (800) 433-3222 Circle no. 37 on the resource card.

# MAKING SENSE OF

# Paint Strip

### A LOOK AT CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES FOR GOING BENEATH THE SURFACE

By Barry Chalofsky

AVE YOU EVER WISHED you could magically wipe away the layers of paint hiding the detail in your fireplace mantel or the varnished oak of your door mouldings? Keep wishing. Interior paint removal is always a messy and time-consuming process, particularly in the complex surfaces of an old house. No one method or product works best for all the varied materials and paint layers you're likely to encounter. Fortunately the arcane art of stripping paint has come a long way over the last three decades, with old-house restorers sharing favorite tricks and tools while manufacturers develop better or safer stripping products. In fact, the arsenal of chemicals has grown so much in recent years that it's hard to keep track of all the different technologies. Understanding what the various systems are and how they work, however, will help you choose the ones with the best chances of making your stripping project go as smoothly as possible.

#### **Traditional Methods**

All of these general approaches have been around for over a century. Some are lowtech, but each is still widely used for specific kinds of paint stripping. Mechanical methods, such as hand scraping and power sanding, strip paint by physically breaking the paint bond. These methods are most successful where the wood trim or other substrate is flat, but hand scrapers with curved profiles can be effective for stripping mouldings and window parts. Dry sanding produces the most dust, which is a potential lead hazard (see "The Line on Lead," page 61). Therefore, if you opt for sanding, consider using wet/dry sandpaper with occasional water spraying to keep down the dust. Power sanders should be equipped with a vacuum attachment and a HEPA filter.

Heat tools, such as hot-air guns and electric element tools, soften or melt the paint so that it can be scraped off the substrate with a putty knife. Heat tools with an open flame, such as a propane torch, are not recommended because they create a potential fire hazard. While nonflame heat tools operate at lower temperatures, they can still cause fires if used improperly, or scorch the surface, creating a cosmetic problem. Heating and scraping also create paint chips and dust. In addition, if the heat is above 1,100 degrees Fahrenheit, the lead paint may vaporize.

**Caustic strippers** are pastes or semiliquids that employ sodium hydroxide (lye),

often mixed with trisodium phosphate (TSP), to loosen paint. The alkalis react with the coating, breaking down the organic molecules and loosening the coating from the surface. Caustics eat away the paint layers and, if left in place, may eventually act on the substrate (wood, metal, or other material). They can soften, swell, or decompose wood's cellulose fibers. Generally, surfaces stripped with caustics require neutralizing with a mild acid wash after the stripper has done its job. Caustics can darken some hardwoods, raise grain, or react with metals, such as aluminum. However, they are well-adapted to stripping cementitious surfaces (masonry, plaster) and ironwork. Caustics can burn skin or cause serious eye damage if used improperly.

#### Solvents

Semi-paste paint stripping products based on solvents have been common since the 1950s. They are fast acting, simple-to-use, and work on a wide variety of paints.

Methylene chloride (MC) or dichloromethethane is one of the most effective organic solvents, but also the most potentially dangerous. MC is fast, efficient, and capable of removing almost any paint. Its small molecular structure makes it able



to penetrate the paint layers and break the bond with the substrate. Then, as the solvent attempts to escape, it pushes on the film in a "tenting" effect that wrinkles the paint up and away from the surface. However, MC also becomes volatile when it interacts with the paint, losing stability and evaporating quickly into the air. Multiple paint layers usually mean applying an MC stripper more than once. (Manufacturers often add wax to the stripper to keep the MC in contact with the surface.) Because of its volatility, MC vapors are harmful to both users and the environment. According to the Consumer Products Safety Commission and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, MC is a potential carcinogen. It can also cause dizziness, headache,

and lack of coordination.

Other chemical solvents include acetone, toluene, and methanol, often used together. These chemicals are also volatile and can have side affects similar to those of MC. Proper precautions must be taken when using these solvents.

N-methyl pyrrolidone (NMP) has been used primarily in industrial applications for many years, but became popular for paint-stripping products in the 1990s. It works in much the same way as MC-breaking the bond between the paint and the substrate—but its larger molecular structure is less volatile. Therefore it takes longer to remove paint-30 minutes to 24 hours depending on the type of paint and the number of layers. Nor is NMP effective with polyester or baked-on coatings. The good news is that since NMP does not evaporate quickly, it does not need to be reapplied as often as MC. This provides more scheduling flexibility. In addition, NMP strippers don't contain wax, so wax removal is not necessary at the end of the job.

#### **New Technologies**

The most recent generation of paint stripping products, designed to be more environmentally friendly and less hazardous than traditional methods, relies to a large extent on the solvent NMP. Produced as gels, liquids, and sprays, they combine a host of innovative ingredients that complement the solvent.

Soy esters—One product employs a nontoxic soy ester, used for its migrating properties, to help draw the NMP through



Soy-Gel, a biodegradable stripper made of soy ester and NMP, creates this "tenting" effect, separating the paint from the wood surface. The paint is then removed with a nonmetallic scraper.

the layers of paint. Soy esters do not evaporate so the product stays in contact with the paint longer. The paint will not re-adhere to a wood surface even if it is left overnight.

Lead bonders—Another product combines NMP, 2-butoxyethanol (a solvent used in home window cleaners), and a lead immobilizer. Upon contact with lead-based paint, this mixture bonds with the lead and reduces the leachable lead level below the hazardous threshold limit, so it can be disposed of as a nonhazardous waste. The

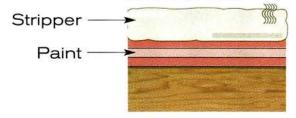
product also contains built-in film formers that will cause the stripper to skin over, thus allowing the active ingredients to work longer. Another active ingredient is sodium hydroxide. Strong enough to work on the toughest red lead primer, but at a lower pH level than in traditional caustics, it will not swell or burn the surface of wood.

Citrus enhancers—The compound d-limonene has been used in industry for over a decade to loosen grease and flooring mastics. Now this citrus-based clean-

#### Separate Systems

#### Caustics

(sodium hydroxide)



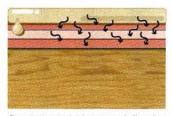
Applied in a thick layer, it breaks down paint chemistry.



Eats paint layer by layer and will eventually act on substrate. After use, wood surface needs to be neutralized.

#### DCM

(methylene chloride)



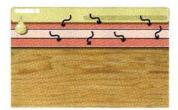
Penetrates paint layers and dissolves bond between paint and wood.



A volatile compound, DCM evaporates quickly and begins to work within seconds.

#### NMP

(n-methyl pyrrolidone)



Also penetrates paint layers and dissolves bond between paint and wood.

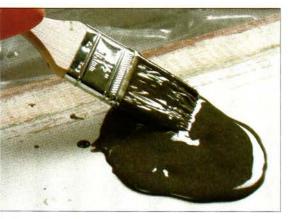


NMP evaporates slowly and takes longer to work, but is less toxic.

Illustration: John Van Pelt



Citristrip (left), begins to work on the paint system immediately, after one thin application. Lead-X 40 (below) employees a lead immobilizer to change lead from a soluble to an insoluble-rendering the lead paint waste nonhazardous.



ing agent is being employed to aid in the stripping process. Another new twist is to combine an industrial dose of NMP with dibasic esters (combinations of adipic acid, and glutaric acid) to boost its effectiveness. A lemon scent and color provide a more pleasant odor and appearance.

While NMP is generally safer than more traditional solvents it still must be handled carefully. NMP can cause eye and skin irritation and is harmful if swallowed.

#### Preparing to Work

Any process or material that is strong enough to lift paint is potentially hazardous, and should only be carried out with proper safety precautions and equipment.

Whatever the stripping method, a good site is important for job quality, efficiency, and safety. Make sure that the area is well ventilated, especially if you are using solvent-based strippers. The ideal working environment is between 65 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit and not too dry (about 77 percent humidity). Break the project into several small parts and clean up after each phase. Cover the floor with disposable materials such as dropcloths or newspapers. If you have to leave the area exposed, cover the walls with heavy-duty polyethylene plastic sheeting to minimize dust. Keep all nonworkers out of the work area.

First test a small area to determine the appropriate spread rate and removal time. (Pour enough stripper for your immediate needs and replace the cap tightly.) NMP removers should be spread 1/6" to 1/8" thick; one gallon will typically cover 125 square feet. Although the new strippers will begin to work

immediately, they will usually take a relatively long time to remove all the paint. Be patient! Manufacturers suggest using nonmetallic scrapers to remove the paint—an old wooden spatula or a plastic scraper will do the trick. They also suggest covering the stripper with plastic wrap so it will stay wet longer. When the stripper has penetrated to the wood or other base material, scrape off the softened paint residue and rinse with clean water.

Check your local or state waste codes before disposing of any used paint stripping materials. Where lead paint is present, floor coverings may be regulated as hazardous wastes and must be disposed of accordingly. Change your clothes and shoes at the end of each job, and wash your clothes separately from the rest of the laundry. Also shower and wash your hair after after finishing work. Do not eat, smoke, or drink in the work area to avoid inhaling or ingesting dust. Tightly seal the paint remover and store in a cool dry place.

Remember, not every paint stripper will work on every paint, and in old houses, there will be several different types of paint to remove. Before you start, be sure to get a product sample and test it on the surface you are stripping.

#### PROTECTIVE GEAR

- Safety goggles that completely cover the eyes.
- Gloves that are chemical resistant, such as Teflon, neoprene, or butyl (not dishwashing gloves).
- Protective clothing that covers all skin (long sleeve shirts, pants etc.)
- When spraying, wear a NIOSH certified respirator equipped with HEPA filters.
- When finished, use a vacuum with a HEPA filter, designed to trap very small particles.
- To clean up dust, use a cleaner designed for lead, such as TSP

#### THE LINE ON LEAD

Prior to 1978, lead was used in paint and varnish to add color, for stabilization, and to decrease drying time. The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that heavily leaded paint was used in about two-thirds of homes built before 1940, one-half of homes built from 1940 to 1960, and some homes built between 1960 and 1978. Like many products of that time, lead worked well for its intended purpose, but we now know that it can pose significant health risks. To know for sure whether your home has lead, hire a trained inspector.

For more detailed information on paint removers and lead paint check out the following sources:

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission www.cpsc.gov 1-800-638-2772

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
National Lead Information Center www.epa.gov/opptintr/lead
1-800-424-LEAD

U.S. Housing and Urban Development
Office of Lead Hazard Control www.hud.gov/lea/leahome.html

#### SUPPLIERS

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#### WM BARR BRANDED SALES

CITRISTRIP (800) 235-3546 Circle no. 26 on the resource card.



# Detailing Early Porches

Lasting Construction Techniques for 19th-Century Decks and Foundations

By Douglass C. Reed

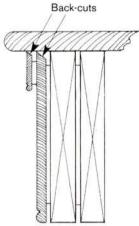
or over two centuries porches have been part of the lexicon of North American house architecture. They have served as both workplace and meeting place, a sheltered spot where folks could gather to gossip or perform everyday tasks. As much as we love our porches, though, those of us who care after them often find ourselves muttering under our breath at the time and money they demand for frequent maintenance. Porches are exposed to the vagaries of weather, so their floors and framing systems

tend to rot quickly. Then the paint peels, the roof supports start to go from the bottom up, and those pesky railings and balusters crumble away.

To put it in a phrase, porches are "out there." Unless they are built with the right materials and attention to construction details, then properly maintained, they will simply rot into oblivion. In the 30 years I have been in the restoration business, too often I have seen porches no more than a decade old just fall apart from rot. The secret to the best-built porches of yesteryear lies in the quality of their



Left: These 150-year-old flooring boards are still intact because of their thickness and half-round bullnose edge, which provides more surface area for the ends to dry faster. Below: Back-cutting the decorative bandboards prevents water from accumulating behind the framing. Bottom: Though neglected, this 1850s porch is still standing because it is built with details that limit water intrusion.



materials and their workmanship. Using these same detailing "secrets" today—and a few new ones to improve material performance—will allow you to build a period porch that will be a lasting structure.

#### Footers and Foundations

THE FIRST PHASE OF PORCH construction has always been to build footers for the posts. Early builders used large stones placed with the long dimension set into the ground from 12" to 18" deep. Only 2" or 3" of the stone would protrude above the finished ground level. Then they would cut posts of locust, walnut, northeastern white pine, or cedar—naturally rot-resistant woods—that they would chamfer and notch to receive the upper framing.

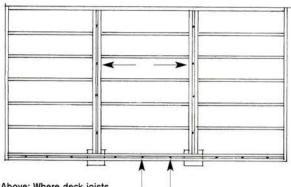
Sometimes there was enough brick or stone

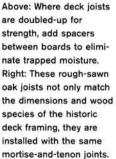
available to build full masonry piers or even masonry walls to support the porch frames. The above-ground foundations were usually built of dressed fieldstone, and the mortar joints pointed with soft-lime mortar in an inverted "V" pattern that would help shed water. What do I suggest for new foundations and footers? Except for making the footers deep enough to extend below the frost line of your geographical area—typically at least 36" in the snow belt—build the post piers and masonry walls just the same as in earlier days. Cedar, cypress, walnut, and locust are still durable wood species for posts and one or the other can frequently be located at local sawmills in most areas.

Mid-19th century deck frames were often built of three or four large logs known as "sleep-



Photos by Brian McNeill; illustrations by Rob Leanna







ers", hewn flat on one or two sides, then set with one flat side facing up. These sturdy members acted as flooring joists, and many survive to the present day. However, the outer edges of log joists have usually rotted away. Many later porches used simple frames constructed with 2x8 mill-sawn lumber to support the flooring. Unfortunately, these small-dimensioned frames are very susceptible to the water ever present on porches, which saturates the end-grain and quickly promotes rot.

If you are working on an existing early porch, my suggestion is to maintain and restore the best of the original framing. Where you have to rebuild, copy the original framing and construction details—dimensions and connections, for example—wher-

ever possible. For the replacement framing under an exposed porch deck use black walnut, cypress, or, where there is no other alternative, pressuretreated lumber. (In many parts of the country black walnut is easier to get than you might think if you search your area for a local sawmill.) Only use pressure-treated lumber where the wood is entirely hidden from the sun, and therefore from view.

Pay extra attention to places where the deck framing is doubled-up for extra support—critical areas for detailing. We separate the framing members so that one board is never tightly sandwiched against another. To do this, we place vertical shims (¼" thick by 1" to 2" wide) every few feet to allow water to pass between the boards. Where water collects between sistered lumber, rot will start very rapidly. We make sure the vertical spacer shims are rot-resistant wood as well.

We use the same spacer technique to separate the outside framing from the bandboard that finishes the perimeter of the porch deck. In addition to the ¼" spacers, we back-cut the very top edge of the bandboard in a gentle bevel (see drawing on page 63). This detail allows water to roll off the top edge of the board and drain down the framing, rather than accumulate on top and saturate the wood. For bandboard woods we like cypress and Spanish cedar as well as redwood and black walnut.

Deck bands and framing are the most common and most severe areas for rot damage in all porches. By following these few suggestions you increase the opportunities for water to escape, instead of allowing it to puddle and start rot in the wood. A second benefit is the drying effects of cir-



Modern pressure-treated lumber can be appropriate for rebuilding period porch framing where it will be hidden from view. In concealed locations, however, spacers between boards are even more important. Note that the shims are pressure-treated lumber as well.

culating air that can pass through and between the wood members.

#### Floors and Decks

FLOORING IS ANOTHER VERY important area to consider from both a technical and historical perspective. Traditionally in many regions up to the 1940s porch floors were made a full 1" thick. After World War II, the thickness of typical porch flooring shrank to a

bare ¾" thick. In the past the deck edges of porch floors were detailed in a half-round bullnose to shed water better and dry faster. Today the typical porch floor edge is square-cut, a shape that allows the end grain of the floorboards to soak up water like a sponge and hasten their demise.

Another recent departure from traditional porch flooring is the notion that cheap softwoods will last in the elements. Generations ago, northeastern white pine was good enough to consider for exterior porch floors. (I have an original 1855 northeastern white pine floor still in place on the second floor of my south facing porch that is exposed to the weather and in very good condition.) However, today's plantation-raised softwoods are not showing the longevity of old-growth woods of the past.

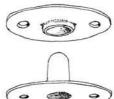
Again, I suggest following the historic details in porch floor construction. Budget the money to custom order flooring that is a full 1" thick at the minimum, and tongue-and-grooved. Also return to the minimum board width of 5", sometimes up to 6" for houses dating earlier than 1875. We use cypress stock almost exclusively, even though it is not as good as the cypress that was available 50 years ago. Just the same, we have never lost one cypress porch deck in the last 20 years. We also use mahogany (not much more expensive than pine) and Spanish cedar. Black walnut is also a good choice, but for use in an exposed position like a deck floor be sure to cut out all white wood.

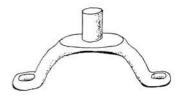
#### Posts and Supports

POSTS NOT ONLY DEFINE the shape of the porch, they also must support the roof framing system and act as anchors for attaching railings, often high off the ground. If posts are made of the right ma-



Early porch post feet (left) were simply iron bars bent into a stirrup shape. Manufactured versions (below) were common by the 1890s.



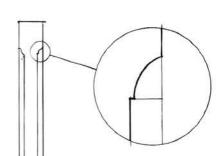


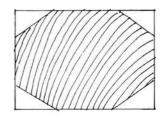
terial and placed on the porch correctly, there is no reason why they should be high maintenance elements. Unfortunately, you don't have to go far to find posts rotting at their bottoms.

Normally, early posts are shaped from solid timbers, but they can also be built up into box posts from four pieces of lumber. Typical designs are square, square with chamfers, square with turnings, or fully turned. Prior to the 20th century, in good construction posts were placed on metal feet of one design or another that separated the post base from the porch deck by 2" to 3". Before the advent of affordable, domestically made castings, post feet were simple pieces of bar iron bent into a series of right angles to form a stirrup. The two small pads were screwed to the porch deck, while the longer bar was screwed to the bottom of the post. Elevating the post off the deck prevented the bottom end-grain of the post from wicking up water, nearly always the reason why posts rot out. This hardware also helped preserve the deck flooring because sun and air could keep the area under the porch post dry.

After cast iron goods became cheap and easy to produce, the porch post foot was redesigned into a pair of cast iron disks separated by a short stem of pipe or round iron. These were later made of steel and used quite commonly up to the 1940s. Wherever possible, do your best to preserve or remake and install post feet. These devices alone will help preserve the bottoms of the vulnerable porch post in ways no other detail can equal.

Douglass C. Reed is a Historic Structures Consultant. Contact him at Preservation Associates, Inc. (449 N. Prospect St., Hagerstown, MD 21740; 301-791-7880; DCraigreed@aol.com).





A typical porch post is a solid timber decorated with chamfers. Note the thumbnail detail (top) where the chamfers end. Mortise pockets carry the porch railings.









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AMERICAN HOUSE STYLE >

# edieva

The spare, low ceilinged interiors of post-medieval houses hold many of their most archaic and evocative details. Narrow, closed stringer stairways typically face a front door made of wide-board battens. Rooms are defined by structural members (timber posts and girts) that clearly frame rough-plaster walls.

Brian Vanden Brink Restoration by Rick Poore

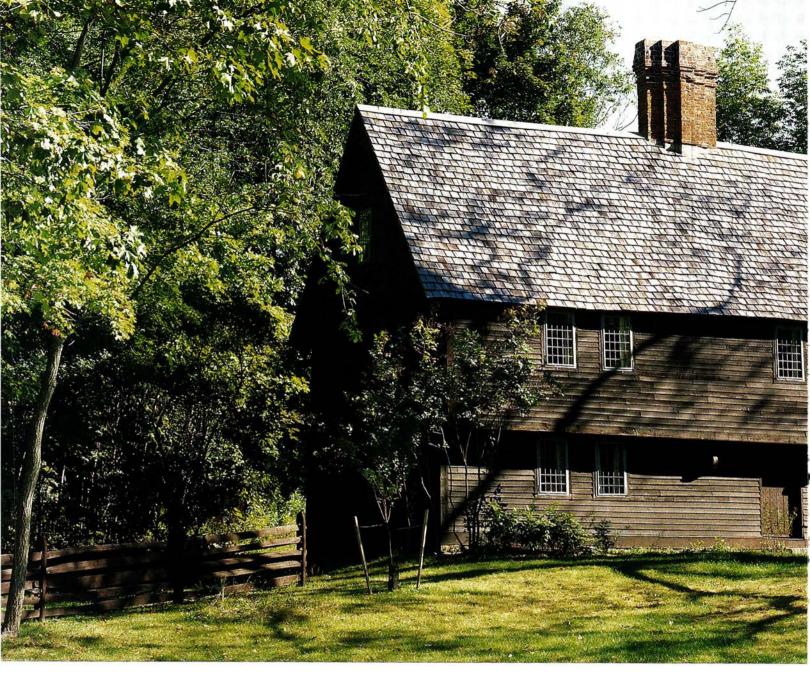


Photo: Kevin O. Mooney

BEFORE THEY LEARNED TO ADAPT to the materials and climate of North America, the first generation of colonists from England built houses with the construction methods and forms they knew in the British Isles. While the groups settling the tidewater regions of Virginia and the Carolinas favored one-storey brick houses flanked by chimneys at either end, the pioneers of Massachusetts and Connecticut erected austere steep-roofed houses with heavy wooden frames, wood cladding, and a single central chimney—the post-medieval houses of New England.

Of the thousands of houses believed to have

been built before 1700 only a couple hundred survive in near-original form, representing a remarkable bridge between building traditions of the old and new world. Typically two storeys high, one room deep, and covered in wood clapboards or shingles, these houses are American versions of the vernacular common man's dwelling found in England in the 1600s. Their heavy timber frames support a large gable roof with a steep pitch—one designed for thatch, but soon switched to wood shingles that stood up better in bitter New England winters. Rear lean-to additions were common in later years to extend the roof to a saltbox form.



# Post-Medieval Houses [1625-1725]



A little molding can make a big difference for a typical split-level

Redecorating can work wonders on a room, but so can another enhancement that's quicker and easier: new trim. Molding gives a room richness and dimension—something seriously lacking in most split-levels—and allows the play of light and shadow



across its sharp lines to add detail and interest. It defines windows and doors within an elegant frame and anchors wall to floor with the baseboard. A shapely crown eases the transition from wall to ceiling, and a simple chair rail creates proportion. In the project shown here, a dining room needed a style upgrade that only new molding could create. Around the windows, plain clamshell molding was replaced by fluted casing, highlighted at the corners with rosettes. The passageway got the same

treatment. A bull-nosed chair rail strikes the right line along the walls, as does the crown molding with its classic dentil motif. First, the pine was pre-treated with Minwax\* Pre-Stain Wood Conditioner. Next, the wood was stained with Minwax\* Wood Finish™ Cherry and protected with Minwax\* Fast-Drying Polyurethane Semi-Gloss. With minimal time and expense, a split-level dining room was transformed into a warm, classic showcase.









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finishing products. Trust Minwax to make and keep all your wood beautiful for years to come.







#### PLACES TO VISIT

BALCH HOUSE (ca. 1648) Beverly, Mass. Built by John Balch, this house remained in the Balch family until 1916. William Sumner Appleton, director for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), formed the Balch House Trust to purchase the house. Today it is owned by the Beverly Historical Society; (978) 922-1186.

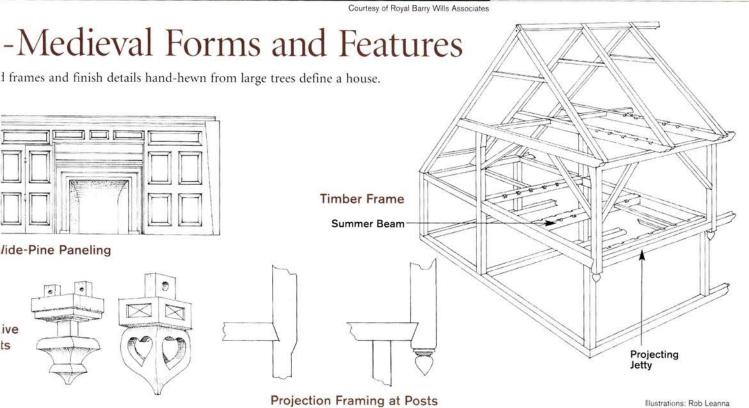
COFFIN HOUSE (ca. 1654) Newbury, Mass. Built by Tristam Coffin, this house began as a post-medieval structure and doubled in size by 1700. Owned by SPNEA, the property is open June 1 through October 1; (978) 462-2634.

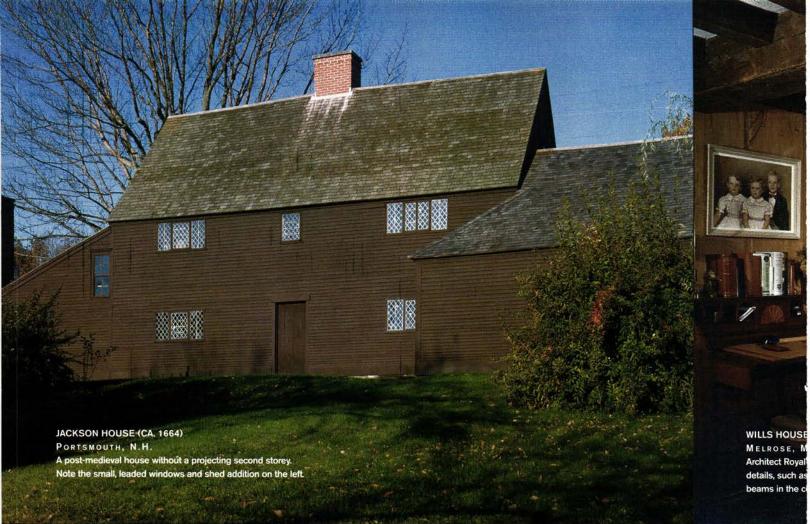
PARSON CAPEN HOUSE (ca. 1683) Topsfield, Mass. One of the best examples of the post-medieva house, it has gone unaltered for 350 years. The Topsfield Historical Society opens the house in summer; (978) 887-3398.

JACKSON HOUSE (ca. 1664) Portsmouth, N.H. The oldest surviving wood frame house in New Hampshire. SPNEA acquired the house in 1924. Open June 1 through October 15; (603) 436-3205.

STANLEY-WHITMAN HOUSE (ca. 1720) Farmington, Conn. Built by John Stanley, son of Captain John Stanley this post-medieval structure opened as a museum in 1935. Open year round; (860) 677-9222.

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Courtesy of SPNEA



inda Klusck

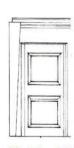
STANLEY-WHITMAN HOUSE
(CA. 1720) FARMINGTON, CONN.
A late example that clearly shows a projecting second storey on the gable end and a saltbox extension off the back.

Façades are symmetrical and all but unbroken except for the center door and small window openings. For a period, however, some builders extended the timber frame so that the second storey projected a foot or more beyond the foundation in an overhang or jetty, perhaps to protect the entrance from water runoff. Whatever its purpose, in well-to-do houses this projection was occasionally fitted with carved pendants—the sparest of decorations in an otherwise severe elevation.

Already an old building type in their country of origin, postmedieval houses were soon surpassed on these shores by the Georgian styles and improved construction methods of 18th-century Americans. Most examples were razed, radically altered or, at best, forgotten until after 1900 when early preservationists, such as William Sumner Appleton of Massachusetts and Norman Isham of Rhode Island, recognized their importance as rare historic records, rather than mere Colonial Revival icons. Architects of the 1920s-particularly Boston's Royal Barry Wills—studied them as models for a single-family house with a modern, compact room layout, but a traditional, regionally rooted appearance. However, post-medieval houses were probably most admired for their cozy interiors of wood paneling and pronounced ceiling beams, the wellspring of the "Early American" design fashion.

### Post

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## HOUSE HOW-TO

BASICS



By Marylee MacDonald

riends had bought a mansion in Hyde Park, Illinois, and as we walked through it, admiring the tall windows and panel doors, they were already moaning about the woodwork they envisioned having to strip. "Why don't you use a finish reviver?" I said. They'd never thought of this labor-saving approach, and yet it's one I used to spruce up a 2,600-square foot Queen Anne house, virtually by myself. Finish revivers can be used on furniture, mouldings, doors, paneling, and even floors.

There are several ways to revive an old finish. Merely cleaning off the dirt and wax may restore the luster. For scratches on a tabletop, a gentle cleaning followed by recoating with shellac or lacquer may do the trick. Lightly dissolving the surface layer and rubbing out flaws with a soft cloth might work, or you might have to liquify the finish and brush it out. Even the last approach is easier than stripping.

#### OLD-HOUSE BASICS

Try a furniture cleaner, such as Formby's Build-Up Remover, to remove wax and dirt. A toothbrush will clean crevices.

#### **CLEANING INTACT FINISHES**

If the finish is dark or dull, but not cracked or crumbly, simple cleaning may be all you need. Start with the mildest cleaner first.

Mix one tablespoon Ivory Liquid in a quart of warm water. Whip it to create suds. Dip an old towel into the suds—not the water. Water will turn shellac and lacquer cloudy. Suds will not. Rub a test area (about two square inches) vigorously, then towel dry.

If the surface is still dark, remove old wax by brushing mineral spirits on the test area. Allow to soak in for three minutes (less if it's a glossy tabletop). Vigorously scrub in the direction of the grain with a towel. Then allow the wood to dry for an hour and apply a bit of lemon oil.

If this doesn't take care of the problem, you can try a commercial cleaner, such as Briwax Furniture Cleaner (imported from England), which removes wax, smoke, and dirt. Floors have their own cleaners, such as Floor Re-



vive, to deep clean and restore shine.

A pleasant-smelling homemade cleaner OHJ has recommended for years is one cup each boiled (not raw) linseed oil, white vinegar, and turpentine. Put the ingredients in a one-quart container and shake vigorously.

In a test area, apply this mix with a paintbrush, let it sit for three minutes, and scrub with terry cloth. You can also use fine steel wool (#0000) or green 3M pads. (If I'm going to apply clear finish later, I avoid steel wool; fine steel hairs catch in the wood grain.) Wipe off the excess with paper towels or rags (see "Safety First," below).

If the cleaner is effective, go on to clean all your woodwork. You can

clean newel posts and carved trim with a toothbrush. To clean inside turnings, use twine, working it back and forth like a shoeshine rag. The same tools can be used for the finish revivers.

When the woodwork is clean and dry, apply lemon oil or paste wax, but not both. Lemon oil dissolves wax and turns it gummy.

#### MORE THAN CLEANING

Let's say your finish is scratched, crazed, or crumbly. As long as the body of the finish is still there, a commercial finish reviver can help it rise again like Lazarus. These products range from those that coat scratches and remove water blooms to others that "melt" the finish and allow

#### SAFETY FIRST WITH REVIVERS

Old-House Journal readers know about the dangers of linseed oil, right? Linseed-oil-soaked rags are volatile. They will spontaneously catch on fire. Don't throw them in the garbage can. Instead, immerse them in water, hang them on a line to air dry, or wash them one at a time, separate from other laundry. (Don't leave them in your unfilled washing machine!)

Commercial finish revivers contain strong chemicals such as toluol. Before using them, obtain a copy of the MSDS (Manufacturer's Safety Data Sheet). This can be found on the manufacturer's web site or from the dis-

tributor. Buy the appropriate cartridges for the mask you'll wear. Change these regularly, and work in a well-ventilated space. Keep the furnace off so fumes don't circulate, and wear industrial gloves. Chemicals such as toluol and methyl alcohol should not come in contact with your skin or lungs.

#### PLAYING FINISH DETECTIVE

Before you begin working with a finish reviver, it's a good idea to test the original finish to see what it is.

On Victorian doors, mouldings, and mantels, shellac was the most likely finish. Later, it was common for painters to put two coats of shellac under two coats of varnish. Tabletops may have been French polished, with over a hundred coats of shellac rubbed and pumiced to a deep luster. Lacquer, quick drying and clear, also was used on tabletops, mainly after 1920, but rarely on architectural woodwork. Varnish, slow drying and thick, provided greater water resistance and durability than either shellac or lacquer. That's why you're likely to find varnished floors.

To find out whether you have a shellac, lacquer, or varnish finish,

choose an inconspicuous spot to test. First rub the spot with a cotton swab dipped in denatured alcohol. If the finish begins to dissolve, it's shellac, and you can revive all of your clear finish with pure denatured alcohol. If nothing happens, the finish is either lacquer or varnish, and you should go on to the next step.

Dampen a second cotton swab with lacquer thinner. Lacquer will dissolve, but varnish will either wrinkle or you won't see a reaction. A word of caution: Some old finishes had heavy-bodied stains mixed into the varnish. You may not be looking at darkened shellac but at a varnish stain applied to hide a wild grain. If you use the more aggressive revivers, some original finish will come off and more grain will show. So test, test, test.



The gentlest cleaner is a non-detergent liquid soap such as Ivory Liquid. Apply just suds, not water, which will turn shellac and lacquer cloudy.



Fine steel wool (0000) is effective for cleaning finishes, but the steel "hairs" can catch between wood grains. Terry cloth and green 3M pads are other options.

you to brush it out.

For a lightly scratched table top you can use Jet Spray Lacquer, which touches up scratches, blending them seamlessly with the existing finish. You'll need to specify clear or one of several wood colors. There's a Blush Eraser that goes along with this product to get rid of those white marks from glasses. Or try Pad-Lac Padding Lacquer. The product kit includes a soft pad that spreads a thin finish over the existing varnish, shellac, or lacquer, leaving an effect similar to French polish.

If the surface is distressed—water rings, burns, checking, or crazing—try one of the products sometimes called "refinishers." They range from gentle to very aggressive. Among the gentlest is Howards' Restor-A-Finish, which does not dissolve the original finish but removes flaws as

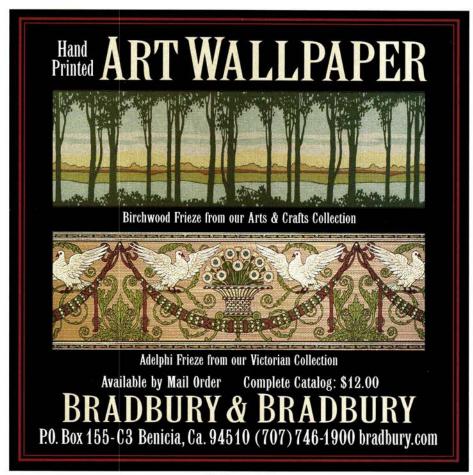
you rub with fine steel wool or toweling. It comes in nine wood colors. A similar product, designed especially for highly polished surfaces, is Briwax Reviver, which is rubbed in with a soft cloth.

A more aggressive reviver, Behlen's Qualarenu Amalgamator, softens old shellac, lacquer, and varnish so that you can brush the finish smooth. You'll need something this strong if the finish is alligatored. Be prepared to work quickly because the amalgamator only has a short "open" time.

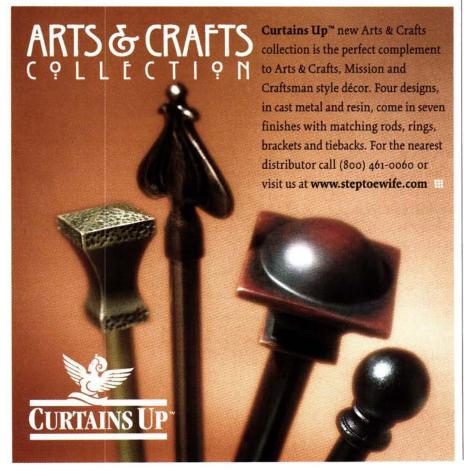
The product you're most likely to find in your local hardware store is Formby's Furniture Refinisher. Formby's definitely falls into the aggressive camp. Be sure to test in an inconspicuous location first and try several application methods, from 0000 steel wool to barely dampened terry cloth. Formby's will cut

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OLD-HOUSE BASICS

through varnish, so it can be used to revive varnished woodwork, but if you put too much on, you'll wind up with most of the finish on your steel wool or rag.

#### HOME-BREW FINISH REVIVERS

Saving money is a goal if you have rooms of architectural woodwork staring you in the face. In that case, you might find that a home-brew works as well as commercial finish revivers, especially if your woodwork is shellacked. You can try the following, starting with the first and working your way down. (Here's where you'll be glad you've tested your old finish first—see "Playing Finish Detective" page 77.)

- 15 percent by volume lacquer thinner in minerals spirits
- 50/50 lacquer thinner and denatured alcohol
- pure denatured alcohol
- pure lacquer thinner

When you are not actively applying them, store these liquids in a widemouth jar with a lid. The volatile ingredients will off-gas, so suit up, with mask and gloves, for the work.

Dip steel wool or a 3M pad in the mix and rub with the grain until you're happy with the color. The finish dissolves, so work on about one square foot at a time. Stop when the tackiness disappears or when the color pleases you. You may have to go over the whole area a second time, with a lightly dampened pad, to remove lap marks.

#### THE FINAL TOUCHES

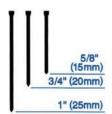
Allow the amalgamated finish to dry. To bring back gloss, rub tung oil on by hand with a lint-free rag. Go with the grain, wiping off excess. One coat provides a satin finish and two coats, gloss.

Another option is to recoat with shellac. You can use shellac over any other finish and it's highly reversible. For tabletops, consider a tung oil varnish. Tung oil varnish provides a durable surface, impervious to water.

Contributing editor Marylee MacDonald is a building consultant who lives in Evanston, Illinois.



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Note: All photos are "before".



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## HOUSEADVISOR



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As you can see, these three houses are all similar. Could you tell me anything about them? I'm guessing they're from Sears & Roebuck, around 1920.

THOMAS MOUAT JEFFRIS II

JANESVILLE, WISC.

THE CROSS-GAMBREL ROOF PLAN was popular for pattern-book houses between 1905 and 1915. Sears, Roebuck & Co., the best known of the ready-cut house purveyors, sold several cross-gambrel designs between 1911 and 1917. The style was first made popular, though, by Radford American Homes. Radford's 1903 design for a Shingle-style house is almost identical to your trio, with the exception of the concrete-block construction.

While these designs are largely associated with "kit" houses, Sears and its competitors never supplied masonry. Sears did promote concrete, however, in order to sell machines that made concrete blocks. Sears noted that concrete houses could be built for one-third less than other stone structures, and called its concrete block-building machines "the most perfect and most rapid...machines made."

In 1908, Sears devoted eight full pages of its spring general merchandise catalog to

concrete-block machines and related hardware. Entrepreneurs could make as many as 150 blocks a day and would find this a very profitable business, Sears promised. Perhaps someone who read that ad copy made all three of your houses.

#### WALLPAPER WOES

Recently, I repapered my dining room walls. A fireplace and chimney go across one corner of the room. Now, in the corner above the mantel, the wallpaper is stretching and may eventually tear. The house was built in 1918. Could it possibly still be settling? What should I do to fix the wallpaper? (I slightly overlapped the paper in these corners.)

CAROLYN WALSH
PERKASIE, PA.

THOSE CORNERS WHERE the wallpaper is stretched are between two different materials: the masonry chimney and the wood-framed plaster walls. You're probably seeing clinical differential movement. The masonry is fairly stable, but the walls shrink and swell with changes in temperature and humidity. Unless you continue to see major shifting

of the chimney, don't worry about it.

The wallpaper can be gently pried up and reglued if it is strippable paper, such as vinyl, or steamed away from the corner if it is unstrippable paper. The best solution, however, is to remove the paper at the trouble-some corners and put up two new panels that butt right in the corner—don't overlap.

#### GLOBS OF GLUE

The previous owners of my old house were pretty sloppy in repairing the railing of the central stairway. They seem to have applied too much wood glue and not wiped up the excess as it was drying. In any case, I have hardened glue that seeped out along the edges of the balusters. What's the best way to remove it?

ED DEAN DENVER, COLO.

TRY TO EITHER DISSOLVE the glue, or scrape/sand it off. Either method has some caveats. You can dissolve both traditional hide glue and modern white or yellow glue with water—hot water will work better. Wood that is unstained should be sanded immediately after removing the glue, or the area will show up darker after staining. If your balusters are shellacked, water can turn the finish cloudy. An alternative is to use lacquer thinner or acetone, scrubbing the glue off in the direction of the grain using a stiff brush. This can remove lacquer or varnish, however. Test an inconspicuous area first.

In scraping or sanding, you always run the risk of abrading the finish so that you need to restain. On unstained wood, if you don't go deep enough, any glue will show up as light spots when you do stain.

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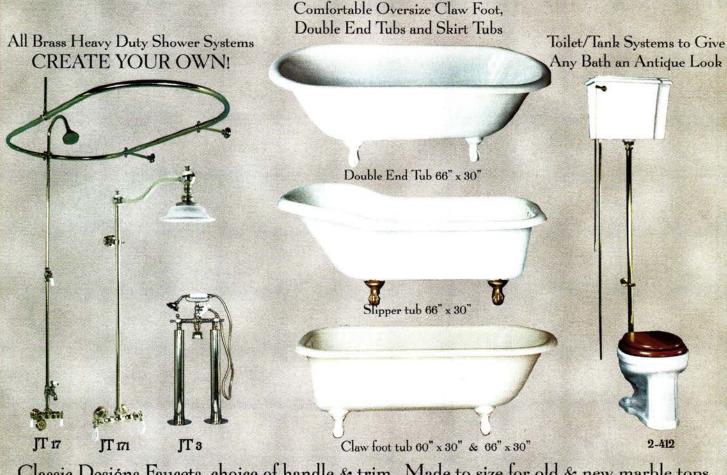
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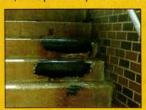






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gleam without primer. A special spray tip makes it easier to reach those awkward areas. If you still want to prime and paint, you can choose a rust neutralizer, which chemically converts rust to a black, waterproof primer that protects it from future oxidation, or a fast-drying galvanizing primer. Contact Krylon at (800) 457-

9566, or visit www.krylon.com. The wrought-iron paint is \$3.78 a can and \$22.68 for a six-pack. Circle no. 13 on the resource card.

#### COVETTING COVES?



You want to restore the original moulding in your parlor, but you don't look forward to the trial-and-error process involved in cutting coves. Now you can combine computer technology with your power tools to take the guesswork out of making a 19thcentury pattern. Cove-Cutting Software, available on CD for Windows 95/98, shows you the profile for any blade tilt angle between 0 and 45 degrees and any feed angle from 0 to 90 degrees. Then you insert your blade diameter and blade type to produce a cove profile that you can print out for the workshop. You can also combine several profiles to create more complex patterns. The price is \$29.99. Contact Woodhaven, (800) 344-6657, or visit www.woodhaven.com. Circle no. 14 on the resource card.

#### CREATING A STIR

When you open a can of paint months after purchase, you know what to expect: a deep layer of syrupy vehicle on top of thick blobs of pigment. Here's an alternative to mixing with one of those paint-stirrer sticks: the Twister paint mixer. Mount it to any drill, and its paddle-shaped extensions will scrape away paint solids from the floor of the can. You can buy a one-gallon Twister for \$4.99, the five-gallon for \$6.99. Contact Allway Tools, (800) 42 ALLWAY (422-5592). Circle no. 15 on the resource card.



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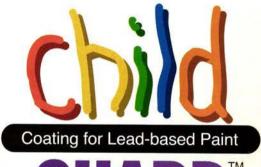
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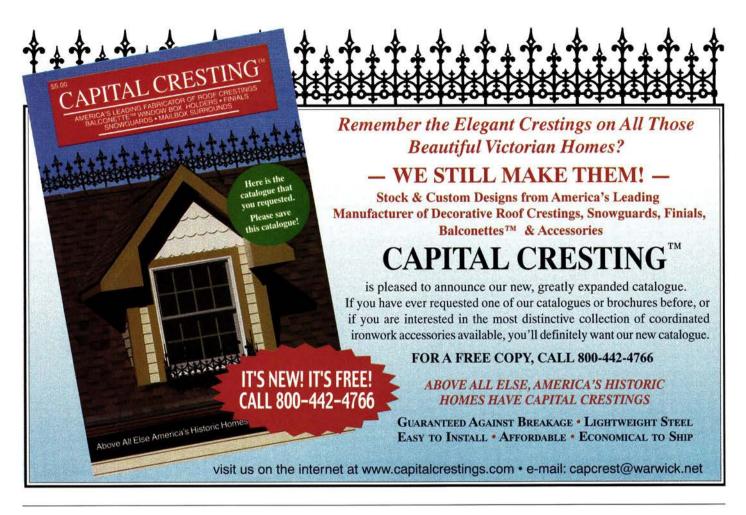
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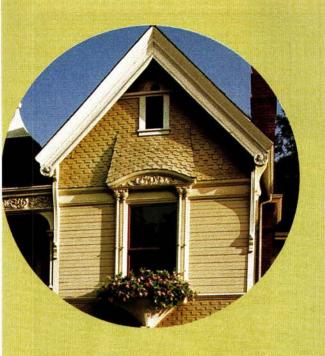
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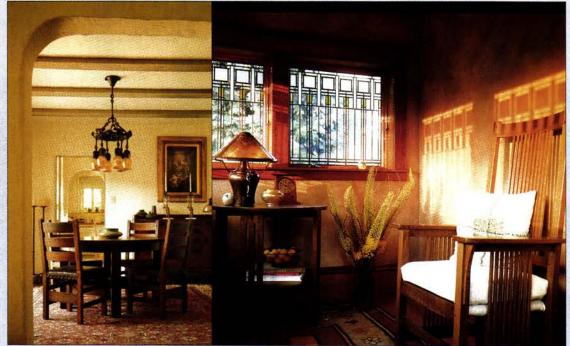
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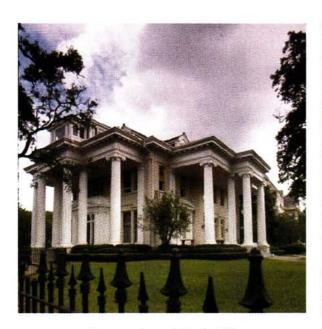
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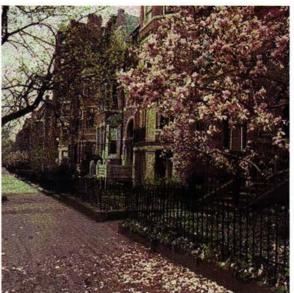
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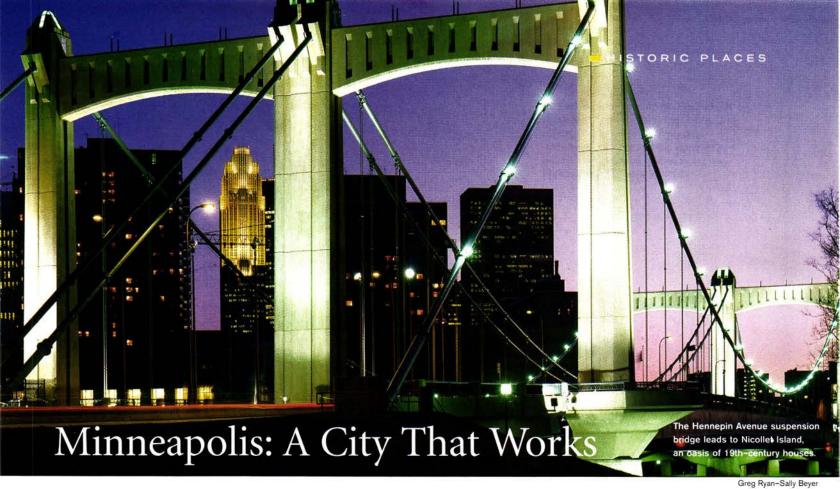


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shaped both inhabitants and architecture.

BY RICHARD L. KRONICK

must know The Essential Fact: We have the coldest winters of any large city in the United States. In January and February, the mean temperature in Minnesota is 14 degrees Fahrenheit. Though Minneapolitans live at the same latitude as Northern Italy, we endure colder Januarys and Februarys than two-thirds of Canadians and 96 percent of the world's population.

The Essential Fact leads many to The Erroneous Conclusion: Winter in Minneapolis is so intolerable that no one would choose to live here. In reality, our climatic severity is the single most important reason why Minneapolis is a wonderful place to live. You see, our weather effectively—and brutally—filters out the least resourceful people. The organizationally challenged simply go away.

Who's left? A population of problem solvers and cooperators with a cando mindset—that's the secret of our success. For several decades, the Twin Cities has been the richest of the nation's 25 largest cities. Minnesota ranks No. 2 in longevity, No. 1 in high school graduation, No. 2 in voter turnout, and No. 50 in unemployment. The can-do mindset is displayed in every sincerely constructed fiber of Minneapolis's built environment. We'll see this on a tour of our restored 19th- and early 20th-century homes, right after a dollop of commercial architecture.

#### Deco Corner

If you have only an hour or so to spend in our vibrant, litter-free downtown—with its signature 62 second-storey skyways—go to Sixth and Marquette for a three-building Art Deco tour. Pop into the lobby of the 1928 Dain Tower (by Holabird and Root) for a look at sleek sculpture and classic zigzag fretwork. Then cross the street to the late Deco (1941) Farmers and Mechanics Bank, by McEnary and Krafft. Pause to examine the noble bas relief on



The Purcell-Cutts House (below) is the most famous of Minneapolis's Prairie Style houses. Over the door of the Parker House (right) are two hallmarks of Purcell partner George Elmslie: the beam-with-pendants motif and the delicately fret-sawn wooden frieze.



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the exterior and then enjoy the grand banking lobby, maintained in perfect condition since the day the building opened. Finally, cross to Minneapolis's best skyscraper, Cesar Pelli's 1989 neo-Deco Wells Fargo Center (originally Norwest Center). Its exterior is best viewed at night when the setbacks are dramatized by a lighting scheme that mimics the Empire State Building. By day, don't miss the showcases in the elevator lobby. They display selections from the Norwest Collection, one of the world's great assemblages of early Modernist furniture and decorative objects.

#### Nicollet Island

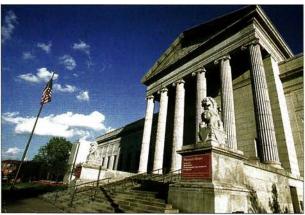
One of the city's oldest and best-restored residential districts is Nicollet Island, which lies in the Mississippi River, just across the Hennepin Avenue bridge from downtown. Pause on Merriam Street to admire the limestone Nicollet Island Inn (see Historic Lodging) and the adjacent Nicollet Island Park. The park offers excellent views of St. Anthony Falls, the city's original raison d'être. A left on East Island Avenue takes you to the island's residential section.

The Nicollet Island neighborhood, saved by residents who doggedly fought urban renewal in the 1960s, is a sampler of late 19th-century housing situated on cozy little streets. You'll find nice examples of Greek Revival (101 West Island Avenue, 171, 175, and 185 East Island Avenue), French Second Empire (2-16 Grove Street), Italianate (167 Nicollet Street and 111–113 West Island Avenue), and Queen Anne (15–17 Maple Place).

#### South Minneapolis

The following two- to three-hour driving tour traverses Minneapolis's south side from east to west along the axis of Franklin Avenue. Begin one block from the city's eastern border at Franklin and Bedford.





Greg Ryan-Sally Beyer



Greg Ryan-Sally Beyer

The Art Deco Wells Fargo Center (left) has a dominant role in the old-new skyline. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (top) faces Olmsted-designed Fair Oaks Park. Milwaukee Road, two blocks of 1880s brick workers' homes (above), is closed to traffic.

Greg Ryan-Sally Beyer

At 255 Bedford you'll find Frank Lloyd Wright's 1933 Willey House, the prototype for his Usonian Houses. In the 1960s, concerned neighbors saved the house from interstate highway construction. Then, during the 1990s, a group of craftspeople and volunteers restored the house. However, there was nothing anyone could do about I-94, which roars along in front of the house, destroying its view.

Cross the Mississippi on Franklin and go about a mile west to Milwaukee Avenue. You'll need to park and walk Milwaukee's two-block length because the street is closed to vehicles. That good idea is part of the master plan for this restored neighborhood of one-and-a-half-storey brick workers' houses in the Eastlake style, built in the 1880s by the street's namesake, the Milwaukee Road Railroad.

Continue west on Franklin and turn left on Third Avenue. Just ahead is Fair Oaks Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. The park's deep gully is a totally artificial "natural" feature. Around the park are the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and an enclave of early 20th-century homes, conservatively styled for the city's elite. Kitty-corner from the park are two houses built for members of the Pillsbury family,

#### Historic Lodging

#### THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The St. Anthony Falls office (612) 627-5433 leads regular tours of the historic milling district, including Nicollet Island. Architecture tours are led by the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota (612) 341 8140, the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians (952) 944-0487, the Minneapolis Planning Department (612) 673-2439, and the Minnesota Historical Society (651) 296-6126.

#### NICOLLET ISLAND INN

95 Merriam Street, (612) 331-1800, www.nicolletislandinn.com The inn, a carefully renovated 1893 limestone factory building, is on a Mississippi River island in the heart of Minneapolis; 24 rooms.

#### **EVELO'S BED AND BREAKFAST**

2301 Bryant Avenue South, (612) 374-9656. This three-storey 1897 Colonial Revival/Queen Anne, designed by William Kenyon, retains its richly carved original woodwork and has been knowledgeably decorated. The lamps alone are worth a visit; 3 rooms.

#### 1900 DUPONT GUEST HOUSE

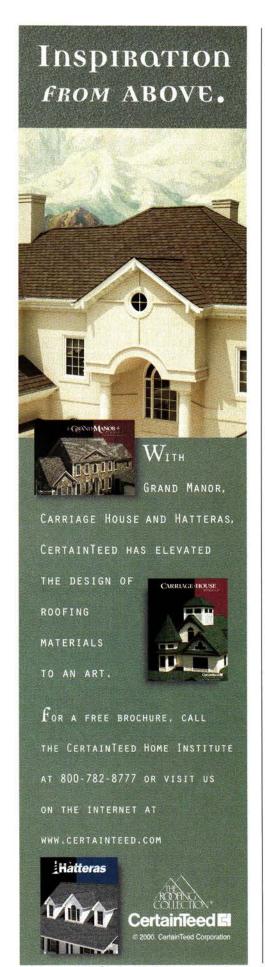
1900 Dupont Avenue South, www.travelguides.com/inns/full/MN/9152.html (612) 374-1973. A stately brick Colonial Revival house in the East Lake of the Isles neighborhood; decorative elements include a three-storey staircase and Arts & Crafts art glass in the library; 4 rooms.

#### **LEBLANC HOUSE**

302 University Avenue NE, www.bbonline.com/mn/leblanc/index/html (612) 379-2570. A nicely decorated 1896 Queen Anne/Dutch Colonial near St. Anthony Falls, the historic milling district, and Nicollet Island; 2 rooms.

#### **ELMWOOD HOUSE**

1 East Elmwood Place, www.iaxs.net/~elmwood (612) 822-4558. Built in 1887, the turreted, fish-scale-shingled house on picturesque Minnehaha Creek has a wonderful living room with an inglenook fireplace; 2 rooms plus 2-bedroom suite.



who made their fortune grinding flour with power from St. Anthony Falls. At 100 E. 22nd Street is a suave rendition of the Elizabethan country manor, built in 1912 by local architects Hewitt and Brown. The other, at 116 and designed in 1903 by Ernest Kennedy, is the same style made more vigorous with roughfaced stone.

Now drive south on Third, turn right on Twenty-sixth Street and left on Emerson Avenue to 2621. Designed in 1909 by Prairie School architects William Purcell and George Feick, this house was recently restored with a fourcolor paint scheme that, while not original, is in keeping with their penchant for polychrome. The home's simple elegance serves nicely as an introduction to your

Back on Twenty-sixth Street, go west to Hennepin, turn right and then left on your old friend, Franklin. You are now entering the Lake of the Isles neighborhood, the city's greatest concentration of high-quality domestic architecture. Turn south on Irving Avenue and make an oblique right on Lake Place. At 2328 is the Purcell-Cutts House, which from an architectural history viewpoint is the most important building in Minneapolis. Designed by William Purcell and George Elmslie for Purcell and his family, it's a showcase for Elmslie's exquisite decorative designs in sawn wood, stencil on plaster, and glass, and one of the best examples of the Prairie School anywhere. The house's owner, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, extensively restored it in the mid-1980s. You can take a tour one Saturday each month. At other times, you may walk



Residents of Nicollet Island saved their late 19thcentury homes from urban renewal in the 1960s.

around the exterior.

From the Purcell-Cutts House, continue south on Lake Place and turn right on Twenty-sixth to Lake of the Isles Boulevard. End your tour by circumnavigating the lake and viewing the scores of remarkable homes that face it. My favorites are the many Arts & Crafts "cottages," such as the one by Mark Frazier at 2416 West Lake of the Isles Boulevard, with a stucco exterior featuring a collection of carefully faked flaws.

If you enjoy your drive around the lake, thank the city leaders who implemented H.W.S. Cleveland's 1883 master plan for the Minneapolis park system, which encloses the city's 22 lakes. Alexander Garvin, in The American City: What Works, What Doesn't, called it "the bestlocated, best-financed, best-designed, bestmaintained public open space in America." He might have called it the best example you can find of that Minneapolis can-do mindset.

RICHARD KRONICK is a writer and architectural historian based in Minneapolis.

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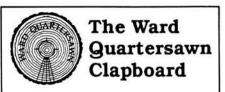
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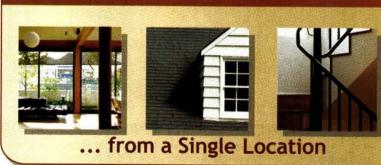


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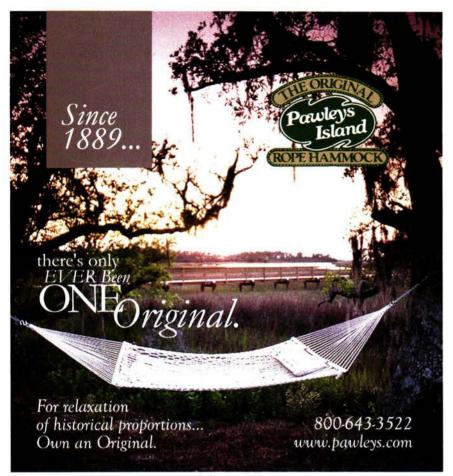
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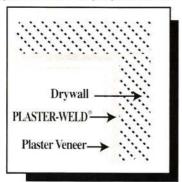




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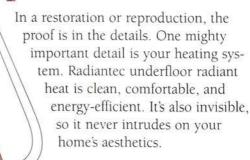
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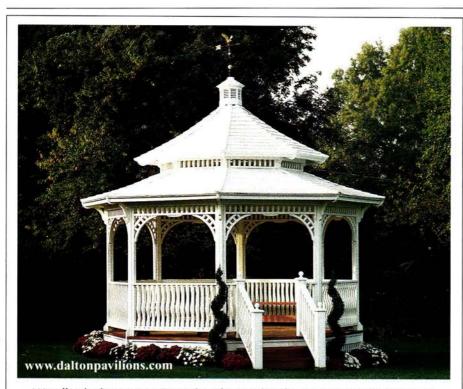
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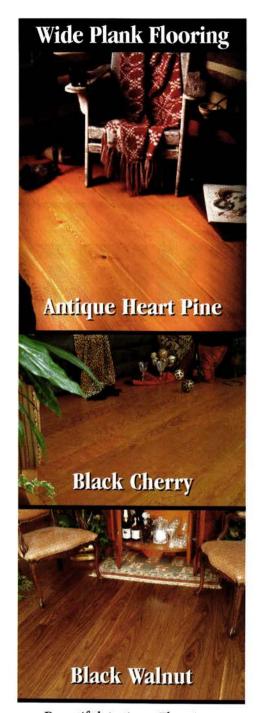


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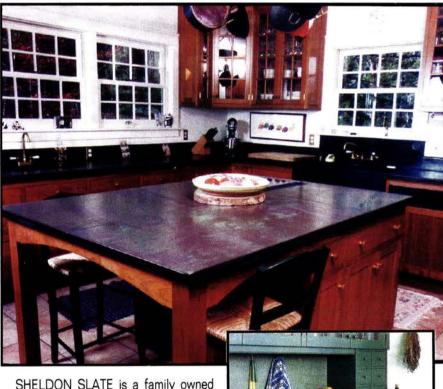
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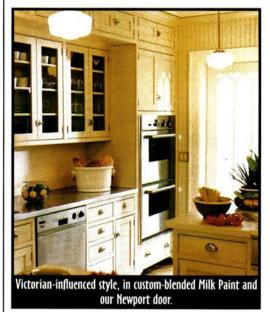
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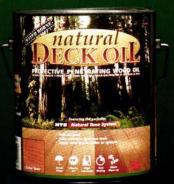


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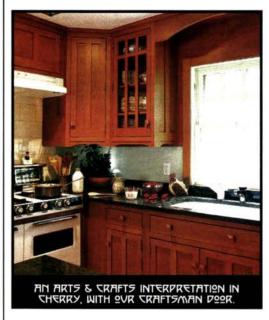


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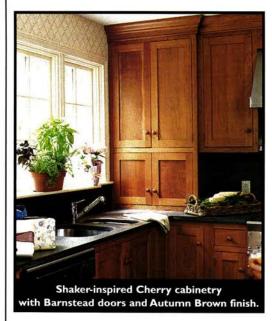
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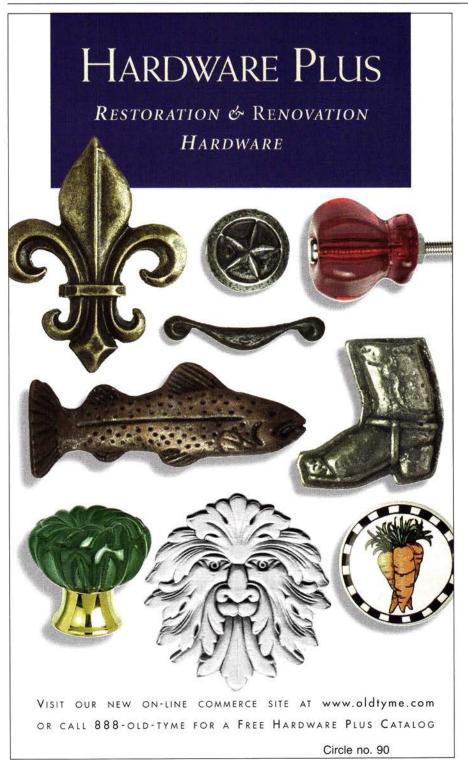


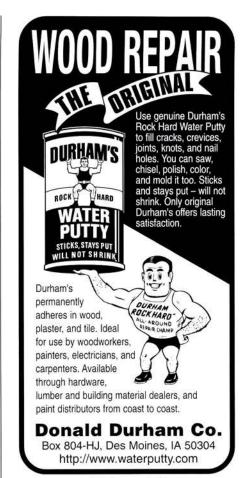
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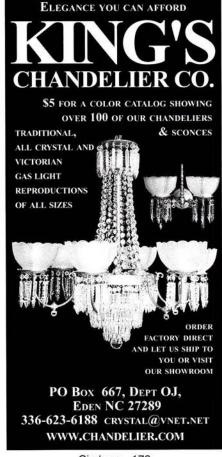
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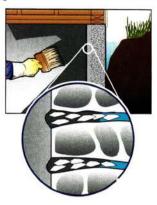


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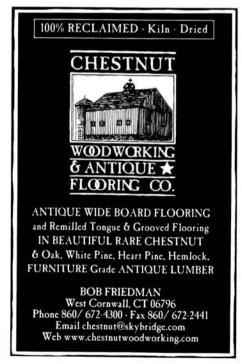
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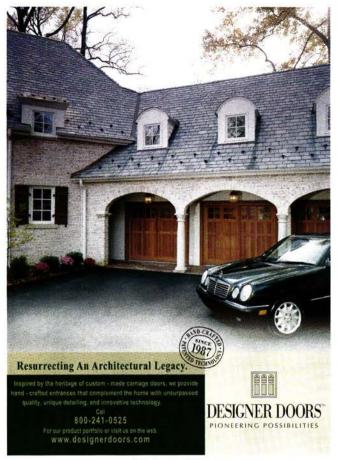
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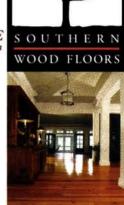


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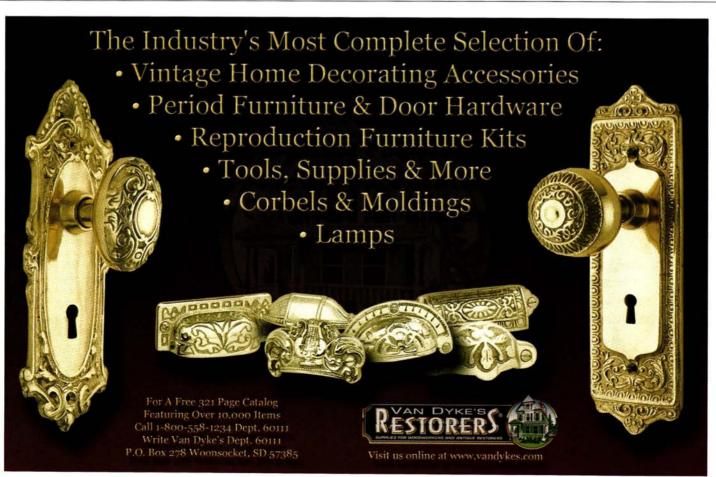
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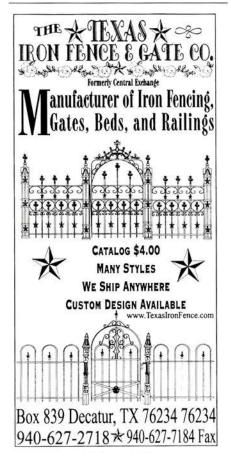
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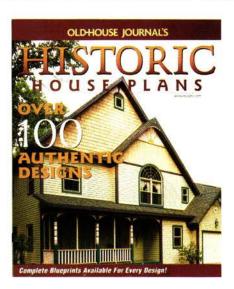
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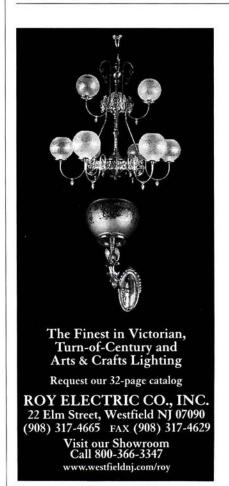
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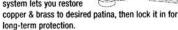
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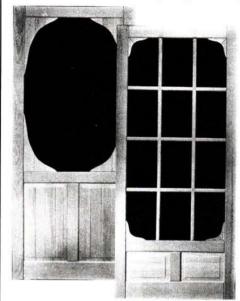
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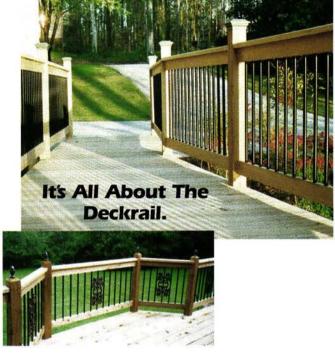
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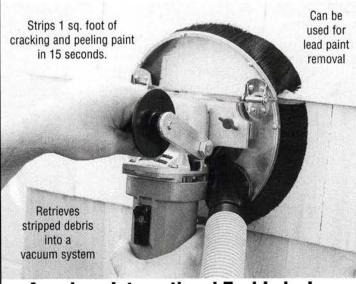
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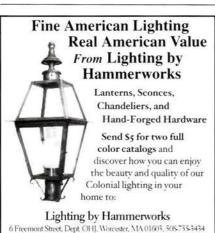
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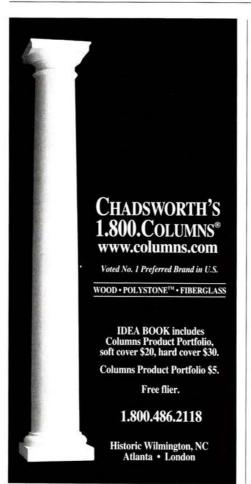






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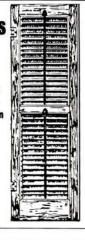
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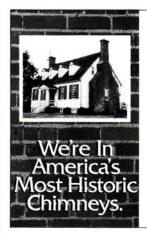
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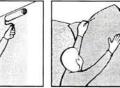
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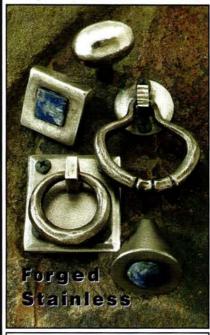
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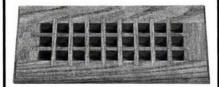
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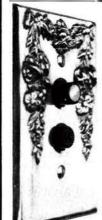
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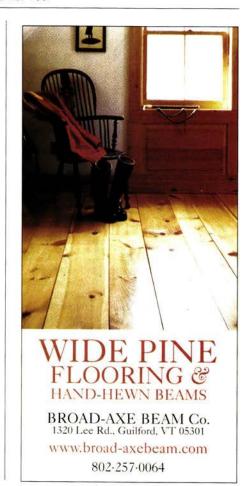
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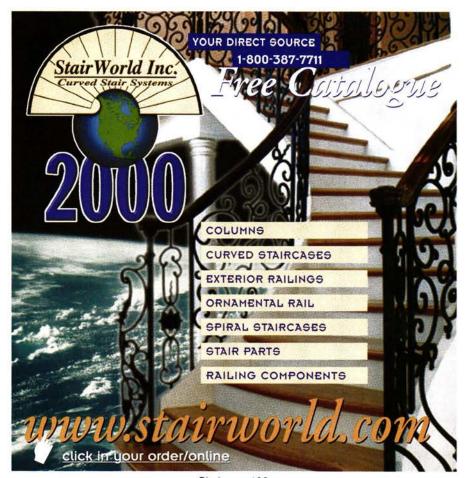
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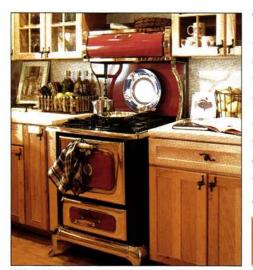
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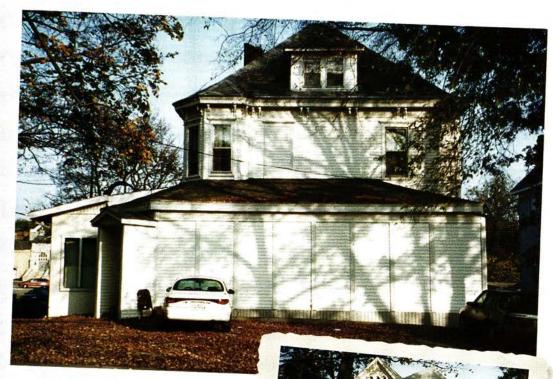
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Opinion



#### PERPLEXING PORCH

When is a porch not a porch? Perhaps when it can't fulfill its purpose as an open-air "room." On late 19th-century Queen Annes, such as the building above porches are an important architectural zone between outdoors and indoors. Here though, the camera sees only a windowless wall of clapboards, a far cry from the similar house (inset) with its airy wraparound version. What then do you call such a creation? Maybe an impenetrable piazza, or a veranda non grata.

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