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- How to Refinish Rustic Floors
- Buyer's Guide to Spiral Stairs
- Restoring Bungalow Woodwork
- Techniques for Epoxy Repairs

Plus:

The Neoclassical House Style

3 Handles for Door Hardware

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February 2002
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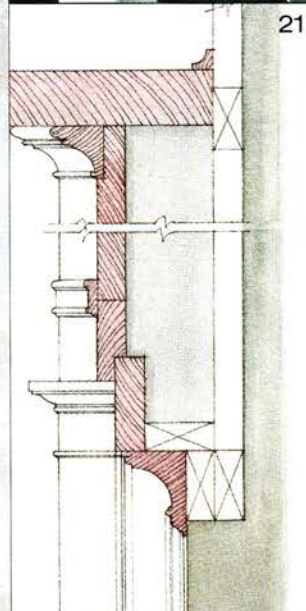
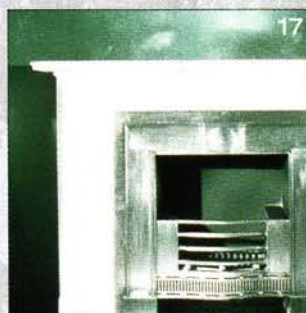
On the cover:

The Olson House in Cushing, Maine, was built in the 1700s by Capt. Samuel Hathorne II. For 30 years beginning in the 1940s, Andrew Wyeth would paint views of the house, most famously "Christina's World," a portrait of the handicapped Christina Olson.

Photo by Brian Vanden Brink

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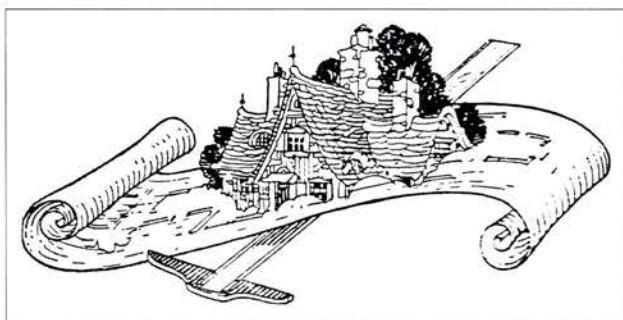
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Something Old, Something New



As you thumb through this issue of *Old-House Journal*, the first for the auspicious year of 2002, you'll still see many of the favorite features and departments that have kept OHJ re-

markably true to its unique focus for nearly 30 years. Looking a little further, however, you will see some fresh faces and revised pages as well. We haven't bought new furniture, as it were, so much as we have moved some of the chairs and tables to better positions and improved a few faded coverings. Here's more of what I mean.

Ask OHJ—We've decided to return OHJ's venerable Q&A department to the front of the magazine and back to its former shoot-from-the-hip title. For many years Ask OHJ was among the most popular departments with readers, and in its new expanded space the editors look forward to fielding more of your questions about vernacular old-house architecture and unusual construction. Keep 'em coming.

Conservator—The Old-House Mechanic column, another favorite, is now rechristened as Conservator, and from here we plan to regularly cover more on the specific techniques of materials conservation. Why the shift? It seemed like a natural when we realized that many articles were about the nuances of restoring stone, metal, wood, and paper, and many of the authors are specialists in this field. If there's a subject you'd like to see, let us know.

Annunciator—Ever see an old house with an annunciator? Also known as a call box, it was an early signal device that, like an intercom, reported messages from the distant rooms of a house to a central station. We've applied the concept to the name for OHJ's new pages that report on upcoming restoration-related events, seminars, shows, and conferences around the continent. Look for Annunciator in every issue.

Plots & Plans—Sometimes the best tool for reconstructing a long-gone doorway ornament or kitchen built-in is a set of plans from the past. In this new department, OHJ will offer dimensioned drawings of common residential elements and features based on original historic sources from the last century and earlier.


Downtowner—When OHJ began in 1973, it was in a row house as part of the "Brownstone Revival" and "Urban Homesteading" movements that were in the vanguard of preservation three decades ago. While the magazine has continued to cover restoring and understanding inner-city dwellings over the years, the time seemed right to give these buildings and their owners/restorers their own forum in OHJ starting with this issue.

That's just a sampling of what's new. Look for more debuts as the year moves on and enjoy!

Gordon Bock

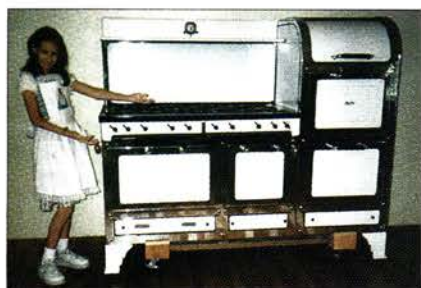


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Range Saga

Interesting to see the story on Jack Santoro and the Old Appliance Club in the November/December issue, since I now have my great vintage range thanks to *Old House Journal* and Jack.

After the 1994 Northridge [California] earthquake destroyed the range original to our house, my wife got her heart set on a 1930s Magic Chef 6300 with eight burners, large turkey oven, smaller oven, two broilers and a bread warmer. But at \$10,500 (\$12,000 restored) she knew we couldn't afford it.

I placed an ad in OHJ's classified section and within days I received two calls, one from a lady in Illinois who wanted \$3,000 for a right-hand Magic Chef. She mailed me a crude Xerox of a photo she used in her local paper, but I knew it was the stove we were looking for, and we arranged to fly to Illinois.

The range was filthy, rusted, and all but one of the burners were broken. The warming oven door was broken, five door springs were broken, and both heat regulators were rusted shut. Still, all the parts were intact except for the clock and light and there were only a couple of places where the enamel needed repair. We came back the next day with a truck and lumber and spent the next 12 hours building a shipping crate on the driveway.

I quickly realized the only way to properly clean and restore the stove was to take it completely apart and rebuild it, and that's when I joined the Old Appliance Club and bought the shop manuals Jack offers.

Over the next year I cleaned each piece with oven cleaner, some 10 or 20 times. I

used more than 60 cans! Dozens of nuts and bolts were rusted together. It took three months of weekends and some evenings to put the range back together. Now the oven varies only one degree from the set temperature and the burners cook food fast and evenly. The restoration was the most difficult project I've ever tackled, and I couldn't have done it without OHJ and Jack.

Geoff Williamson
Saugus, California

More on Old "Salts"

I enjoyed Gordon Bock's piece on Saltboxes and Catslides in the December issue and wanted to add a point. He strongly implied that the New England Saltbox form was the result of an addition to a two-storey hall-and-parlor house. Often it was, particularly in the earlier 1600s, but by the late 1600s and into the 1700s "original" Saltboxes were also common. I have crawled around in more than one!

A frequent visual giveaway is that a house built as a Saltbox tends to have a



straight roofline from ridge to north wall, whereas an "added" Saltbox frequently has a break in the

roof slope, with the roof over the addition having a lower slope than that over the main block to allow adequate headroom.

To get that headroom with a straight rear pitch, the ridge of an "original" Saltbox roof often lies behind the centerline of the front rooms. The slope of the two pitches may also be different. These things can be hard to see from outside, but usually become obvious when you go into the attic or make measured drawings.

Allen C. Hill
Woburn, Massachusetts

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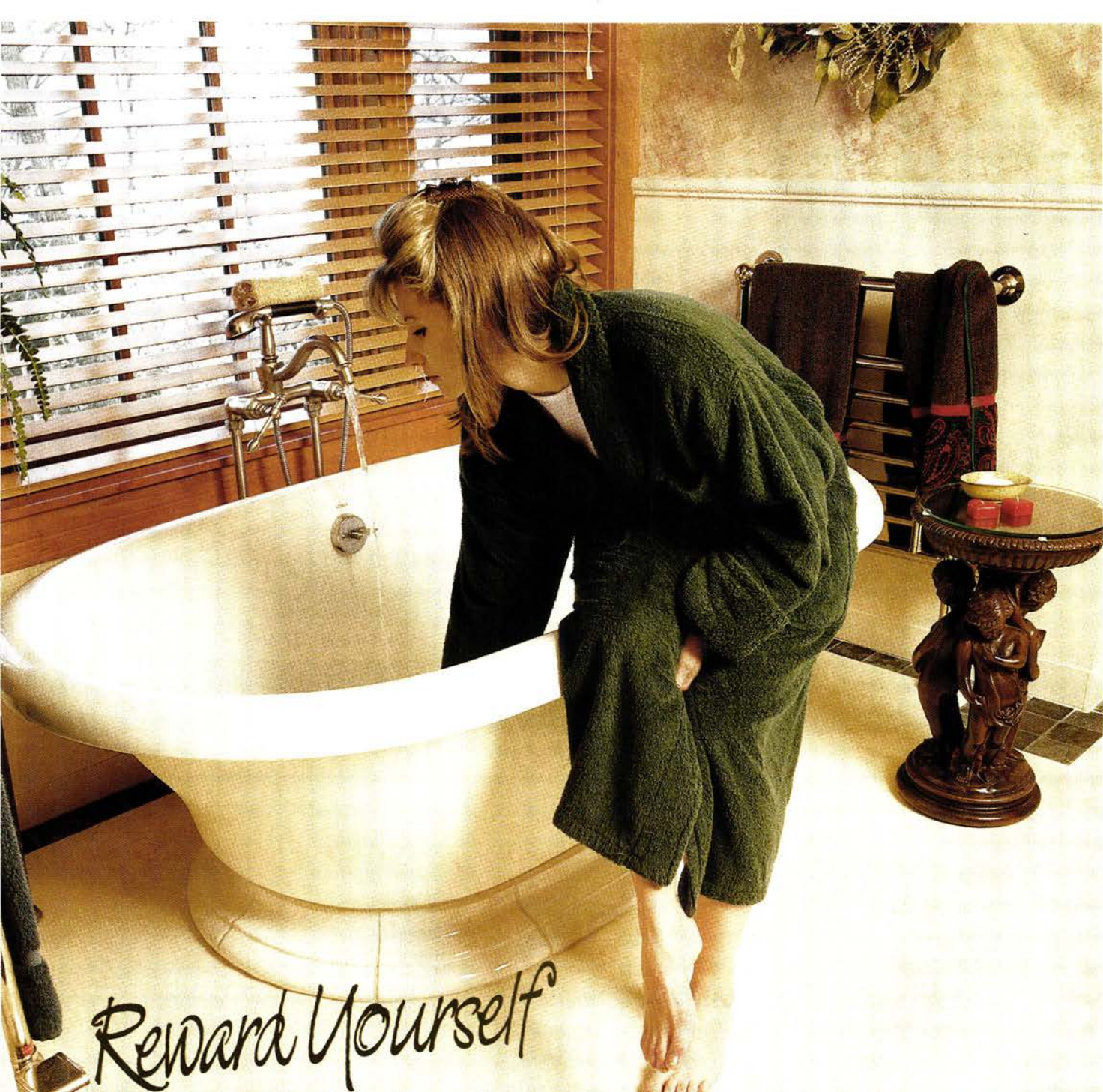
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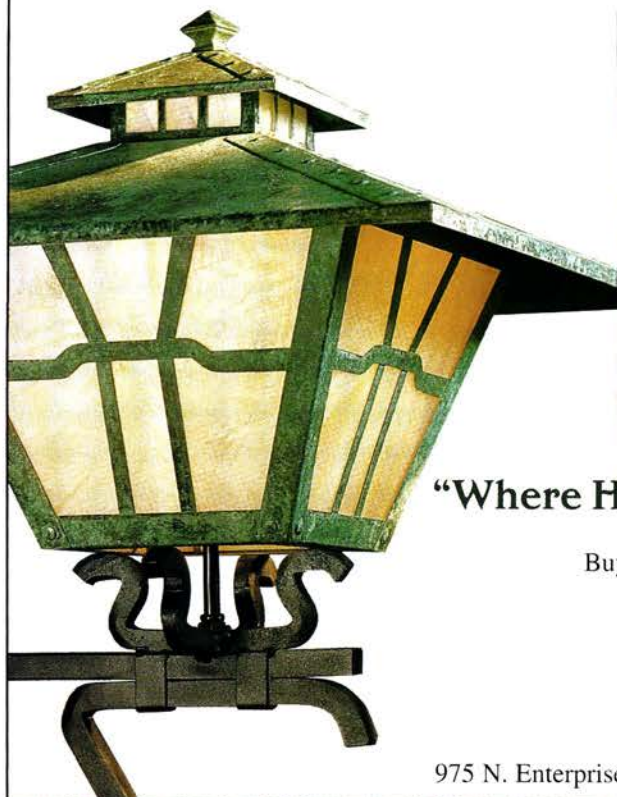
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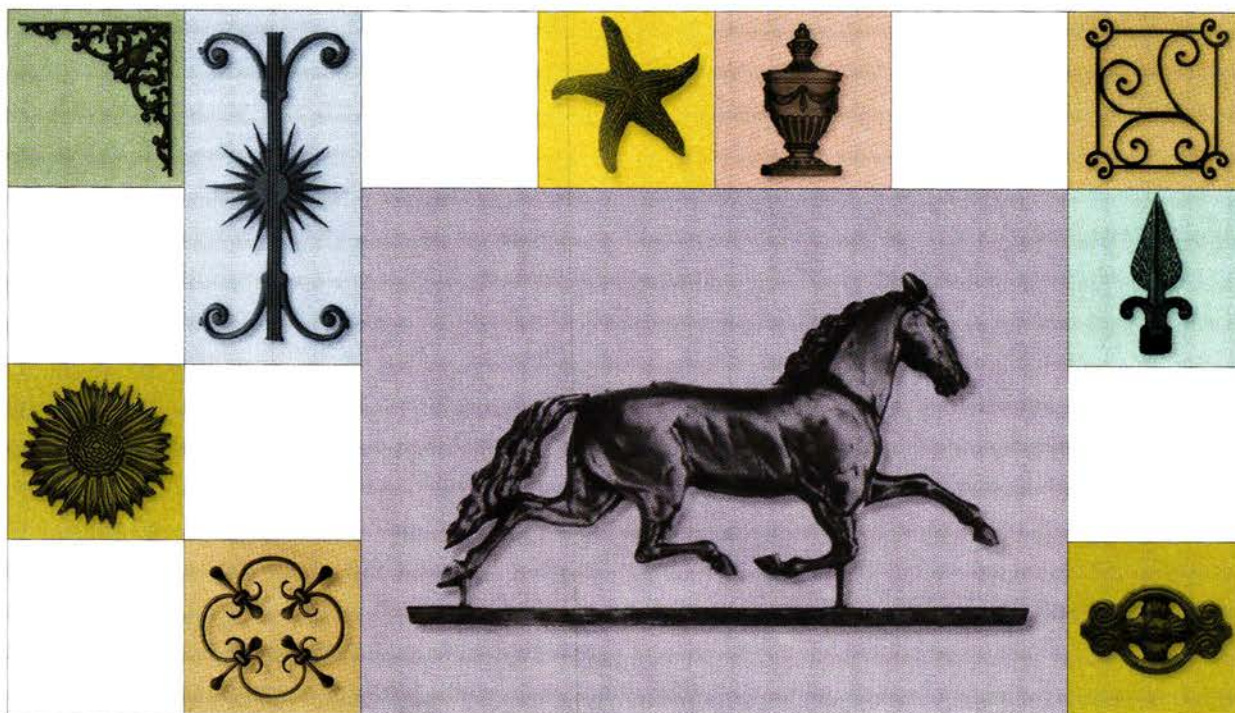
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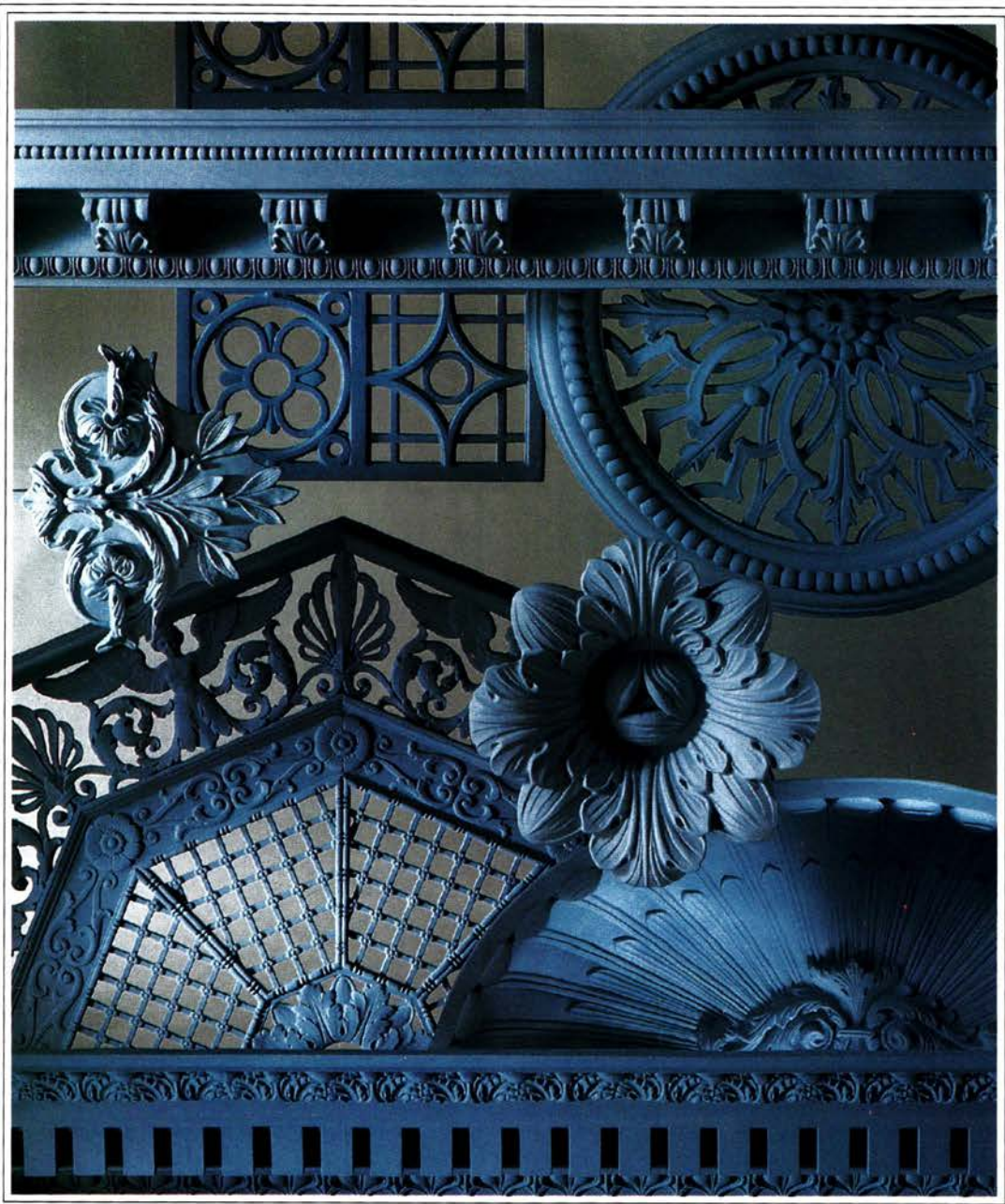
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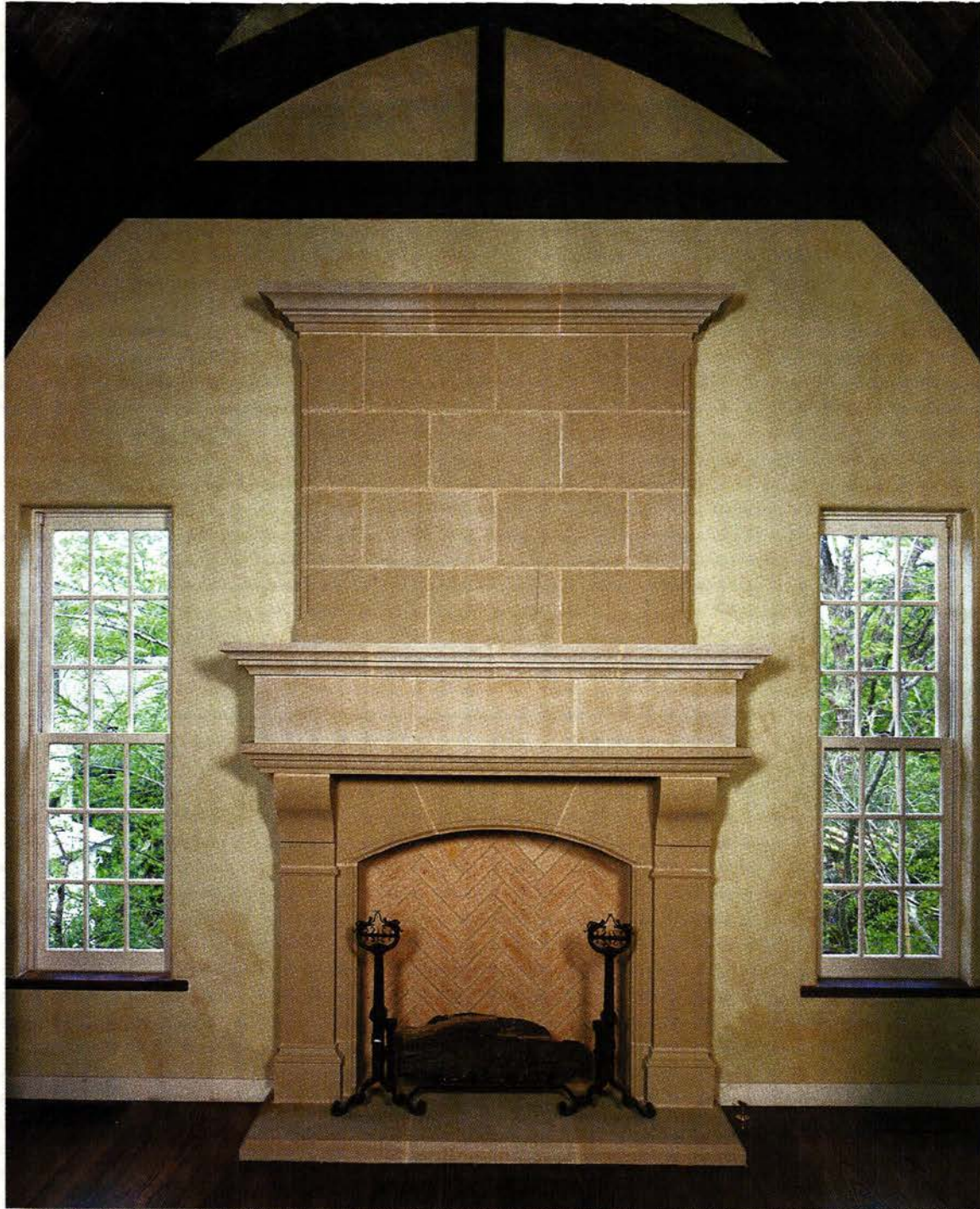
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Mission Fusion

While visiting New Jersey, I couldn't resist photographing this interesting house. What can you tell me about it?

— Delbert Griffiths
Chicago, Illinois

We'll have to reach for perhaps the most common American architectural style adjective: eclectic. Those undulating parapets and that red tile roof—both striking features—fairly scream Mission, a style that was loosely based on the Spanish Colonial missions of the West Coast. The Mission look is usually associated with California, where it began in the last decade or so of the 19th century. Mission houses were also popular in the southern Plains states and eventually filtered through to eastern suburbs before dropping off the fashion scene around 1920.

The lower half of the house suggests a culturally related but geographically

more remote inspiration. The eye-catching blind arches above the doors and windows often appear in Italian Renaissance houses built in the same period.

This academic style based on buildings in Italy also featured tiled, hipped roofs, but usually with boxed-in, bracketed eaves, rather than the wider, open eaves of Mission houses.

The hipped roofs of Italian Renaissance houses were typically not as steep as this one. While stucco was the most common wall surface for the Mission style, the Italian Renaissance style made much use of masonry, particularly refined brickwork.

In fact, the popularity of the style got a boost after 1900 from the new masonry veneer techniques that were probably used here to detail the first storey. Given



This house gets its distinctive look from a mix of influences.

this sophisticated hybrid of styles, we might guess that this is an architect-designed house from 1915 to 1920, a period when both these influences might have converged.

Stop the Rattlin'

Your September/October article on removing mouldings mentioned screws used to keep window sashes from rattling. Can you tell me more?

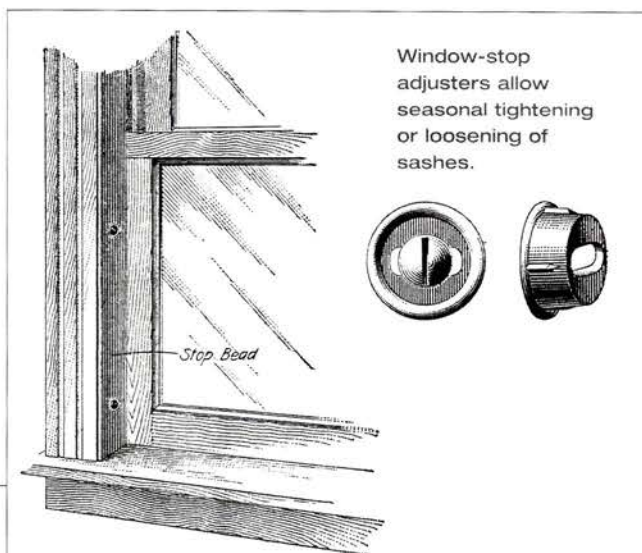
— Edward Hanover
New York City

Called stop-bead screws, stop-bead washers, or window-stop adjusters, these novel bits of metalwork were promoted as "necessary hardware adjuncts to the window trim for buildings of the better

class" around the turn of the last century. Fastening window stop mouldings with nails often set the stage for gouged wood if the stops ever had to be removed to service the sash. Secur-

ing them with round-head screws eliminated that problem and allowed some latitude for adjusting the stops against the window frame.

These clever little devices went one better. The simplest form involved a surface washer with one large hole or two small side-by-side holes that allowed the stop to be moved sideways, as wood swelled or shrunk, to keep the sash from rattling or sticking. While surface washers would mar the wood surface if used too often, the counter-sunk cup washer (shown here) was set into the stop itself so that washer and stop would move together. Adjusting the stops would



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also make the windows more airtight.

A major manufacturer of stop-bead washers was the H.B. Ives Co. of New Haven, Connecticut. Founded in 1876, they are still making brass builders' hardware, such as window and door locks.

Damp Dilemma

I am working on an early 19th-century masonry building with brick walls that have been chemically treated twice for a rising damp problem, without beneficial result. I am considering sawing the walls a few feet at a time and inserting a copper moisture barrier plate. Do you have any suggestions?

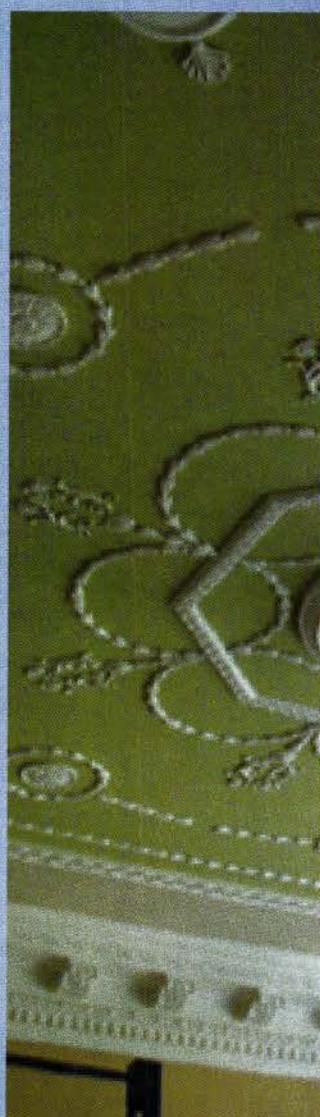
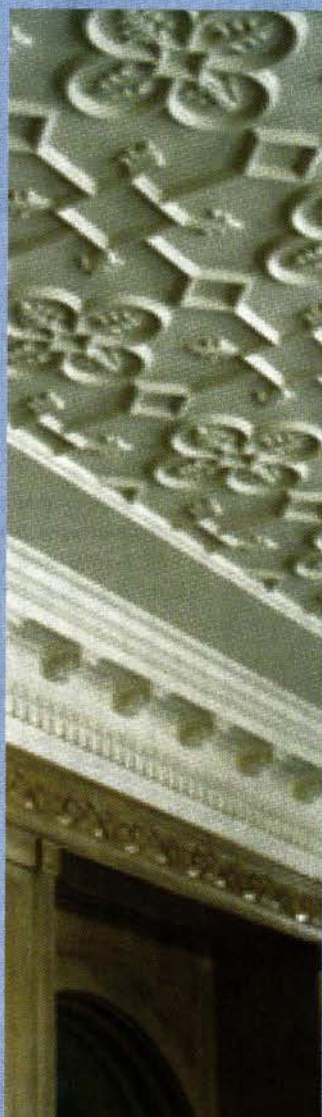
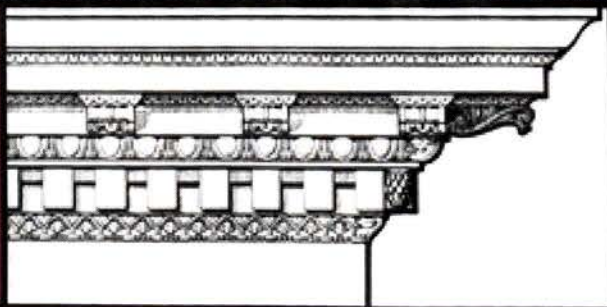
— Robert B. Patout

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Rising damp is a subtle building condition where the capillary action of masonry walls combines with a high water table to effectively wick water out of the ground—sometimes as high as the second storey of the house. Even though the low regions of Louisiana are the classic land of rising damp, before touching the building you should thoroughly research your situation to make sure this is indeed the root of your problem. True rising damp is actually a rather rare condition, and the high-moisture symptoms some people assume stem from this phenomenon are often a more garden-variety problem, such as damaged or missing gutters. Look into qualified consultants, such as a soil analyst, and read up on the subject. Among the best brief discussions ever written is the National Park Service Preservation Brief "Holding the Line: Controlling Unwanted Moisture in Historic Buildings" by Sharon Park, FAIA. You can order it from the Government Printing Office, or find it on the OHJ site, www.oldhousejournal.com, under Preservation How-To.

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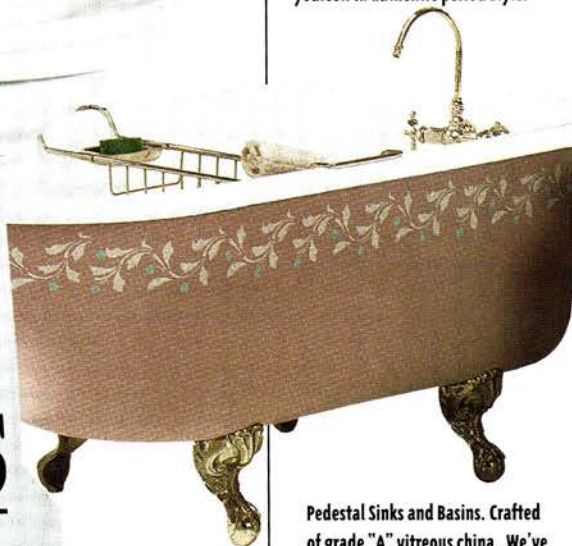
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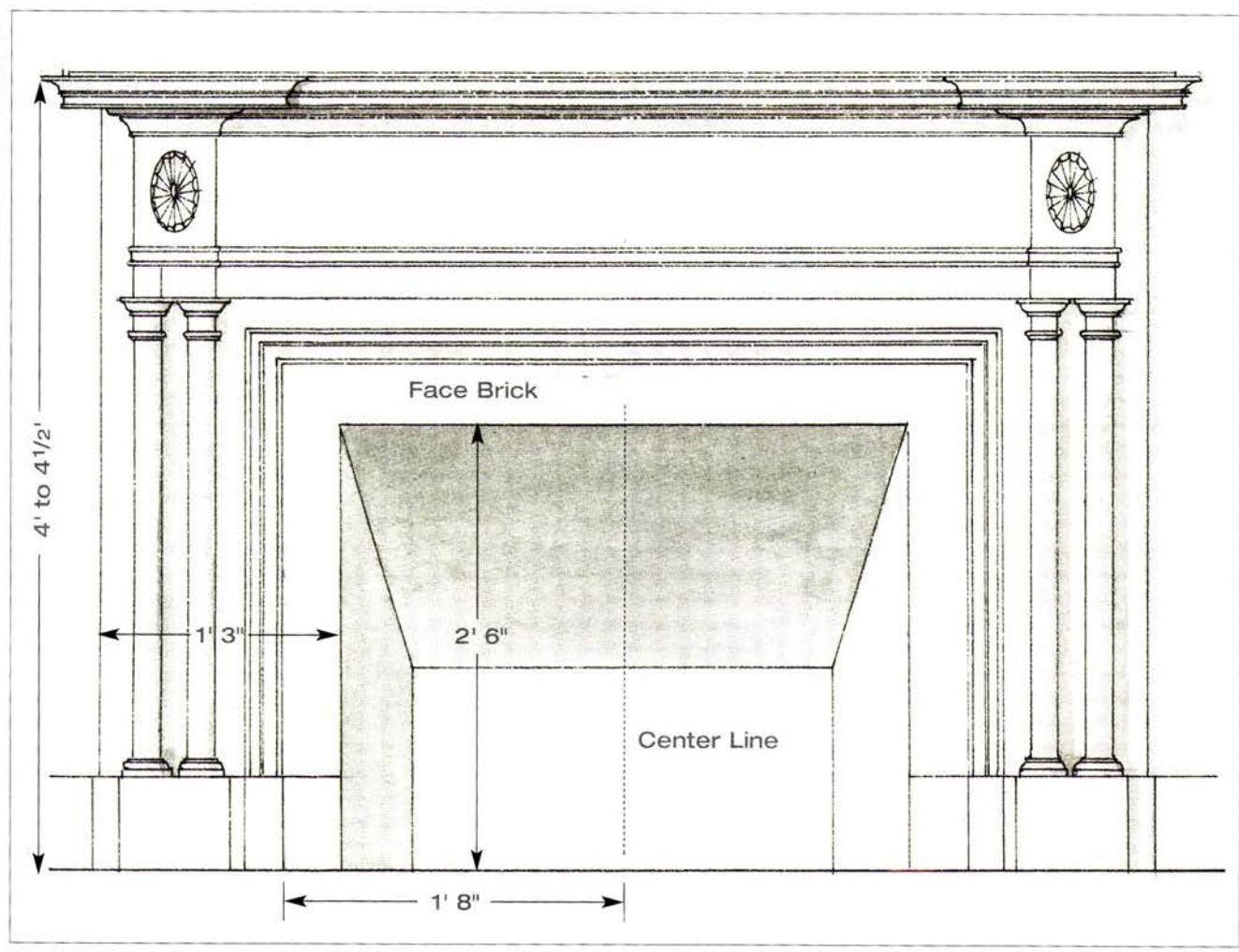
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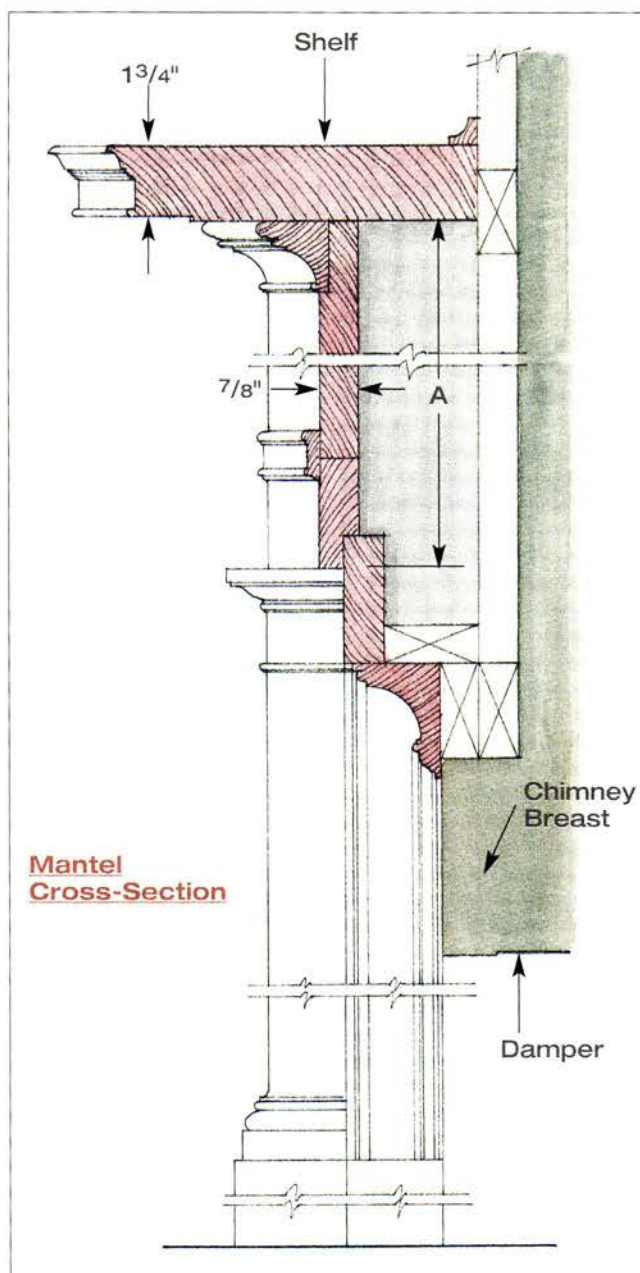
Drawings by Rob Leanna

Colonial Revival Mantel

Even a modest house with a minimum of interior decorative details usually includes a fireplace mantel that is not only the focal point of the room, but something of a show-piece of architectural ornament and craftsmanship. Unfortunately, original mantels in old houses are regularly lost to later remodelings or in the saddest cases, vandalism and thievery, and need to be replaced.

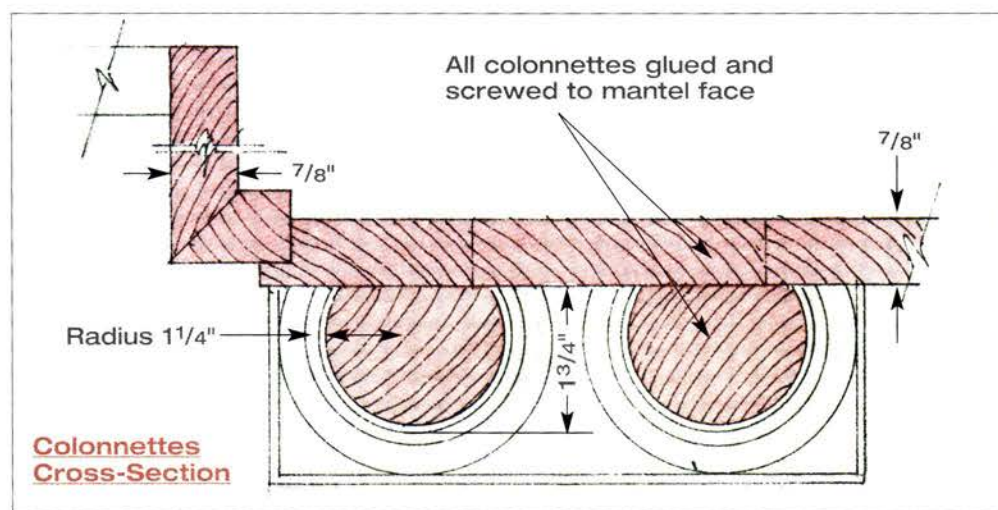
With this in mind, the plates presented here for the debut of Plots & Plans show the construction of a generic Colonial Revival mantel, suitable with minor alterations for a wide variety of houses from the 1890s to the 1940s. The design is Adam-inspired





and typical of the kind that was being built in the 1930s, down to the paired colonnettes and oval incised rosette ornaments.

Such mantels were typically painted, in which case this design may be made of paint-grade material. If you desire stain and clear finish over hardwood, the ends of the mantel shelf should be finished in applied mouldings to cover the end grain. The mantel shelf itself should be a solid piece of wood a maximum of 2 1/4" thick. One piece of wood may be used to make the frieze board over the hearth lintel (see "A" at left) if the width is not large. Whatever the finish, back-paint all finished wood to minimize warps and movement.



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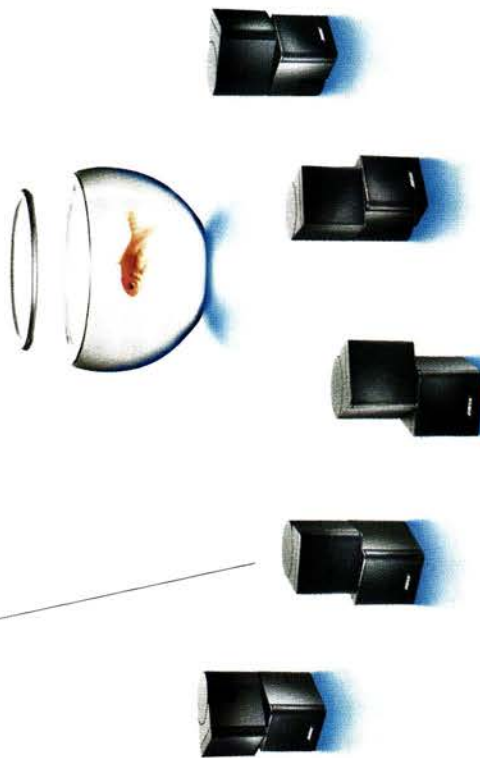
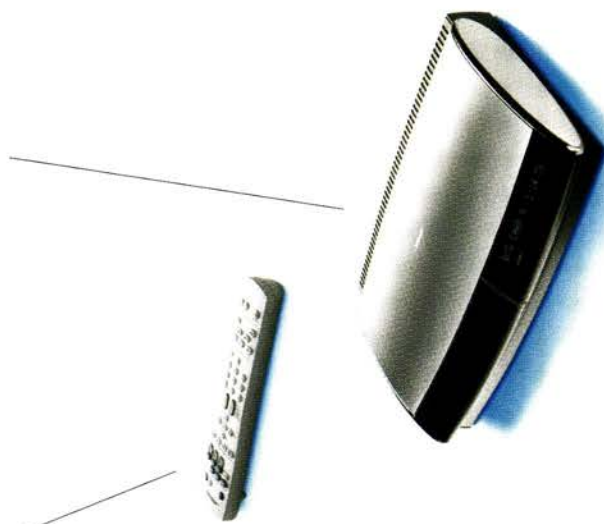
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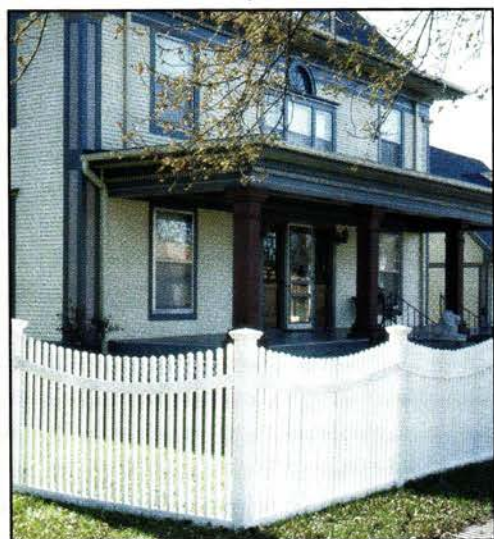


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What Lies Beneath

BY WILLIS A. ALFORD **"M**y wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death," quipped Oscar Wilde. "One or the other of us has to go." Many old-house owners feel the same loathing for a century's worth of florals, stripes, and toile hiding the original walls in their living and dining rooms. While most people are frustrated by the challenge of stripping this potpourri of paper, I'm fascinated by the prospects of what might lie underneath all of those patterns.

Besides revealing the past in the layers of paper removed, you may stumble upon a historic treasure. In antique homes in New England, for instance, you may even uncover a wall stenciled by revolutionary patriot and artist Moses Eaton or an early 19th-century primitive mural by artist Rufus Porter.

These itinerant artists traveled the countryside washing walls in bucolic scenes with soft shades of ocher, raspberry, and misty grey. However, by 1860—with the advent of mass-produced wallpaper—design tastes changed and these rich, colorful artisan paintings disappeared under paper.

Playing Detective

If you believe that you have a hidden treasure under your wallpaper, or you simply want to reveal the original plaster walls, read on. First, do a little research on the house and the surrounding neighborhood. When was the house built? Did an artisan visit other houses in your area? Also, look in the attic or in a closet. Often the artist would stencil a few designs in these areas for the homeowner to choose from. Elsewhere, chances are that the artwork isn't hidden under just one layer of paper but several layers, not to mention that the layers of wallpaper may have been painted over.

Getting Started

If all your research proves futile, don't despair. You can test several areas on the wall to see if there may be something of historical interest lurking under the paper. Get a spray bottle and fill it with warm water. Add a few drops of fabric softener or dish detergent, preferably Ivory Liquid. Fabric softener and dish detergent are great at dissolving the original wheat-based pastes

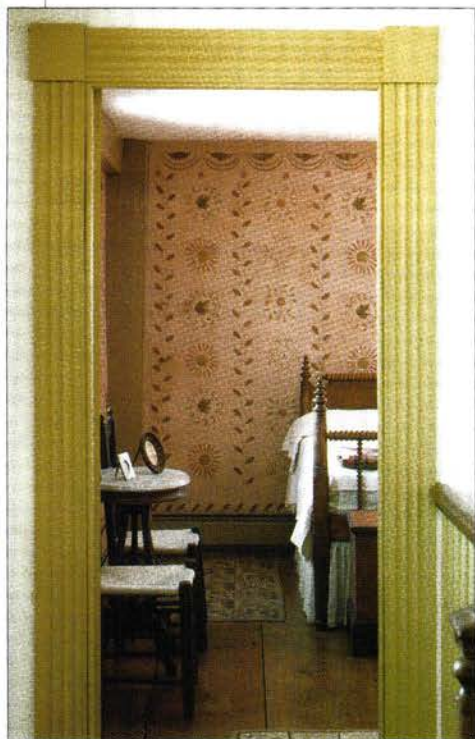


RICHARD SEXTON

Above: The removal of a century's worth of wallpaper can be a bit daunting to an old-house owner—especially if the homeowner is trying to preserve an original mural under all that paper. Below: The Rufus Porter mural below is just one example of the treasures you might find on your walls if you live in an 18th-century farmhouse in New England.



BRIAN VANDEN BRINK



BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

Uncovering primitive stenciling in an old house can return a room to its beginnings.

used to affix paper to walls in the 19th century—and they don't contain harmful chemicals such as sodium hydroxide that could bleach or "whiten" the wall and damage the mural underneath. What could harm the art, though, is too much water, so be sure not to oversaturate the walls.

Cover the floor in the areas to be sprayed. Spray the wallpaper at the ceiling line in a corner of a room. There may be multiple layers of wallpaper on the wall so you may have to spray the wallpaper several times. After about 10 minutes, the wallpaper will be soft enough to gently scrape off the wall using a putty knife. After removing the paper from the test areas and determining if there is indeed a design on the wall, remove the paper. It isn't difficult, just a little tedious and time consuming. If you've found a portion of a design, you may want to contact your local historical society before you go any further.

The Process

If this is your first time removing wallpaper, figure at least one full day for an average-sized room. Before you begin the removal process, protect the floor surfaces with plastic at least 1

mil. thick. Tape the plastic to the baseboards with masking tape. Turn off all electricity to the room and cover all electrical outlets and switches with masking tape. Have a couple of 5-gallon buckets handy, one for mixing your solution and one for washing the walls after the paper is off. You'll also need several clean cloth towels to wash the walls. To scrape off the paper use putty knives of varying widths. I use 6", 3", and 1 1/2" knives. A good garden sprayer that holds 2 1/2 to 3 gallons (\$35) works best to apply the water and fabric softener (or dish detergent) solution to the paper. Fill one of the buckets with warm water. Mix in about 1/4 cup of fabric softer or dish detergent and fill the sprayer.

Spray one wall only, remembering not to oversaturate it. Give the solution time to penetrate the paper, about 20 minutes. Using a putty knife scrape off the wallpaper. While waiting for the solution to penetrate the second wall, mix more removal solution in the second bucket, and using a clean cloth, gently wash the first wall to remove the paste, then remove any residue with a towel and clean water. If the paper on the second wall dries in the interim you may need to respray and wait another 20 minutes before scraping. Continue the process—one wall at a time—until all the walls are uncovered. Now you can see what has been hiding under all that paper for so many years—a design that is 150 years old! 🏠

Willis A. Alford is the owner of Off The Wall Wallpaper Removal Services, Inc. He is an associate member of the National Guild of Professional Paperhangers as well as author of Off The Wall: The Professional's Guide to Wallpaper for the Do-it Yourselfer. His email is otwwrs2@aol.com.

Removing Painted Paper

If your wallpaper has been painted over you will need to score the paper first. Scoring breaks the painted surface and allows the solution to penetrate. I recommend using a scoring tool (available at any hardware store). This tool has tiny teeth that puncture the paper, creating tiny holes that liquid can seep through. You can also use coarse sandpaper-80 grit works well. Both methods of scoring the paper will create dust, so wear a dust mask and safety glasses. To keep dust to a minimum, lightly spray the painted wallpaper before scoring. After the paper has been scored, spray the paper with the solution and leave it on 20 minutes before scraping the paper off the wall.

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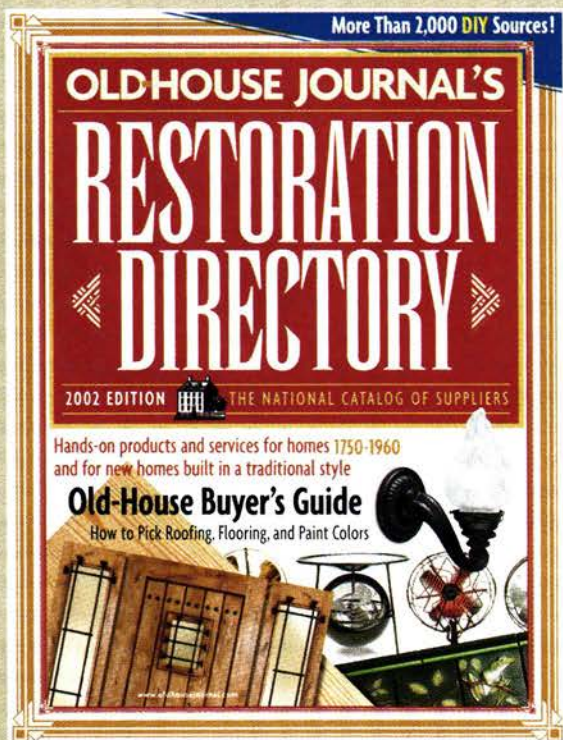
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The high style of Victorian home décor didn't stop at fanciful fabrics and floral wallpaper, but found its way right to the heart of the home—the hearth, where decorative tiles surrounded the fireplace. Commissioned artists often employed transfers that allowed for clever patterning when several tiles were used together. Charles Rupert uses that technique to reproduce a wide selection of popular Victorian reproduction tile patterns. Shown here is the reproduction 1870 Symmetrical Victorian tile that measures 6" x 6" and retails for \$38. Call (250) 592-4916 or visit www.charlesrupert.com. Circle 1 on resource card.

Corner Cupboard

If you've read Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, you'll remember the corner cupboard was the place for Zeena Frome's most prized possession—her glass pickle dish. Many 19th-century houses in rural New England would rely on such sturdy cupboards to house a number of precious, irreplaceable household items. Cabinetmaker Lee Sawyer makes replicas such as this Eastern Shore flat cupboard with tombstone glass and flat panel doors. At 78" tall, 48 1/2" wide and 19" deep, it costs \$4,210. Call (312) 828-0055 or visit www.sawbridge.com. Circle 2 on resource card.



Big 'n' Bold

If you've moved into an old house with big rooms and high ceilings after years in more cramped quarters, you may be a bit taken aback by all that...space. The folks at Thibaut, who've been making wallcoverings and fabrics since 1886, urge you not to be timid. Go big, the way the Victorians did. Thibaut recently introduced a new collection of Neoclassical wallpaper and fabrics called "Empire." Shown here is the Empire pattern from that collection, an arabesque panel design derived from an antique document, chosen to complement tall windows, doors, and other architectural features without overpowering them. The figures include vases, birds, flowers, and foliage in earthy colors on soft, mottled backgrounds. This pattern sells for \$80 a roll. For more information call (800) 223-0704. Circle 3 on resource card.



Engaging Ringer

Along with sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles, doorbells were some of Maria Von Trapp's favorite things. This one really would have made her sing. Dahlhaus Lighting has been reproducing Victorian lighting fixtures for more than 30 years and has added to its line of cast-iron wares this decorative doorbell with nameplate attached. The bell shown here measures 4" x 6". It also comes in brass and costs \$56. Call (718) 599-5413 or visit www.dahlhaus-lighting.com. Circle 4 on resource card.



The Wright Screen

While many architects at the turn of the last century drew inspiration from European architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright turned to Japan. Many of his "light screens" or window designs were evocative of Shoji screens—lightweight sliding partitions used in Japanese architecture. Cherry Tree Design re-creates these screens in the Wright style. These handmade, custom-designed screens are faced with rice paper set between glass and framed in oak, cherry, or maple. Because they are custom designed prices vary. Call (800) 634-3268 or visit www.cherrytree-design.com. Circle 5 on resource card.

Screen Star

Screen doors breathed new life into homes all across America in the late 1800s—allowing inhabitants fresh air without the pesky flies. Madawaska Doors features in its 4000 series this Victorian-design stile-and-rail door featuring raised panels, spindles, and mouldings. It comes with a fiber screen insert and can be ordered in 15 standard wood types. Prices vary. Visit www.madawaska-doors.com.

Circle 6 on resource card.



Strike Up the Band Box

In vogue in the early 1800s, band boxes were decorated in the wallpaper fashions of the day. They served not only as ladies' hatboxes but also offered valuable storage for any number of household items. Today Wendy Weeks reproduces these early 19th-century repositories. Her latest is Clayton's Ascent, an 1835 design originally inspired by balloonist Richard Clayton who had recently outdistanced all previous balloon flights. The newsprint lining of each box is printed on a 19th-century letterpress using reproduction broadsheets. The band box shown here measures 11 3/4" high, 19" long, and 5 1/2" across and costs \$250. Call the American Paper Staining Manufactory at the Farmers' Museum at (888) 547-1450. Circle 7 on resource card.



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Old-House Romances: The Dark Side

BY MAX DENZER **S**ee the happy young couple. They've just closed on the house of their dreams, a 12-room "fixer-upper" from the 1890s. They're in marital/domestic-partner bliss on this beautiful spring day as they proudly nail a cutting of their favorite wallpaper to a stud in what will be their kitchen. They pledge to each other that they will work hard at their respective jobs and return each evening and weekend to enthusiastically restore their love-nest. Tenderly, they assemble a scrapbook of paint chips and pages torn from magazines—a montage of what their lives will look like in three short years.

Their third February in the house has past; they trudge by that wallpaper cutting, now yellowed and curling, still nailed to the oxidizing stud, still illuminated by the bare bulb pigtailed to the Romex. No longer do they spring from their bed each Saturday morning hammers in hand. The animated conversations of potential dinner parties and weekend guests have turned to talk of roofs and furnaces and whether they can possibly last another season.

Sunday breakfasts used to involve thoughtful discourse on hardware-store sale flyers and plans of action. Now there are long silences. One of them thumbs dejectedly through seed catalogs with the creeping realization that the cottage garden will never be more than muddy ruts, while the other contemplates the merits of various brands of table saws, their prices far beyond reach. If he could just have that one tool, it would deliver him from the Sisyphean labors that seem to double each passing week. They drift into separate fantasy worlds of weekend getaways that don't involve punch-lists and lumberyards.

No longer do they work on projects together, the act of conjugal paperhanging is an emotional minefield. For now,

one stands sequestered in an upstairs bedroom, scraping rock-hard putty from endless window muntins while listening to a radio playing songs that will only darken his mood. ("And I'm free, free-falling...") Downstairs the other, exhausted from pulling nails out of door casings, aimlessly doodles exterior paint schemes onto Xeroxes of the façade, grinding her Prismacolor pencils to nubs. Beneath them both, tree roots bore into their sewer pipe, harbinger of a basement full of grey water.

The House. The House.

Everything revolves around The House. The House has become a greedy child. Birthdays are excuses to buy faucets. Christmas means a gift to each other of a replacement water heater for the one that ruptured Thanksgiving morning. They moped in anger and then sponge-bathed in cold water while the turkey desiccated and the vegetables wilted. Weekends and holidays, once anticipated Restoration Time, have dissolved into mantras: "We can't go out; we're stripping wallpaper." "We'd love to join you, but unless he solders that feed line we won't have a working toilet." "We're not going on vacation this year [read: decade]; we're saving for a roof."

Then there is the plaster dust. They feel it in the farthest reaches of The House. It's as if the magma of every three-coat wall and ceiling in history has funneled to the surface and burst forth into the plenum of their hot air furnace. Gritty powder lurks every-

where, piling into corners until it obscures drill bits, falling on the coffee maker where shaking morning hands clutch at filters, and worst of all for this increasingly fragile bond, between the bed sheets. Sheetrock scraps piled next to their pillows, they wonder if they will crawl the rest of their days through debris both physical and mental. Will it prove too much? Will there be tearful calls to Mom, then to realtors and attorneys?

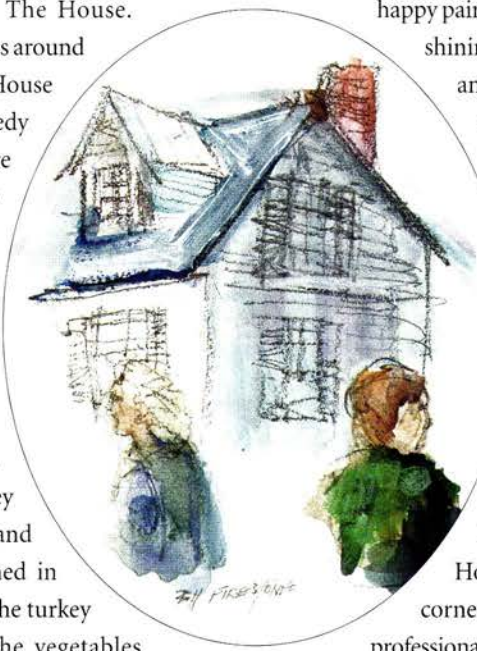
All old-house couples have an unshaken belief: Someday they will be that happy pair in the magazine, eyes

shining in the firelight emanating from a marble mantel, laughing as they sip Shiraz with friends. Their shellacked woodwork will gleam; the metallic gold bits in their wallpaper will sparkle in the glow of a bronze chandelier. So they stay together for the sake of The House and eventually a corner is turned. They seek

professional help (perhaps of several kinds). While contractors hammer and hum, they use the last of their dwindling cash for a long weekend in Aruba. Much remains to be done, but they return both tanned and more realistic.

Flash forward three years. Now the ornate parlor is all they dreamed, but they are feeling restless. In the flickering firelight, they gaze into each others' eyes with mutual desire: "Honey, how would you feel about having another old house?"

Max Denzer is a veteran of several restorations and relationships.





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Knobs, Latches, and Levers

BY LES MOORE Every house has doors and every door has some sort of hardware that enables the user to open or secure it. The device seen on most new houses is the doorknob, but in old houses that might date back to the 18th century, knobs

Getting a handle on historic hardware styles.

are far from universal. In fact, in old houses of any era or style, latch or lever hardware may be far more common. Understanding a little about what these three types of hardware are and where they come from historically can help explain where you'd expect to find or use them in a pre-1940s house.

First a word about locks—those mostly invisible mechanisms operated by knobs, latches, and levers. Along with simple latches, rim locks or box locks that mount onto the surface of the door were the primary locks seen on houses from the early 18th century to about 1850. Before a lock industry fully developed in America, many such locks were imported from England. After 1850 box locks started to be replaced by mortise locks, where the lock slips into a pocket cut into the edge of the door and only the trim is visible. Mortise locks are still manufactured, but now are mainly used in commercial applications. Mortise locks were eventually superseded in houses by bored locks, which include tubular locks (developed by Linus Yale, Sr. in the late 1800s) and

Rim locks, which mount on the door surface, were the primary means of securing doors until the mid-1800s. As early as the 17th century, whitesmiths would give knobs and locks a high, decorative luster.

the cylindrical lock (developed by Walter Schlage in the 1920s). Since the 1920s cylindrical locks have grown to be the most common type used in residences due to their cost, relative quality, and ease of installation.

Knobs—spherical or oval handles—are unquestionably ubiquitous devices, although perhaps 80 percent

of the knobs in pre-1800 America were imported from Europe (primarily England). Throughout nearly 300 years of use they have come in an amazing variety of materials. Some dating back as far as the mid-17th century were cast in early brass- and iron-works by whitesmiths. Unlike blacksmiths, who left the surface of their products much as they came from the forge, whitesmiths filed and polished their wares to a high finish. The cheapest knobs were made of clay. Known as pottery knobs, they came in three



PAUL ROCHELEAU

RICHARD SEXTON



In the Victorian era, doorknobs and escutcheons, like everything else, went decorative. Such hardware is often called Eastlake style, although the tastemaker himself decried such excess.

basic styles: mineral, porcelain, and jet. Pottery knobs, used on thousands of locks, were popularized by John Pepper in the 1850s when he teamed up with Emanuel Erwin (later of Russell & Erwin Mfg. Co. fame) to form "The Mineral Knob Company." Equally widespread were wooden knobs, sold either stained or left natural. Better quality wooden knobs are securely fastened to the shank by hydraulic pressure and still function well today; cheaper versions are glued on and were considered undesirable even a century ago.

Another inexpensive knob material was cast iron. While durable, iron knobs are not particularly stylish. Stamped or spun metal knobs, however, often represent the peak of the decorative hardware industry and were made in an immense variety of styles. Knobs of brass and bronze are, outside of glass knobs, of the highest quality in terms of construction and ornamental design. These come in two forms: solid, cast-in-one-piece knobs, and composite knobs fabricated with wrought bronze or brass covering a steel frame. The most expensive knobs, generally, have always been the cut glass or crystal glass variety with their value, then as now, depending upon the grade of the glass and the amount of cutting involved.

Latches—generally any simple fastening device—make up the oldest group of door security hardware and, in terms of handling, are typically operated by pressing a lever with the thumb. The earliest wrought-iron thumb latches are metal versions of the primitive wood-and-cord string latches used in colonial dwellings. Common and domestically made of iron up to about the 1820s, they contained no mechanism for securing with a key and were subsequently made obsolete by rim locks. Latches were probably considered too archaic for mass-producing through most of the mid-1800s, but the picture appears to have changed after the American centennial and the perfection of modern lock systems. Like knobs and levers, this beautiful hardware type went through a transformation in the 1870s, when they were usually cast in bronze or brass with figural motifs on the pull portion and matching back or door plate. Catalogs of entrance or store-door locks often refer to the large pull handles and thumb latches



At the opposite end of the spectrum was the simple wrought-iron thumb latch that American colonists used on interior and exterior doors. It had no locking mechanism and went out of fashion in the 1820s, but brass and bronze versions appeared on the scene 50 years later.

ANDY OLENICK



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that are frequently seen on commercial buildings and large houses.

Levers—horizontal handles of various types—originated in Europe, as did most door hardware. They became more common in America after 1890, often for buildings with a continental inspiration. Levers are usually cast in either iron or more expensive bronze. The designs can be simple or highly ornate, with swirling curves and matching roses. Levers, unlike knobs, can be handed, meaning they will only work properly if they are placed on either the right or left side of the door—an important point to remember when ordering hardware. Following knobs' resurgence after the 1870s, levers have made a comeback since the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the early 1990s. While those regulations only apply

Every period and style had corresponding hardware. This brass lever has a ziggurat design that marks it as Art Deco.



PAUL ROCHEREAU

The inside of a thumb latch, showing the horizontal bar that lifts when the thumb lever on the other side is pressed.



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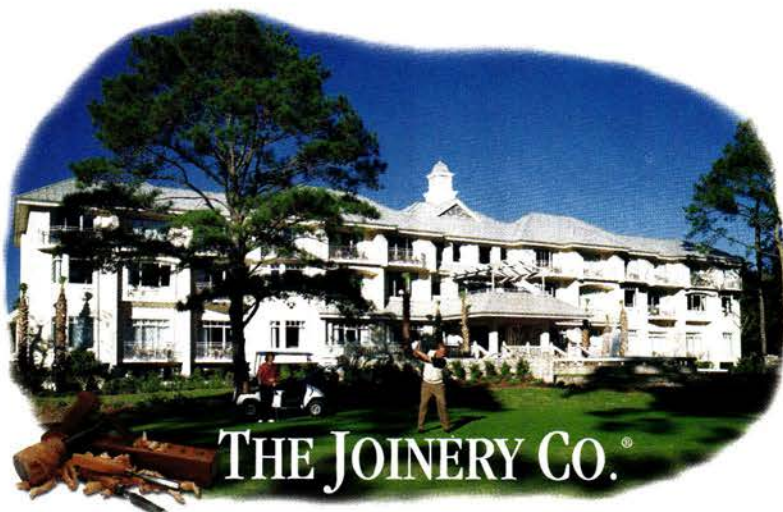
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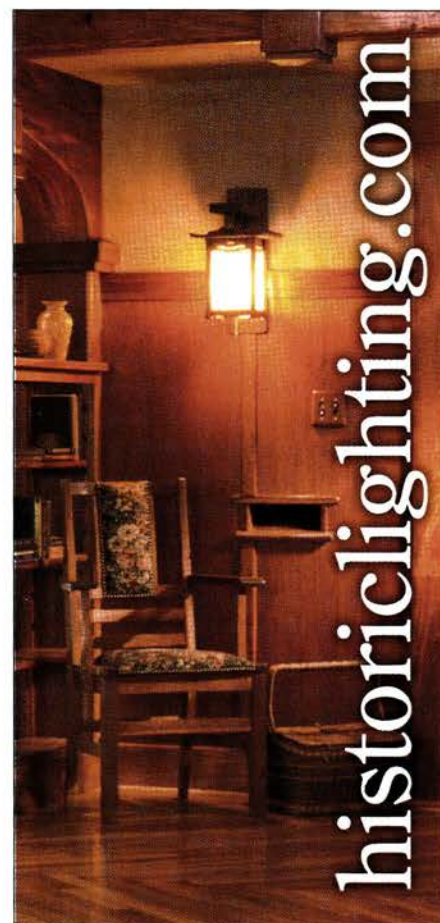
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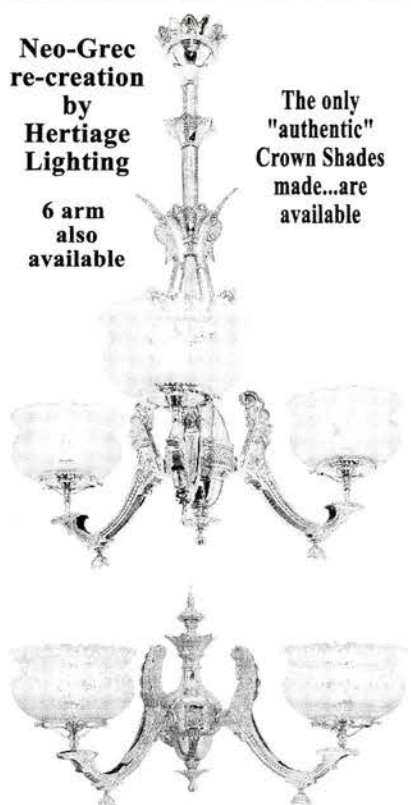
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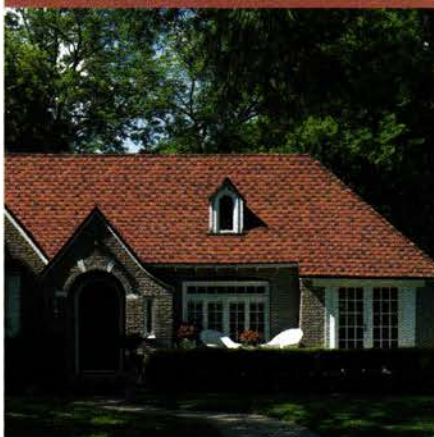
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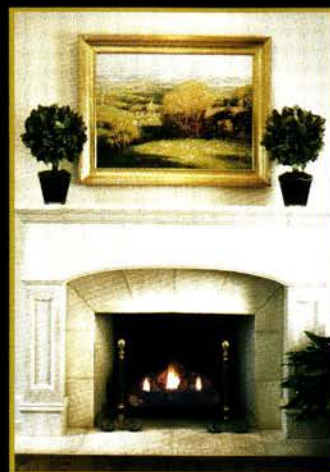


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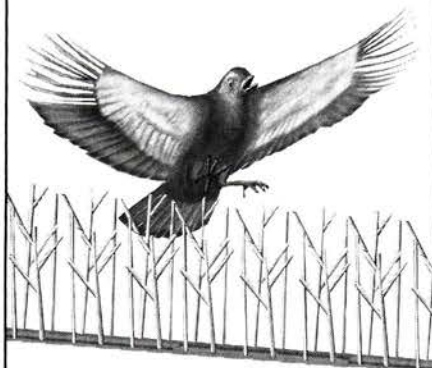
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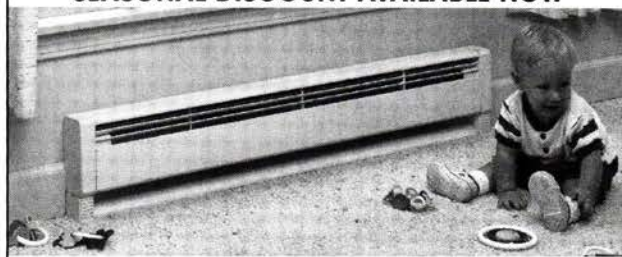
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A few days' work can leave wide boards beautiful for decades.

BY PETER AND NOELLE LORD In early houses every feature had a practical origin, and wide-board floors were no exception. The majority of floors were constructed of wood planks from 8" to 18" wide, because narrow boards were expensive to prepare in a preindustrial era and therefore reserved for the best rooms. Though many wood floors were meant to be unfinished, care was also a practical concern and these boards were often painted to ease cleanup and protect the wood. Simple as they are, painted floors are historically significant parts of many old houses and they deserve good stewardship. With quality materials and proper preparation, you can revitalize your painted wood floors and preserve them for many years to come.

Preparation Is Everything

Restoring a painted floor is time-consuming, so be sure to set aside several days for completing the necessary steps and several more for your room to be off-limits to traffic. What is a week or two when a good

paint job will last decades?

Floor work is a hands-and-knees endeavor, so invest in knee pads. Make sure you have proper equipment for personal protection too: gloves, safety glasses, a suitable dust or vapor mask, and a filtered vacuum. Methods for identifying lead paint hazards fall outside the scope of this article, but it is always a good idea to test painted surfaces in older buildings before disturbing them. Lead paint test kits are readily available and fairly inexpensive.

Floor preparation begins by going over the floor with a hammer and punch to set any nails or plugs that protrude above the surface. Next, address the gaps. Small gaps may merely be unsightly, but gaps wider than 1/4" can be a nuisance, catching shoe heels or pet paws. There is no way to reverse gaps caused by compression set (see sidebar page 49), but you can improve them by cleaning and filling. First remove built-up debris between the boards to the extent possible. Your objective is to remove all the junk along the sides and down in the gaps



between the floor boards. Any tool that fits the gap will do. We use a linoleum knife that we have sharpened into a hook. Ready-made tools (such as the 3-in-1 tool from Hyde) work well, as does a screwdriver. Keep a vacuum cleaner handy to pull out additional loose debris after you dig. This is an important—though unglamorous—step. The better you clean between the boards the better any fill-in repairs will hold and the longer your refinishing job will last.

Before repainting, you must sand the floor for best adhesion. You are not trying to remove the old paint layers, just give the surface "tooth." (You won't need to prime. Even on bare wood, most floor paints don't

require primer.) We use a random-pattern orbital power sander that attaches directly to our HEPA-filter vacuum cleaner. However, you can use any power sander or even sand by hand. (We start with 60-grit paper, then go

Restoring Painted Wood Floors

Restoring a painted floor is a hands-and-knees job (left), so be sure you have something soft to kneel on. A wood floor properly painted with gaps between boards cleaned and filled (below) will be both historically significant and easy to care for.



PHOTO BRIAN VANDEN BRINK, RESTORATION SCHOLTZ AND BARCLAY ARCHITECTS

back with 80-grit, followed by 120-grit to remove any sanding marks.) Vacuum as you go and when you have completed sanding, continue to pay close attention to the gaps between boards. Then thoroughly wash down the floor by hand with a big sponge and a cleaner that will remove old wax, grease, and general grime. We use TSP (trisodium phosphate), Spic 'n' Span, or Dirtex, and then rinse thoroughly with clean water.

Filling the Gaps

Filling large gaps prior to painting will protect your boards from the damage of future debris build-up, as well as make the floor much easier to clean. We have had success with a commercial caulking system used in many construction applications; it accommodates the floor movement while it fills and seals the gaps. We back the gap with a closed-cell foam backer rod that prevents three-point bonding (see drawing page 48), then caulk to fill and seal the edges of the gap. (We use products from Sonneborn, but there are many caulking systems available.)

The methods we use are best undertaken in fall and spring when the gaps are midcycle—that is, when the wood is neither at its maximum nor minimum dimension. Summer is a poor time to fill gaps because the wood is fully expanded.

First, pick a rod diameter that will fill your crack snugly without being forced into the space. Next, fill 2/3 of the depth of the crack with the foam backer rod, pushing it down firmly with a blunt tool that will not cut the foam. Then, wearing solvent-resistant Nitrile or PVC gloves, fill the remaining gap with a one-part urethane caulking (such

Any tool that fits floorboard gaps will work to remove debris. This is a linoleum knife sharpened into a hook.



PHOTOS PETER AND NOELLE LORD

as Sonolastic NP-1) until it is flush with the surface. You may want to mask the wood on each side of the gap with ultraviolet-resistant tape (such as 3M Long Mask) to make this step easier. Once you run the caulk, use a finger or scraper covered with a thinner-soaked rag to push the caulk into the gap. (You use thinner because urethane caulks set up with water.) You can fill any split boards in your floor at this time. Remove any excess from the wood surface with a thinner-soaked rag. Caulk left on the floor becomes sandwiched between the wood and paint and will move independently, causing the paint to crack. It is fine to paint over the caulk between the boards.

Properly applied, the caulk will move with the wood. The correct caulk will not adhere to the backer rod, so it is not as likely to crack from the dimensional stress of a three-point bond. The better you cleaned out the debris along the sides of the boards and inside the crack, the better your caulk adhesion will be. Over time, the caulk may

After digging the debris out, follow up with a vacuum cleaner.



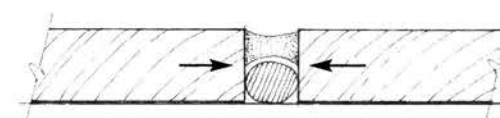
split some, but this flexible filling is still better than hard debris that can damage your boards. If you use caulk that is close in color to your paint any cracking will be less visible. Otherwise opt for black, the least obvious color.

At this point leave your floor alone for a couple of days to allow the caulk to completely set up. It will still be soft, so be careful where you turn your feet or place your knees. We usually damp-sponge rinse the floor one more time now to remove additional dirt and lint and encourage the caulk to set up.

The Painting Process

Now you are ready for paint. When it comes to deciding between oil-based paint and water-based (latex) paint, generally we prefer oil for any high-traffic areas and most woodwork. When you consider that a floor is probably the most demanding surface for paint, the extra work and wait required for oil-based paint is worth it. All floor paints have an exceptionally glossy sheen because they are formulated with resins that set up harder than regular paint for additional durability. (There are latex floor paints, some with cross-link activators, which we have only used in low-traffic areas.) A good

Once gaps are cleaned, push foam backer rod into the crack to fill about two-thirds of the space. Caulk won't adhere to the rod, but will form a stable two-point bond to the boards (see drawing).



neighborhood specialty-paint store is invaluable to help you understand the paint brand options.

Wear soft clothing, socks only (no shoes), and an organic-vapor charcoal mask (different from a HEPA filter mask). Always have handy a rag with thinner on it and a vacuum cleaner because there will be lint and dust that magically appear. You can create your own tack cloth for picking up lint as you go along by putting just enough floor paint and thinner on a rag to make it sticky. We use a roll-and-brush technique to apply paint because a roller helps put down the paint evenly, and brushing offers a nice fin-

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A thinner-soaked rag, left, pushes the caulk tightly in place and cleans up excess that could cause paint to fail. A brush-and-roller technique, below, gives the floor a historic painted finish look.



ish appropriate for older buildings. Two coats of paint will be necessary.

First edge around the room and any pipes, radiators, and other floor penetrations using a brush-size you can control. Begin rolling from one edge, on one board, working in as far as your natural reach. We prefer to use a 4" foam roller (because it leaves no lint), and a 3"- to 4"-wide china bristle brush. A wider brush fatigues your hand faster, but it requires fewer strokes, so brush width is a matter of personal preference. You want to lay down enough paint so that your brush moves smoothly without "chattering" (skipping), but not so much that it floats on top of a puddle of wet paint (painting the puddle). It is best to paint one board at a time; two to three boards are okay for a more experienced painter. Remember, you can't go back to a board once you have left it if you want a smooth, lapless job. If you try to fix an error once the paint has set up (within only a few minutes), the sheen will show an obvious mark.

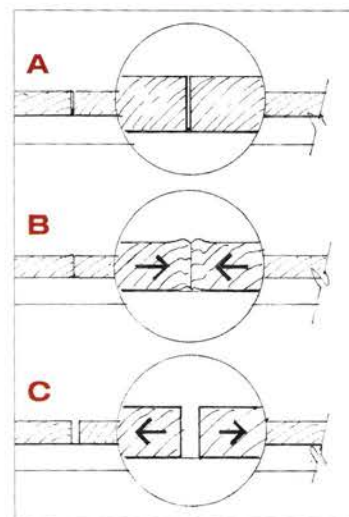
Allow several days for this coat to set up, then lightly scuff-sand the floor with 220-grit paper to take off any raised grain or foreign particles that may have shown up on the paint and to leave a good tooth for the next coat. Remember, the paint is

still rubbery so don't be too aggressive! Gently vacuum and use your tack cloth to wipe the floor down again. Afterwards, apply the final coat using the same techniques as for the first coat. This final coat should set up for a good week, and it will take a month for two coats of oil paint to cure fully. During this time the floor can feel firm and dry, but it will still lift easily with a heel turn or while moving furniture. (We test paint softness by pushing a thumbnail into the paint in a room corner or other inconspicuous spot.) If you want to move back in, put your furniture on pads or casters and lay down paper for extra security while walking on your beautifully repainted floor. 🏠

Peter and Noelle operate Peter Lord Plaster & Paint, Inc., specializing in the preservation and restoration of historic surfaces and all plaster systems (151 Mast Road, Westbrook, ME, 04092; 207-854-5156; www.plasterlord.com).

The Facts on Gaps

Throughout the cycle of seasonal changes, wood expands and contracts as it absorbs and loses moisture, a process that causes any woodwork or flooring to subtly move. The wider the boards in your floor, the more they expand and contract. You may have noticed that sometimes the gaps between the boards seem to get bigger every year. This is a phenomenon called compression set. Over time, dirt and debris fall between the boards of a floor and begin to build up. When the wood swells during the summer months, the wood pushes against this debris and compresses the edge fibers so that next season, when the wood shrinks again, the gaps are a bit wider. Each year more debris accumulates and the cycle repeats.

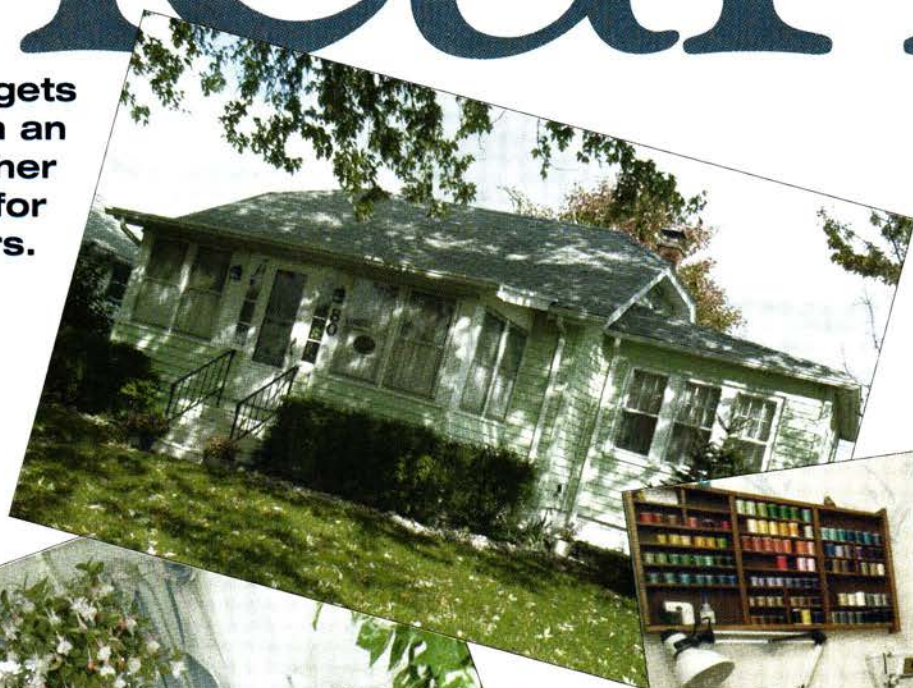


ILLUSTRATIONS ROB LEANNA

- A.** Gaps between floorboards may start out small but still trap debris.
- B.** Wood swelling in summer compresses the edges of the boards.
- C.** When the boards shrink again in winter, the gaps are wider and can become home to larger amounts of debris.

In the Mean

A Michigan house gets a gentle fix-up with an eye to making further restorations easy for the next owners.



Arlene David (right) stencils walls in the sun porch of her 1927 bungalow (above right). Decorative painting serves to brighten the interior without doing damage or making more work for subsequent residents.



PHOTOS BY DAVID DALTON
ILLUSTRATION BY ROB LEANNA
"BEFORE" PHOTOS BY ARLENE DAVID

time

BY KATHLEEN FISHER **"First do no harm"** is a credo as appropriate for old-house owners as physicians. The patients it applies to aren't just ornate Queen Annes or imposing Foursquares, but also the most modest of early 20th-century bungalows.

Arlene David can't remember ever seeing the Interior Secretary's preservation guidelines, but when she bought her two-bedroom home a decade ago, she did things right by instinct—protecting the structure rather than rehabbing, preserving rather than replacing, and making gentle repairs that enhanced its quiet charm instead of trying to make it something it wasn't.

When the longtime Detroit resident was newly divorced in the fall of 1990, she didn't have the income for a big mortgage nor did she want to waste her assets on renting

an apartment. "The real estate agent looked at me like I was totally daffy when I asked him to get printouts for homes around \$40,000," she recalls.

Nearly in tears after looking at what that budget would allow, she was drawn to a 1927 bungalow on a corner lot, sandwiched between an industrial

park and a hospital in historic Mount Clemens, Michigan. At only 910 square feet, it had a living-dining room combination with a spacious feel although the layout was a

bit "quirky." One room was accessible only through the first-floor bathroom, which also opened to both bedrooms. The roof sagged under three layers of shingles and the detached garage sported fist-sized holes.

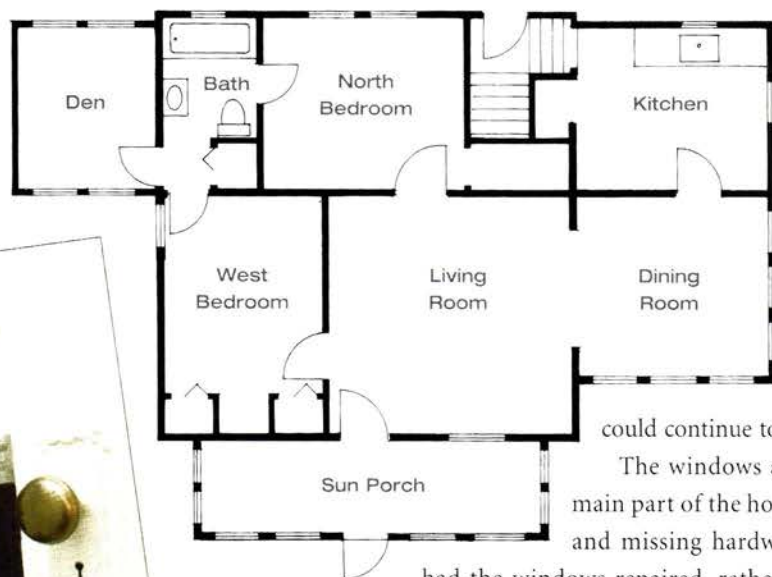
"I knew I couldn't afford to do what should be done to the house," says Arlene, a former teacher who now works for a fundraising candy company a few minutes from home. "Yet I wanted to do a good job of repairing and preserving it without causing problems for the next homeowners, so they could continue to restore it to its original charm."

The windows are a good example. All but three of the 18 in the main part of the house were painted shut, and some had cracked panes and missing hardware. Many of the sash cords were broken. Arlene had the windows repaired, rather than replaced, but added storm windows to cut fuel costs and keep out dirt.

No Stinting on Basics

Fully half the money she has spent on the house has been on plumbing, electrical work, and the all important basic that protects everything else—the roof. "I didn't stint on the quality of people I hired," she says. "It was important to me that the work was up to code and done correctly with all the necessary permits."

A common bit of advice from preservationists: Take your time. Don't barge ahead and do something that you—or someone else—can't undo later. That's why an old house may be better off with an owner who has less capital. Arlene's initial job was simply cleaning, then removing "carpets of very inferior quality, terribly soiled with stains of questionable nature." (In the main bathroom, orange carpet squares set off a turquoise tub, peach trim,



A "quirky" layout results in the first-floor bath having three doors, one of which deadends in a room only 7'10" X 8' 4". Arlene turned it into a den where she sews or works on her computer.

Mount Clemens

A town of about 17,000, Mount Clemens comprises four square miles on the banks of the Clinton River 25 miles outside of Detroit. From 1870 until the 1920s the town had a heyday as a mineral bath resort. Most of the huge bathhouses and hotels closed during the depression. The last shut its doors in 1974, and nearly all of the elegant structures have been torn down for parking lots or office buildings or succumbed to fires "of suspicious origin." The only mineral bath still operating is in St. Joseph's Hospital, coincidentally next door to Arlene David.

Three years ago the city launched a Neighborhood Improvement Program that offers cash prizes of \$1,000 to \$2,000 and discounts on materials and services with local merchants.

More than 200 people have participated. Arlene David is one of a similar number of people with houses built prior to 1940 who have earned historic plaques for their houses by documenting their histories.

The Macomb County Library there has a useful Website on the town's history. Its tips on tracing the history of a house could be used in any city. Visit it at www.macomb.lib.mi.us/mount-clemens/local.htm



Arlene earned a plaque from the city for researching her house.



and yellow-and-black plastic tiles.)

Arlene refinished the hardwood floors by hand—not with an electric hand sander, but blocks of sandpaper. "The patina on the wood floors was beautiful," she says. "It wasn't just a matter of saving money. There were some bad stains I didn't think would come out even with professional sanding. I used stripper in the north bedroom and could see that it had definitely been stained dark," so she didn't want to have it stripped back to light wood.

After screwing up her courage for five years, she pulled up peel-and-stick vinyl flooring in the kitchen, plus two layers of linoleum with 1/2" plywood in between, exposing a pine subfloor. "It looked pretty decent after four coats of gloss urethane finish," she decided, "but it needs an occasional light sanding and new coat. New linoleum would be a more permanent fix." A pantry area that she suspects of once harboring an icebox was badly water stained, so she painted it with

grey porch paint to match new countertops. She plugged what appeared to be drainage holes with pieces of old broom and mop handles, stained to look like knotholes.

Don't Do Unto Others

The plastic wall tiles she inherited in kitchen and bath were examples of cheap fixes hard to undo. The adhesive they left behind proved impossible to remove with any means she tried, so a creative co-worker applied a stucco-type finish to camouflage the bumps. "I would have preferred having the smooth plaster replaced, but it was going

to be prohibitively expensive."

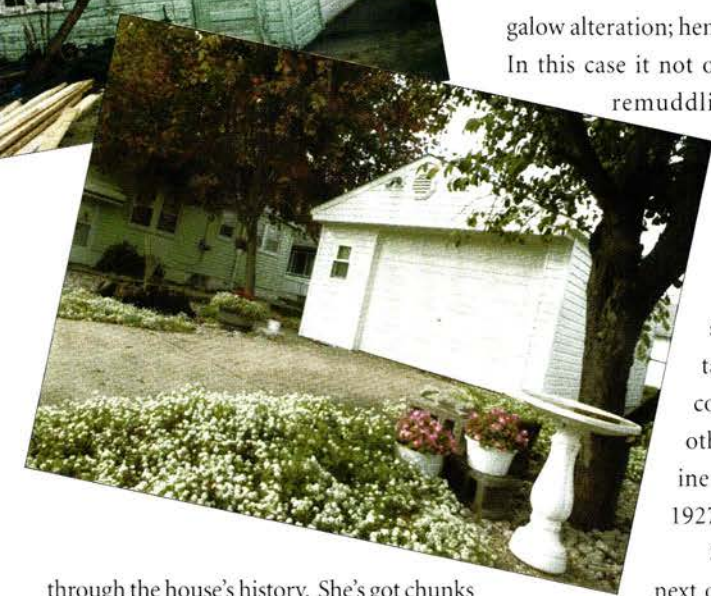
Tackling other walls also required biting the bullet. The living-dining room and north bedroom were the worst with up to seven layers of paper under paint. Again, no heavy artillery such as steamers. Arlene removed the paper with diluted vinegar and a razor blade, "not something I'd like to do again." Sponge painting helped hide any flaws in the plaster.

Perhaps the next owners would like to replicate some of that vintage paper? No problem: Arlene has baggies of samples, layer by layer, so they can take a little trip





Arlene removed a padded headboard from the west bedroom wall and found that her piano keyboard fit the space (far left). Arlene first gave the garage a new roof (left) and gradually made other repairs (below).



through the house's history. She's got chunks of the kitchen linoleum, too, should that be of interest. Photos document all the rooms as she found them, including that technicolor bathroom. She recorded the location of plaster patches in the living room where sconces once hung; she'd like to replace them eventually although she's unsure about their style.

Enclosing porches is an endemic bun-

galow alteration; hence Arlene's sun porch. In this case it not only doesn't smack of remuddling, but adds much needed living space. Although unheated, it's comfortable for much of the Michigan year, and now sports a small dining table at one end and a conversation area at the other. Arlene can't imagine reopening it just for 1927 authenticity.

She *can* imagine the next owner trying for more period-appropriate kitchen cupboards, and perhaps the vintage tub she wasn't able to find. She's come to grips with the oddball layout, turning that funky little space off the bathroom into a room where she can compute or sew. The next owners might see it as a nursery or walk-in closet.

"I would hate to see the house enlarged though," she says. "It's fine for a sin-

gle person or starter home for a couple." Someone needing more space might look to the basement. It has its own bath, but needs more permanent waterproofing than she's been able to give it.

"I love the individuality of this house," Arlene says. "I lived in cookie-cutter suburbs too long. I'd like to see other small homes targeted for restoration by other people with less money." 🏠



Above: A friend glazed the west bedroom walls with a feather duster. Arlene sewed the curtains and bedspread and made the lampshades with lace from an aunt's collar and her own wedding dress.

Below left: The enclosed porch wasn't original to the house. Not only can Arlene live with it (see "Thou Shalt," this page), but she's made it truly livable.



Arlene documented her wallpaper and floor covering with photos and samples. A stop-gap measure in the kitchen was to urethane the subfloor.



Thou Shalt

There are some well-accepted maxims among preservationists. "Be patient" might be one of them. We asked James Massey, OHJ contributing editor, to give us 10 Old-House Commandments.

- Better to preserve than repair, better to repair than restore, better to restore than reconstruct.
- Intervention and changes should be reversible.
- Treatments should be the gentlest possible.
- Most old-house problems are caused or worsened by water in the wrong places (including dry rot).
- Put a new "hat" on your house—a good solid roof is a basic need.
- Never, ever sandblast brick or wood or stone.
- Buildings and their uses develop over time and should not be arbitrarily returned to an earlier age without good reason. Live with it!
- Follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for preservation, rehabilitation, or restoration, depending on the work.
- Don't "early up" or "fancy up" an old house. Keep it real.
- Document the changes you make before, during, and after the work with good photographs and don't forget to date and label them.



The spiral stair of the Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was built around 1880 by a mysterious "stranger with a donkey" after Sisters there prayed for a solution to accessing the choir loft. Built without nails, it makes two 360-degree turns with no visible means of support.

ERNESTO BURCIAGA/RAINBOW

Stairs with a Twist

BY KATHLEEN FISHER

There are enough variations on spiral stairs to make a buyer's head spin.

Spiral stairs are almost as old as architecture itself. Medieval castle builders wound them up into turrets, always twining them clockwise so ascending, right-handed attackers would be at a disadvantage against defenders. First laid atop masonry vaults, by the 13th century the stairs were made of stone slabs mounted to the wall.

Spiral stairs rose toward heaven next to church lofts and pulpits, and descended into the horror of dungeons and the pleasures of wine cellars. With the advent of cast-iron spirals in the mid-19th century they no longer depended on circular walls for support and became free-standing and decorative. They were primarily used outdoors or in commercial applications, providing access to skywalks in factories or storage areas in warehouses. Their quintessential setting was in lighthouses.

Spiral stairs are somewhat limited in use. National and local building codes have a lot to say about how big they need to be and almost every detail of their construction. You can't use a small spiral stair as the sole access to a full second storey, nor would you want to. You'd find it impossible to haul up king-sized mattresses and oak wardrobes; emergency workers couldn't carry stretchers down. Don't even think about using them as your one and only entry to a basement, where you might occasionally need a new furnace or water heater, or need to tote big baskets of laundry. Nevertheless, their archetypal corkscrew



It took a live-in carpenter two years to build this Honduran mahogany stair in what is now the Rose Hill Inn in Ithaca, New York. The spiral is an ancient symbol for our search for meaning, but on another level it makes a highly practical way to get from point A to point B.

curves are the ultimate in romance. On a practical level they're great space savers with outdoor applications as fire escapes or ascents to widow's walks, and indoors for climbing to lofts and libraries.

Initial Considerations

Some medieval castles had stairs with uneven risers, to further thwart the enemy by forcing him to stagger rather than sprint. The only thing homeowners will find staggering about today's spiral stair offerings is the range of choices, costing just a little more than \$400 for a utilitarian metal stair, three to five times that for a stock wood stair, to tens of thousands for a personalized spiral of substantial girth and height with ornate carving.

You can have your spiral custom built, choose from stock stairs that arrive fully assembled, or buy a kit to erect yourself. (In fact, kit stairs are sometimes compared to Erector sets.) If you're confident in your carpentry, you can go online to buy detailed plans for hammering together a spiral in your workshop.

Already-assembled stairs are tempting, billed as installable in 10 minutes. Yet they're most practical for new construction: It's hard to picture a 5' diameter spiral stair just slipping in the front door of most old houses, and they're expensive to ship in one piece.

Kit sellers indicate an installation time of anywhere from four hours to a day, and skill levels from "anyone can do it with common tools" to considerable experience. It's definitely not a one-person job.

If your stair will go through the floor above, the project becomes more complicated because you'll need a well opening. This is professional-level work, which means a higher price tag.

You typically erect the kit stairs with tubular "sleeves" to which treads are attached, stacking them on a center pole. Many suppliers offer a "continuous" design that makes the sleeves look like a solid pole with no gaps between them. Sellers of stairs with solid center poles claim that the sleeve structures result in considerable "flexing" of the stair treads.



COURTESY OF STEPTOE & WIFE

Steptoe & Wife's 4'-diameter "Albany" stair (above) was adapted from a style that first appeared in England around 1870, primarily in industrial settings. This 6'-diameter "Victorian One" from the Iron Shop (right) features scroll-design tread ends and triple spindles. Open treads like these make a stair look more airy and help resist rust outdoors by letting rain and snow fall through.



COURTESY OF THE IRON SHOP



Check Your Building Code

Before you think about the aesthetics of your spiral stairs you'll need to address the practical issue of building codes. Some suppliers will want a signature from a building inspector before they ship you your stair or parts for it. There are three national codes that may apply: the CABO (Council of American Building Officials), UBC (Unified Building Code), and BOCA (Building Officials & Code Administrators).

The most common specifications result in spirals of the following dimensions:

- Stair diameter, 5'
- Tread path (length of tread), 26"
- Center tread width, 7 1/2" a foot in from the narrow end of the tread
- Headroom, 6'6"
- Riser height, 9 1/2"
- Baluster spacing, as with most stairs, no more than 4" apart (to prevent children from sticking their heads between balusters)
- Presence of and height of the handrail, ranging from 30" to 38"
- Landing width, usually the same as the tread path
- Weight capacity, a minimum of 300 pounds

Suppliers make every effort to create stock stairs that will meet or exceed all of these national codes, but there are often state or even local codes that may supercede them. Codes are tied to the area being accessed; they may be less stringent when stairs lead to an open space such as a loft or cupola, and the square footage of the area may also make a difference. Some companies offer stairs that they warn will not meet code for sole access to a second storey, but can be used for auxiliary stairs.

Ordering Your Stairs

Some sellers make the process a no-brainer. They offer a single style, or perhaps a half dozen, and ask you only three basic questions: floor to floor height (exclusive of any carpeting), stair diameter (larger diameter stairs are easier to climb), and whether you want to ascend clockwise or counter-clockwise. Assuming that you won't have to



COURTESY OF THE IRON SHOP

If your stair will penetrate the floor above, you'll need to factor in the cost of building a well opening: either square, as in the access to a roof deck in the seaside cottage above, or round, as in the multi-story model at left. Suppliers usually offer landings and railings for either design.

defend your castle against any sword-wielding attackers, the latter is a practical consideration to keep you from having to slither into a tight opening or exit into a wall.

Other suppliers will dazzle you with materials and trim and dozens of styles in everything from finials to treads. How about a decorative bracket on that stringer, or cove moulding for the riser?

Some architectural guides define spiral stairs as those with a center pole, or newel, to which the narrow end of the roughly pie-wedge shaped treads attach. However, you can also buy helix designs with no center post and handrails on both sides rather than just one.

Materials for stairs include metals such as forged iron, cast iron, aluminum, and steel. Pine, oak, cherry, and mahogany are among the popular woods for spiral stairs, with prices climbing respectively. For outdoor use aluminum is rustproof, but it can have a "tinny" feel and sound. Galvanized steel is another option. Iron stairs should be rust-proofed with baked enamel. Metal stairs can be lovely inside; suppliers say that weight is almost never an issue, even with iron. Outside, if wood strikes your fancy, you can get spirals in weather-resistant woods such as redwood, cedar, and teak.

A typical code-compliant stair will turn about 30 degrees per tread so that it takes a lucky 13 stairs to turn a full 360 degrees. Some stair designs have a looser spiral of 180 degrees or even 90 degrees, which really falls into rubric of "curved stair."

Planning a spiral stair to access an open loft or balcony is relatively easy, but it's a good idea to mark the planned diameter on the floor with masking tape to get a sense of how much space it will take up and of course, where the openings will fall. The well opening required for stairs ascending to a closed space can be either square or round. Manufacturers usually sell landings and railings for either, as well as matching balcony railings should you need them.

Simple to Fancy

Once you're done with these big decisions you can go on to the finer details.

One seller of metal stairs offers 18 styles



Artist and sculptor Wharton Esherick was known for creating organic, undulating shapes when Pennsylvania Supreme Court Judge Curtis Bok hired him in 1935 to renovate ground-floor rooms in his Gulph Mills manor house. In addition to furniture, bookshelves, paneling, and a fireplace, Wharton designed this unique spiral stair with no central post. Each tread supports the one above it. He was reluctant to interrupt the fluid design with handrails, but at Mrs. Bok's urging, added three rails at heights appropriate for adults and children. The Wolfsonian Museum of Florida International University in Miami Beach, Florida, acquired the stair when the house was slated for demolition in 1989.

In addition to traditional 360-degree spirals, some suppliers offer other configurations such as a half turn or a quarter turn, which is more often described as a curved stair (below). Because it doesn't rise straight up to its destination, a curved stair takes up more space than a spiral. Another possibility for restricted openings or other unusual situations is the combination straight-spiral stair (bottom).



COURTESY OF STAIR WORLD



RICHARD SEXTON

COURTESY OF THE IRON SHOP

of treads, from plain Jane to grated to lacy filigrees. Another says they can duplicate any design you send them. If you plan to cover the treads with carpet, you can get flakeboard treads or metal ones with predrilled holes for underlayment.

Stairs with solid risers have a more substantial look, while open risers give the spiral a "floating" appearance.

Handrails are available in everything from polyethylene to aluminum to elegant brass and woods with volutes and scrolls.

Balusters are probably the commonest way to vary your stair design. In an Arts & Crafts house you might want to go with simple square balusters. A few turnings in the baluster would complement a Colonial Revival, or you could tart up a Queen Anne with double fleur-de-lis, scrolls, baskets, or brass center collars.

The spiral's sophisticated geometry keeps it from being a project that most of us could turn out on our own, but kits, preassembled designs, and the plethora of options available make it relatively easy and affordable to wind up giving spiral stairs a whirl. 🏠

Suppliers

THE IRON SHOP

metal and wood kits and custom stairs
(800) 523-7427
www.TheIronShop.com
Circle 18 on resource card.

PIEDMONT SPIRAL STAIRS

wood spiral stairs
(800) 622-3399
www.piedmontstairs.com
Circle 19 on resource card.

SALTER INDUSTRIES

metal and wood stair kits
(800) 368-8280
www.salterspiralstair.com
Circle 20 on resource card.

STAIR WORLD, INC.

wood stair parts
(800) 387-7711
www.stairworld.com
Circle 21 on resource card.

STEPTOE & WIFE

cast-iron stairs re-created from Victorian designs
(800) 461-0060
www.steptoewife.com
Circle 22 on resource card.

UNIQUE SPIRAL STAIRS

helix-style assembled wood stairs
(800) 924-2985
www.uniquespiralstairs.com
Circle 23 on resource card.

The Art of

BY GORDON BOCK **M**any of the techniques that form the core of historic preservation are actually traditional tools, methods, and materials developed over centuries for the maintenance and repair of existing buildings, but not all of them. The modern restoration movement also makes active use of the full arsenal of modern building technology, such as power tools for cutting stone, or lasers and computer software for analyzing problems. This includes the use of man-made materials and compounds, and one of the most versatile and effective materials in this arsenal is epoxy technology. Epoxies have continued to grow in their popularity and versatility over the last three decades, but many old-house restorers are still not clear about all these materials can do—and perhaps just as important, what they cannot do. It doesn't help that there are many epoxy products on the market, each engineered to operate in an individual way and often for specific uses or kinds of projects. To help with understanding this still-growing methodology, we have put together the following primer to help explain the common applications and general use of epoxies in old-house restoration as a guide for understanding what's possible for matching products and projects.

What is Epoxy?

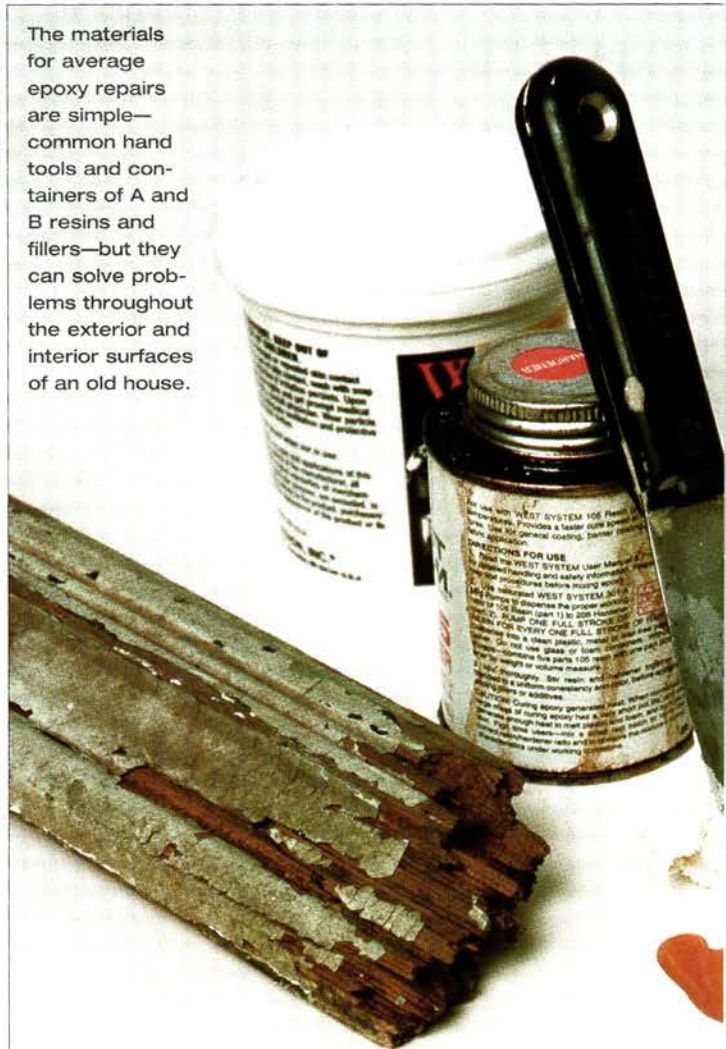
Epoxy first became a household word in the 1960s, when a new breed of super-strong adhesives started to appear in local hardware stores. Its extensive use dates back as far as the 1940s. Like plywood, Plexiglas, and many other innovations that later became construction materials, epoxy technology was perfected during World War II, in this case as an alternative to metal fasteners for joining members in aircraft production.

Briefly, epoxies are petroleum-based resins that cure to a solid state when combined with the right amount of the appropriate hardener. Epoxies are two-part systems—typically cans or tubes labeled A and B—that must always be mixed immediately before application. In contrast, a one-part system like yellow carpenters' glue is usable right out of the bottle at any time.

Epoxies are also thermosetting—that is, they create heat as they cure. This is important to remember because substantial quantities of mixed resin and hardener—excess left in a mixing container, for example, or a pouring 1" or more thick—can generate enough heat to melt the container or burn the epoxy. For the same reason, resin that is warm or used in a warm environment will cure at an accelerated rate. (Direct sunlight also will speed up the curing reaction.) The good news is temperature can be used to improve the working properties of the epoxy during adverse conditions, by cooling the resin in an ice bath on hot days to increase the pot life, or circulating warm air around a project in cold weather.

The materials for average epoxy repairs are simple—common hand tools and containers of A and B resins and fillers—but they can solve problems throughout the exterior and interior surfaces of an old house.

PHOTOS: CHARLES STECK



Epoxies

A primer on what's possible with thermosetting resins.



Consolidant effectively saturates the deteriorated wood of thin objects, such as window sashes, with repeated brushings that pay particular attention to end grain. Large projects often require small holes for deeper penetration.



Epoxy fillers bond best to wood that was previously consolidated and cured. Note how the weathered wood has completely absorbed the low-viscosity consolidant applied earlier.



The A and B components of fillers are usually different colors to help with proper proportioning and thorough mixing—critical for complete curing of the epoxy.



COURTESY OF ABATRON

Top: The strength and superior bonding qualities of epoxies make them well adapted for the patching and resurfacing of poured concrete and masonry—temperamental materials to repair. Above: Epoxies formulated with the proper fillers are available for work on ferrous and nonferrous metals as well as ceramics.

Consolidants and Fillers

Epoxies have really come into their own in restoration work for the repair and reconstruction of wood building parts. Where the component still retains its general shape, but has lost much of its integrity due to rot, fungal growth, or insect damage, epoxy consolidants can be used to reinforce the remaining wood fiber. Generally speaking, the consolidant is resin that has been formulated for low-viscosity so that porous wood readily absorbs it like a sponge. Ideally, the consolidant penetrates right to the threshold of sound wood, returning the damaged area to a significant percentage of its former strength and consistency when it cures. In small projects, resin and hardener mix is often simply brushed repeatedly onto the component surface as the wood drinks it up. Larger projects often require perforating all of the damaged wood with small holes in strategic spots to enhance saturation, then filling these holes with consolidant mixture from a squeeze bottle. (Consult the manufacturers' recommendations for instructions.)

The typical consolidation candidates in old houses are the rot-

ted parts of window sash, doors, and carved or moulded features, such as newel posts and column details. Indeed, the beauty of consolidants from a practical (as well as historic preservation) standpoint is that they retain as much as possible of the original wood. Moreover, they can often be used without removing the building part from its installed position. Epoxy consolidants, however, are for the most part not reversible; once they have cured they cannot be undone with, say, a special solvent.

Consolidants help restore the integrity of wood, but it takes epoxy fillers to replace lost wood fiber. These materials are resins and additives combined (often in proprietary mixtures) to make a gap-filling paste. Unlike simple one-part wood putty, epoxy fillers are, again, mixed from A and B components and often formulated not only to adhere well to consolidated wood (which helps increase their bond in tough, outdoor conditions) but flex like wood and even tool like wood with planes, chisels, and sandpaper.

Autobody fillers and resins, which appear to be similar, are not wood restoration epoxies. Generally, these are polyester resins that cure with the addition of a catalyst. They are not formulated for absorption by wood. The fillers in particular are engineered to adhere to and move with sheet metal, and therefore they may not stay in place on, say, a wood window sill.

Epoxy fillers are ideal for filling the voids and holes in wood: checks and splits from weathering; holes from old hardware, countersunk screws and nails; lost knots and woodpecker holes. However, the right fillers can also be used to reconstruct totally lost features by building up the filler in several stages, then sculpting or forming it with woodworking tools.

The epoxy curing process actually has three stages, and this can be a great advantage when working with fillers. When the liquid resin or paste filler is first mixed with hardener, it remains in

Suppliers:

ABATRON

5501 95th Avenue
Kenosha, WI 53144
(800) 445-1754
Wood, concrete, and metal epoxy systems
Circle 41 on resource card.

CONSERV EPOXIES

7 Goodale Rd.
Newton, NJ 07860
(973) 579-1112
Circle 32 on resource card.

EPOXY TECHNOLOGY

14 Fortune Drive
Billerica, MA 01821
(978) 667-3805
epoxy products
Circle 33 on resource card.

PRESERVATION RESOURCES GROUP

P.O. Box 1768
Rockville, MD 20849-1768

(301) 309-2222
PRG structural epoxy systems
Circle 34 on resource card.

PC PRODUCTS

221 S. Third St.
Allentown, PA 18102
(610) 432-3543
epoxy products
Circle 35 on resource card.

SYSTEM THREE RESINS

P.O. Box 70436
Seattle, WA 98107
(800) 333-5514
epoxy products
Circle 36 on resource card.

WEST SYSTEM

P.O. Box 908, Dept. 71
Bay City, MI 48707
(989) 684-7286
epoxy products
Circle 37 on resource card.

an easily manipulated first stage called *the open time* or *working time*. Before the epoxy cures to the third solid stage, it passes through a second stage, often called the *gel* or *kick-off stage*. In this short stage, the epoxy has begun its initial cure; while it is no longer a liquid it is not quite yet a hard solid. When fillers reach this soft, rubbery stage, the time is ideal to rough out general shapes and remove large amounts of material by quickly sculpting them with “cheese grater” tools (such as Stanley Surform planes). With experience, it’s possible to quickly work the filler without breaking its bond to the wood, waiting until the filler has cured hard for final shaping and sanding.

Important Considerations

Epoxy consolidants and fillers are very versatile and user-friendly, but they still require proper preparation and evaluation of their appropriateness before moving ahead with a project.

Moisture—The root of all building problems, moisture is a critical issue with epoxies. Wood damaged by rot or fungal growth needs to have 1) the source of moisture corrected and 2) the wood thoroughly dried through air circulation or heaters. Epoxies cannot penetrate wood fiber that already has a high moisture content such as might be found in the inner sections of a post or column. Moreover, if the consolidant is applied so that it cures on only the dry outer surface of such a member, it will trap the moisture inside the wood where it will continue to promote damage. For this reason, some restoration conservators use consolidants in conjunction with wood preservatives, such as borates, when working on large repairs.

Appearance—If the epoxy repair is in, say, a floor that is due to have a clear varnish, its visual impact is worth noting. Epoxy products made for wood restoration are generally formulated with clear or amber resins and wood-toned fillers. Nonetheless consolidants, like any adhesive, can slightly alter the tone of wood, and fillers do not generally take stain the same as wood.

Cost Versus Value—Volume for volume, epoxy fillers and consolidants are more expensive than most woods, so the value—both economically and philosophically—of making repairs with epoxy versus new wood has to be considered. That is not to say that repairs cannot be a hybrid of epoxies and patches of new wood, but the time and expense of a large epoxy repair on a common, mundane building component—a simple porch railing, for instance—may be better spent on a feature that would be much more difficult or costly to replace in-kind, like a carved column capital.

Safety—Like any active compounds, epoxies should be used with proper care and respect by following the manufacturer’s instructions. Wear gloves and eye protection and avoid getting liquid materials, especially hardeners, on skin. Work with good ventilation.

Epoxy technology has proved so effective for the repair and reconstruction of wood building parts that over the last decade the methods and products have expanded to a wider range of building materials. With

concrete now in its second century of wide use, epoxy products are increasingly turned to the repair and construction of features built with this material. Epoxy repair techniques for the repair of load-bearing members, such as heavy timber beams, have grown steadily since experiments in the 1970s. As epoxy technology continues to extend its track record and grow in applications, we are bound to see more. 📷



Above: When cured, epoxy fillers formulated for wood restoration can be shaped and sanded the same as hardwoods. Below: Fillers are also effective for reconstructing the lost portions of complex decorative elements, such as this football-sized newel cap. The deterioration at the core is typical of conditions that require drying and perforating the wood before consolidating. Bottom: In advanced applications, epoxies are also used to rebuild beams. In this model, horizontal fiberglass rods reinforce an epoxy prosthesis cast in place on a rotten beam end.

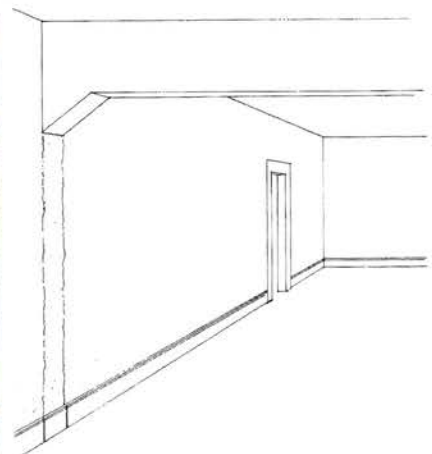


PHOTOS CHARLES STECK; MODELS COURTESY OF PRG PRODUCTS



Fitting for a bungalow, the newly recycled colonnade creates an entrance to the dining area through its matching rectilinear woodwork without impeding the flow of the early 20th-century open floor plan.

Right: An earlier view of the living room. The bulk-head running along the ceiling clearly suggested that the rooms had once been further divided. Far right: Wood and plaster patches down the walls hinted at a previous built-in such as a colonnade.



ILLUSTRATIONS ROB LEANNA

A Salvage Installation Case History

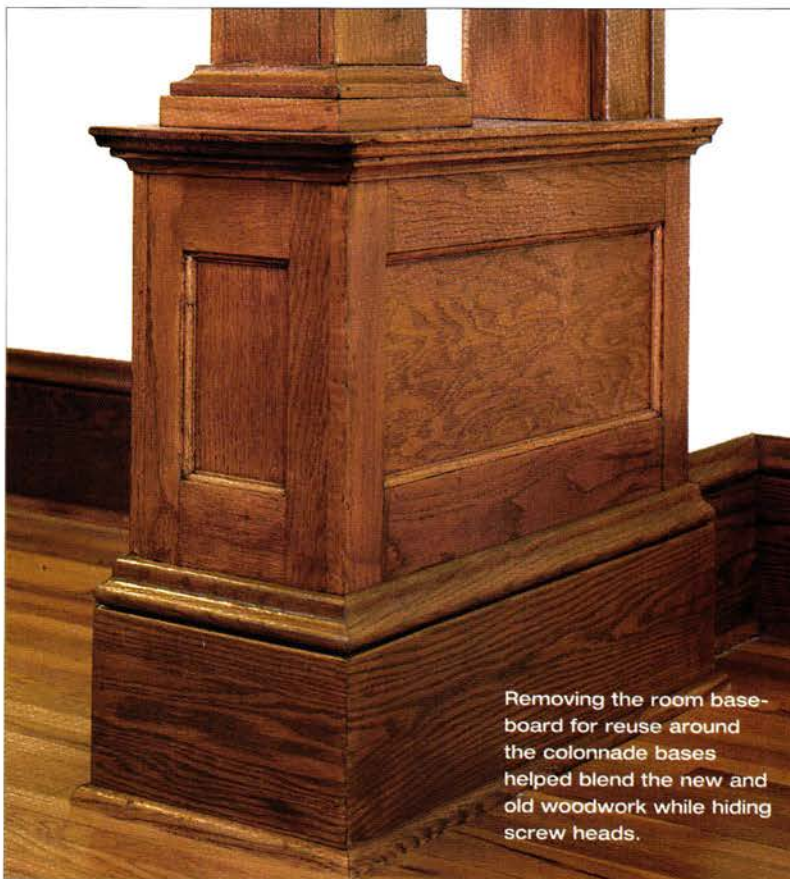
BY TOM GUELCHER **M**y new client had been frustrated by her 1919 Arts & Crafts bungalow here in Minneapolis ever since she moved in seven years ago. The problem was an unsympathetic—not to say disastrous—modernization that had probably taken place

in the 1950s. Among the long-gone decorative features were the cove moulding along the ceilings, the beveled-glass mirror behind the built-in sideboard, and most conspicuously, an oak colonnade between the living and dining rooms. Of course, countless bungalows met a similar fate in the mid-20th-century, when the ranch house represented the latest in modern residential design. Since my client's goal was to restore her bungalow to its original state, my main project became to replace the missing colonnade. Here are the steps it took.

Preparing the Parts

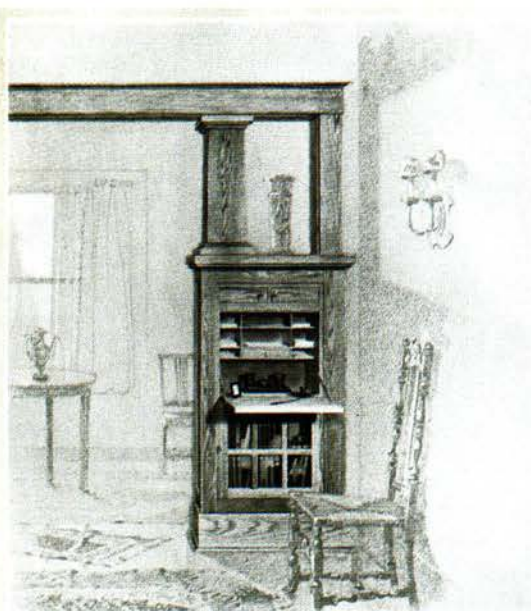
To save money I suggested that my client try to find a salvaged colonnade. Accordingly, she visited four architectural antique warehouses in the Twin Cities and was fortunate enough to locate an antique unit for \$900. Before she closed the deal, I inspected the unit and determined that it was exactly the type widely sold in catalogs at the turn of the century (see page 66) and, with modifications, perfect for the house. It consisted of two knee-high boxes, each 24" long x 12" wide and topped by a 6' tall square pier or "column," including enough trim to case out the opening. I was glad to find that the columns were square—a better match with the typical Arts & Crafts details in the rest of the house than the Colonial-Revival feel of round columns. More important, the unit was wider and higher than the opening I had to work with and therefore ideal to cut down to the right size. To be sure, the installation would still be a bit of work, but even so using the salvaged colonnade would save my client at least \$2,000 over the cost of constructing a unit from scratch.

Inside the bungalow,



Removing the room baseboard for reuse around the colonnade bases helped blend the new and old woodwork while hiding screw heads.

New Home for a Bungalow Colonnade



Inter-Room Openings C-543 and C-544

HARDLY a family nowadays but does not keep some sort of record of income and expense. A bookcase like this helps make that task a lighter one. Notice the places for stationery, correspondence, memo books and the like, while below is a desk.

C-543

Complete opening includes one writing desk pedestal as illustrated, and one pedestal, jamb, and two columns from design C-542, page 98. For dimensions see page 98.

C-544

Complete opening includes one writing desk pedestal as illustrated, and one pedestal, jamb, and two columns from design C-543, page 99. For dimensions see page 99.

Colonnades were sold by millwork companies up to the 1930s in dozens of styles (and by several names). Like folding ironing boards and breakfast nooks, they were prime examples of prefabricated, built-in cabinetry that often incorporated clever space-saving features, such as bookshelves, flatware storage, or the writing desk shown here.

I had to work with a 24"-deep "bulkhead" or overhead wall dividing the living room and the dining room along the ceiling, plus two badly patched vertical strips where the original colonnade had once met the walls of the rooms. Here, each baseboard was patched with 12" filler pieces. Since I wanted to enhance the separation between rooms as much as possible, I decided not only to leave the bulkhead in place along the ceiling, but also to extend it to two 12" minipartitions that would project at right angles from each wall. I could then insert the colonnade into the space between and below these three short structures.

When I dropped a plumb line from the middle of the overhead wall to the floor, I was not surprised that it didn't line up with the centers of each of the two baseboard filler pieces. I've worked in enough old houses to know that nothing is ever perfectly plumb, level, or regular. So to ensure that the new

minipartitions would line up with the 12" openings in the baseboard, I framed each end partition to accommodate the angle from floor to ceiling. I then discovered that the original plaster in the overhead wall was thicker on one side than the other. To make up the difference, I varied the thickness of the mud I used to cover drywall at the junctions between the minipartitions and the overhead wall.

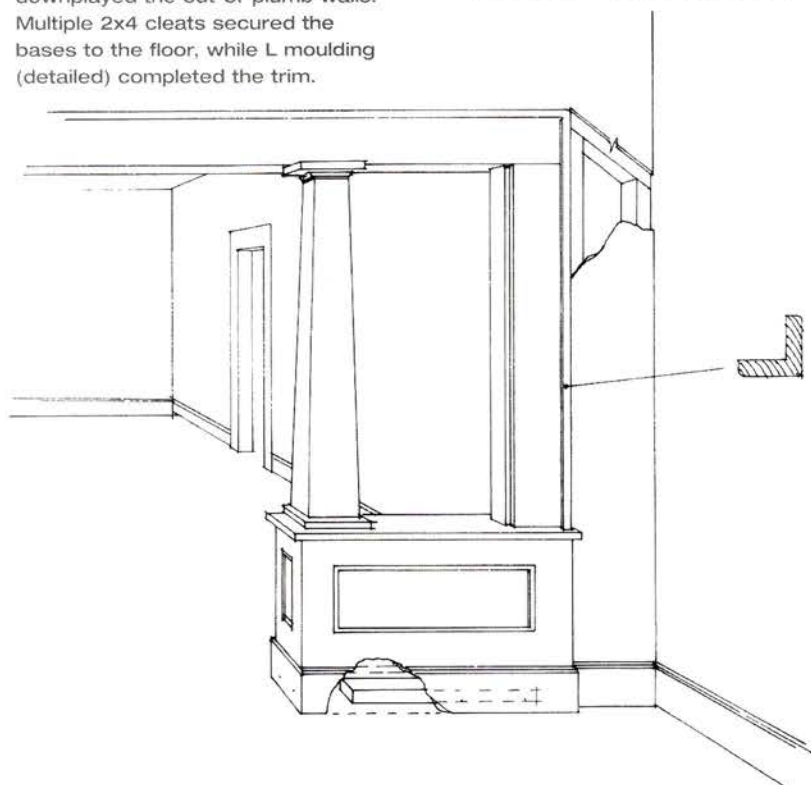
After I had completed the new minipartitions, I realized yet another problem. Because I had to match the partitions to the thickness of the overhead bulkhead, the original baseboards now fell short of the end walls by about 3" on each side, leaving four tiny gaps. Since patching these spaces would have been unattractive, I chose instead to remove the entire lengths of original baseboards on both sides of each sidewall. I carefully tapped

the blade of a wide putty knife between the baseboard and the wall, and then another directly behind it. In this way, I was able to insert a prybar between the two blades and nudge the baseboard away from the wall without damaging either the main board or the base cap. By repeating this process several times, I was able to pry the four sections of the old baseboard away from the plaster walls on each side of the colonnade and save them for trimming out the bases of the new colonnade.

Installing the Components

The next step was to attach the colonnade securely to the floor. Like many catalog-ordered cabinets and millwork products today, colonnades were designed as prefabs for quick installation in a wide variety of buildings. After removing and discarding the baseboards from the boxes, I began by screwing two 2x4s to the floor on each side

Standard stud framing covered in drywall extended the bulkhead down on each end into minipartitions that downplayed the out-of-plumb walls. Multiple 2x4 cleats secured the bases to the floor, while L moulding (detailed) completed the trim.



using 3" wood screws. I was then able to slide the boxes over the 2x4s and secure them by driving 3" wood screws through the boxes at the base and into the 2x4s. These screws would be covered later by new baseboard. After that I further secured the boxes by toe-driving two large screws through the tops of the boxes into the 2x4s within the end walls. Now the boxes were secure indeed.

The next challenge was to find base cap (the moulding that rests atop the baseboard) to match the pattern already in the house. Fortunately, back at the architectural salvage store I found an adequate supply of matching base cap that had only to be stripped of old finish and installed. I then trimmed out the entire opening above the boxes with the salvaged colonnade casing, having first cut all the pieces down to the correct size.

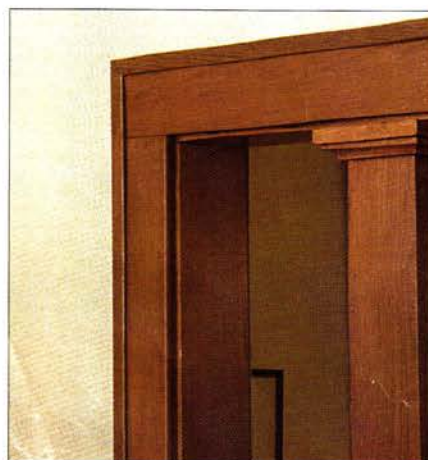
Now that I had the exact height that would be needed for the columns, I could trim them to size by carefully measuring the distance from the bottom up, squaring the faces, and cutting each face with a handsaw. Since the piers are battered (tapered) on all four sides, I had to first establish an imaginary plumb line from each corner, then square from this point. Only then could I wedge the shortened piers into place. Finally, I removed the ornate Victorian crown moulding (which did not match the original woodwork) from the header, and replaced it with modern 1" L moulding from a standard lumberyard. I used this moulding, also called "door lip" or "backband," to edge all the casing trim as well.

Finishing Touches

To match the reddish-brown color of the existing woodwork in the house, the salvaged colonnade had to be stained. Fortunately the old finish, blackened and alligatored with age, turned out to be shellac, so I was able to strip it with denatured alcohol, non-metallic scrubbing pads, and a little elbow grease. Once I had the colonnade down to bare wood, I used a two-step method to match the stain. First I applied a heavy wipe-off paste stain because this type allows more control over the final shade than liquid stains. After the stain had dried, however, I saw that it would have to be darker still, so I applied a stain-tinted varnish to further darken it, protect it, and to match the sheen of the 90-year-old woodwork in the rest of the building. The room divider was now installed in all its glory, and all that remained was to paint the new walls to match the old ones.

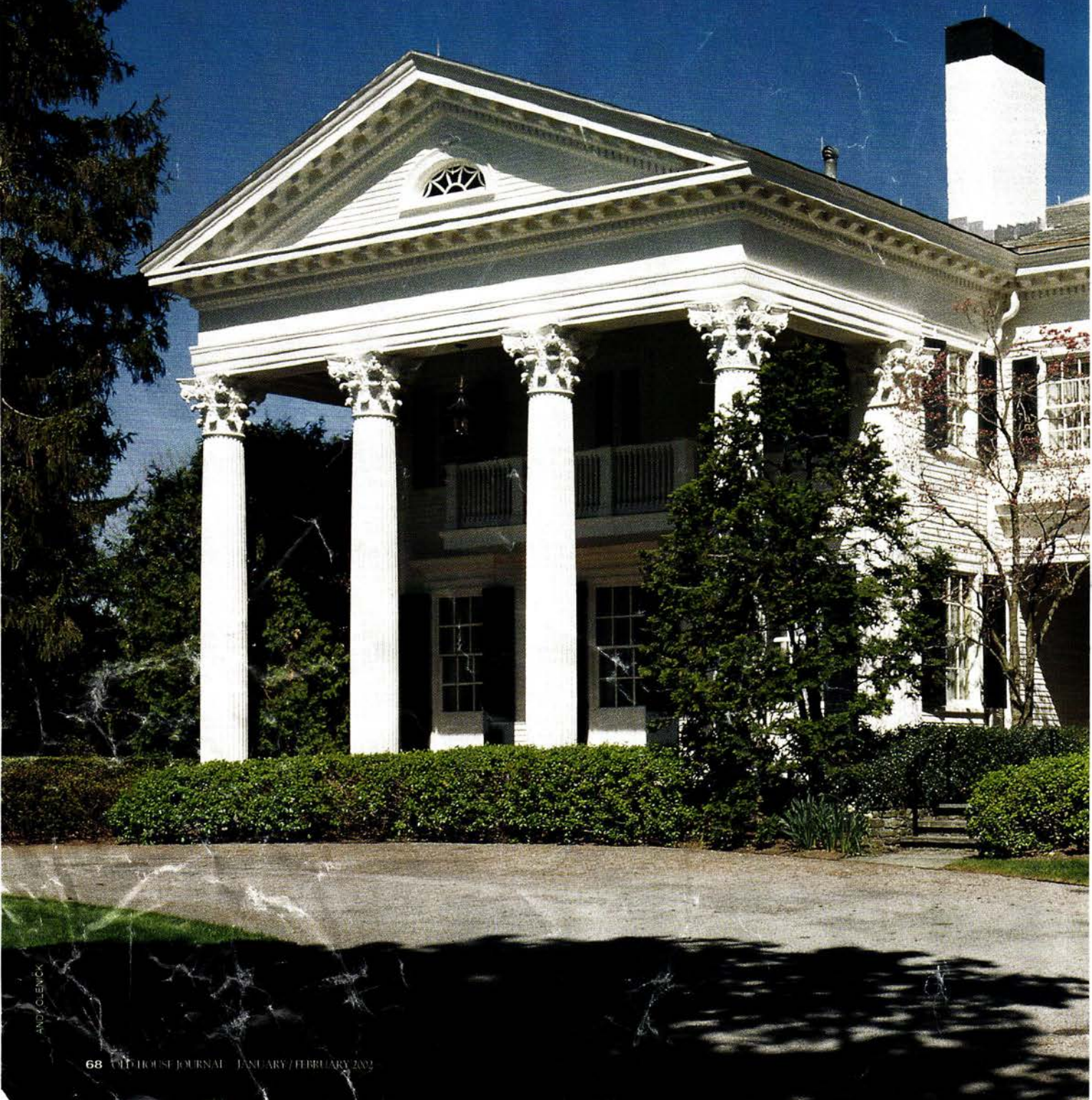
At this point the project was supposedly done, and my client was delighted with the results. However, when I offhandedly mentioned that her sideboard probably once had an oak-framed beveled-glass mirror, she could not resist extending the project a bit more. When I removed the later plate-glass mirror from the sideboard, I was happy to discover that the original oak frame was still intact behind it. I next installed the new mirror that I had ordered from a glass company with a bevel to match the windows in the front door. I secured the mirror with 5/8" cove moulding, stained before installation. The result of these changes exceeded our expectations. Not only did the bungalow feel cozier than before, but the enhanced separation between the two rooms actually created the illusion of a larger home—and the new fittings looked as though they had always been there. 🏠

Below: The horizontal header trim supported by the colonnade is actually built around a large cleat attached to the underside of the bulkhead with construction adhesive, a method that avoided potential plaster damage from nails or screws. Bottom: The sideboard now complete with its new beveled-glass mirror.



Tom Guelcher is the principal at the Turning Point Woodworks (1270 Grand Ave. St. Paul, MN 55105; 651-698-4227).

The Neoclassical



Style (1890 - 1920)

BY GORDON BOCK There is no clearer hallmark of classically inspired architecture than a columned entry porch, and few houses make more of columns, or the rest of the classical design vocabulary, than those built

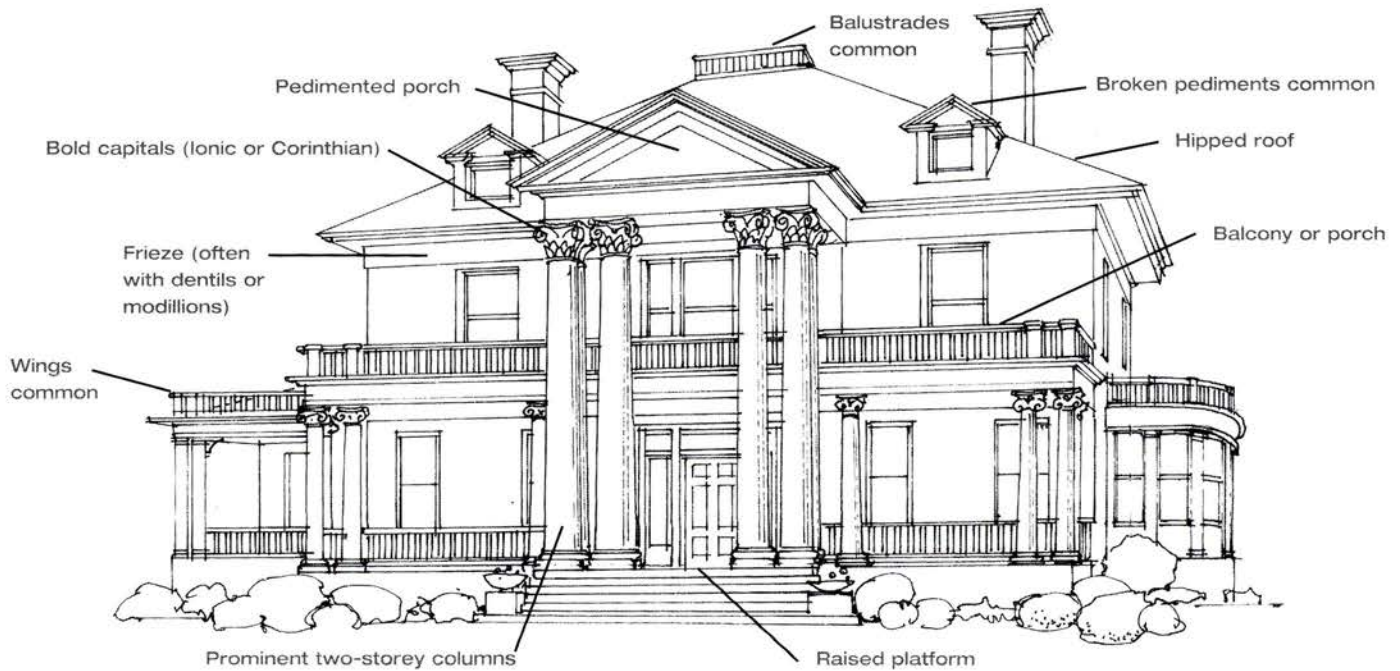
after 1890 in the Neoclassical style. The label is sometimes applied to buildings of the Federal period—particularly those of the Jeffersonian mode—but the vogue for templelike houses that rebounded at the dawn of the 20th century was a classicism of a different sort. Neoclassical houses of 100 years ago were not only large, but they also made abundant use of oversized features—so much so that they might be better called hyperclassical.

Deja Classical

Indeed, what distinguishes late 19th-century Neoclassical houses—or Neoclassical Revivals as they are sometimes called—from earlier classically inspired buildings is not so much a new interpretation of the ancient Greco-Roman orders, but its expanded use on a much larger scale. Neoclassical houses begin with the same geometrical forms and symmetrical layouts that are the basis of balanced, rational classicism as synthesized by Renaissance scholars and architects such as Andrea Palladio. What's different is their extravagant and eclectic use of details. These houses incorporate far larger features and more historical ornament—and from a greater number of sources—than buildings from any of the previous classical modes.

Porches are perhaps the best example of this tendency to classically overcompensate. The central entry of a Neoclassical house is almost always covered by some type of columned porch—and what a porch it is. While Georgian- and Federal-style houses from a century earlier might be built with understated, one-storey, half-round porches, the Neoclassical house extends such a porch to the full building height, making it dominate the façade with an arc of columns and a prominent rooftop balustrade. Many Greek Revival houses feature a pedimented portico with two-storey columns, but the Neo-

When Francis Mitchell rebuilt this massive house in Pittsford, New York, in 1922 after a fire, the Rochester architectural firm of Gordon and Kaebler chose to recast the façade with a full menu of Neoclassical details—most visibly, the dominating full-height portico replete with flowery Corinthian columns, a robustly modillioned cornice, and massive triangular pediment with semicircular window.



classical version accentuates the idea with massive columns and bold capitals, usually in the Ionic or Corinthian order and often fluted. As if this weren't enough, there may be a second porch running the full width of the house at the second-storey line.

Greek Revival houses sometimes ex-

panded the portico to the full width of the house. Neoclassical houses do the same while eliminating the pediment to create a full-height colonnade, a treatment that continued to be popular into the mid-20th century. Though wings and extensions may also carry their own porches, Neoclassical porches,

surprisingly, appear primarily only on the front façade of the house. The columns themselves were usually academically correct, especially on earlier houses, but the architectural order was not guaranteed to be consistent throughout the rest of the house.

After porches, doors and windows are

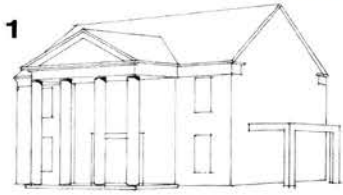


ANDY OLENICK

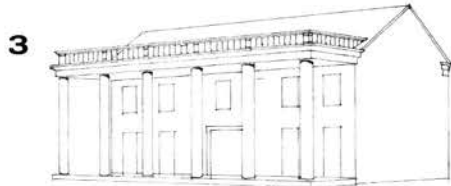
The parlor of the George L. Williams-Edward H. Butler House in Buffalo, New York, (above), is as richly appointed on a grand scale as the building's exterior (see page 72) and may also show the hand of its architect Stanford White, who often designed furniture for his clients.



Neoclassical Forms and Features



Invariably full-facade in height, Neoclassical porches appear in three general forms: 1) classical pediment, less than full building width; 2) curved or semicircular, usually with roof balustrade; 3) full facade, spanning the entire elevation of the building.



ILLUSTRATIONS ROB LEANNA

the next best places to see the heavy hand of Neoclassical detailing. Top-broken pediments—rich decorations usually reserved for the exteriors of only the most high-style Georgian houses—appear regularly over Neoclassical doorways and windows. What's more, they are often theatrically oversized,

heavily scrolled, and deeply carved. Unbroken pediments rendered with equally bold relief are less common but also typical. Actual entrances do not stray wildly beyond earlier classical models with sidelights or paneled doors. Windows, however, are in many instances clearly turn-of-the-cen-

tury "cottage windows"—a multi-paned decorative sash over a single-paned bottom sash. Cornices, too, got the Neoclassical spin with broad use of aggressive-looking dentils and modillions.

Beyond this, the other characteristics of a Neoclassical house are noteworthy but not extraordinary. Roofs are typically hipped, especially in early houses, but flat, gable, and gambrel roofs also appear. Balanced wings and extensions are common on these often imposing houses. Balustrades are another favorite touch, especially along the perimeters of main roofs, porch roofs, and balconies.

Why Neoclassical?

In America as in Europe, the late 19th century was a golden age of exhibitions—large-scale industrial and mercantile fairs that were widely attended and often highly influential. In much the same way that the 1876 Centennial Exhibition sparked a new interest in the American past and helped launch the Colonial Revival Movement (which continues to this day), the 1893 World's



ANDY OLENIK

An iconic example of the Neoclassical style is the Williams-Pratt House (1895-96) in Buffalo. It was built for Charles H. Williams by Stanford White who, though he didn't make it as opulent as the Williams-Butler House next door, still managed to create an elegant entrance on the narrow façade by fronting this massive brick example with a semicircular porch that effectively spans its width.

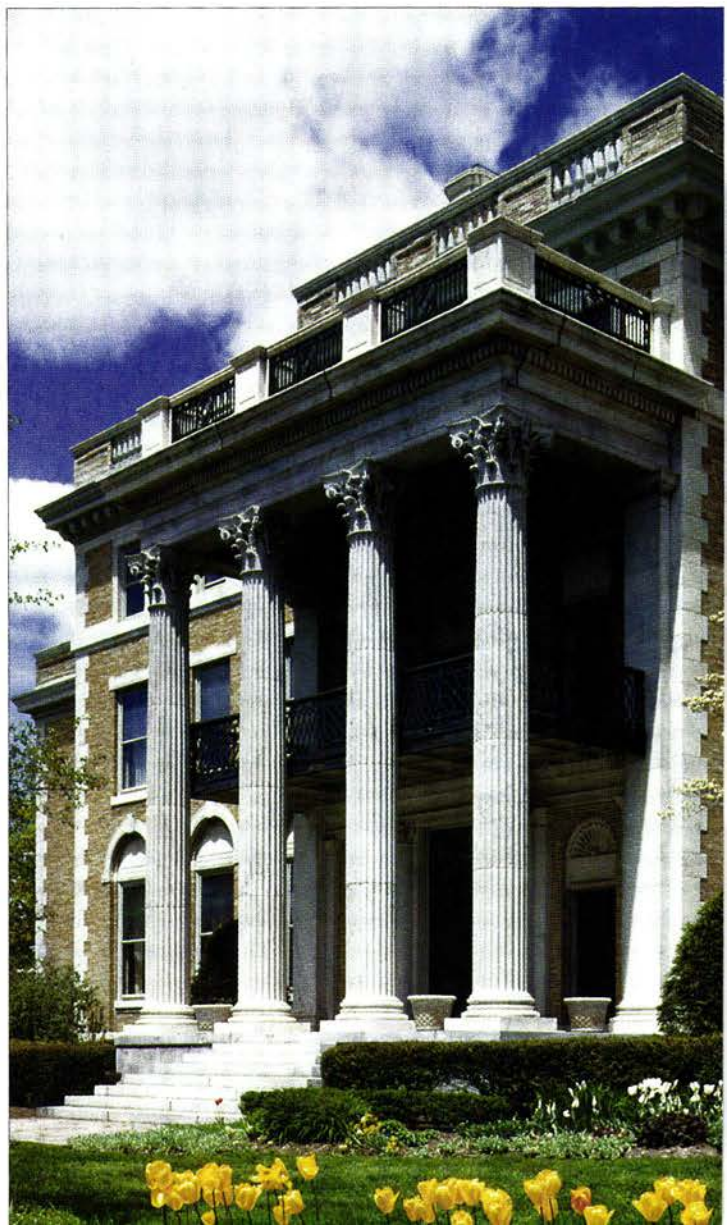


Columbian Exhibition in Chicago set a new course in architectural taste that would remain steady until well after World War I.

Major buildings in this immensely popular and widely promoted fair had to have a classical theme, and many of the day's leading architects competed to design them. The centerpiece was the Great White City by Daniel Burnham, a concourse of monumental piles in the Beaux Arts style that single-handedly inspired the City Beautiful movement. Equally popular were state pavilions and buildings designed by the likes of Charles B. Atwood (who trained in Burnham's office and later worked for Herter Brothers, the furniture studio) and McKim, Mead & White, the pre-eminent architectural firm of the era. Many of these architects employed both Greek and Roman orders as motifs that would percolate through to the housebuilding public shortly thereafter in Neoclassical houses.



Top: Another common Neoclassical approach is to present the full-height porch on a platform or set of stairs. The roof balustrade seen here stands out even more silhouetted against sky rather than roof. Above: Top-broken pediments built with deep scrolling to sometimes overbearing dimensions were used repeatedly over many Neoclassical windows. Such bellicose scaling appeared almost as often on early Colonial Revival houses of the day.



It comes as no surprise then that the Neoclassical was a “top-down” style originated by formally trained architects and realized at first in the houses of the very well-to-do. In particular, Stanford White of McKim, Mead & White made a specialty of the style, producing landmark examples such as the Williams House in Buffalo, New York. Like the Beaux Arts—and Italian Renaissance—style houses that came into vogue at the same time, these houses were academically correct, generously proportioned, and expensively fitted out for clients who were industrialists, financiers, and socialites. For many of the newly minted millionaires of the 1890s, in fact, a Neoclassical house seemed to strike the right balance between instant, imposing grandeur and ponderous, European-derived establishment.

By the 1910s, however, the key features of the Neoclassical idiom had filtered through

the ranks of the architectural profession to local carpenter-builders who could apply columns, pediments, modillions, and balustrades to vernacular house types like the ubiquitous shotgun house in New Orleans. Ready-cut house purveyors such as Sears Roebuck and Gordon-Van Tine even dabbled with the style in a model or two.

As with all fashions, part of the appeal of the Neoclassical style was its departure from the houses that preceded it. Neoclassical houses represent a shift in taste away from the brooding medieval quirkiness of Victorian houses. Where the Queen Anne, for example, is typically asymmetrical, with round towers and polygonal bays, Neoclassical houses are symmetrical with rectangular rooms and forms. Where Victorian houses are either painted in the drab greens and ochers of the Brown Decades or polychromed in multiple contrasting col-

ors, Neoclassicals are usually uniform in color and often totally white.

Prosperous decades and the full flower of the Industrial Revolution made possible the florid use of all that ornament and helped propel the popularity of Neoclassical houses. Capital columns, for example, are often molded from terra-cotta, plaster, or one of the early manmade composition materials. In fact, part of the impact of the of the Columbian Exhibition came from the “staff” used in its construction—a mixture of plaster-of-Paris and fiber that was a cheap, temporary method for producing ersatz marble and the stunning all-white color scheme of the fair. Though it always remained second in popularity to the Colonial Revival movement, the practicality and instant recognition of the Neoclassical helped keep it a viable style for residential buildings well into the 1950s. 🏠



ANDY OLENIK



JAMES C. MASSEY

Left: Stanford White set another Neoclassical standard with the George L. Williams—Edward H. Butler House (1895-98). George Williams commissioned McKim, Mead & White to build this mansion immediately adjacent to his brother's house in a tour-de-force of classical details created with all the technology the Industrial Revolution had to offer. Above: Several levels down from the masonry mansions of the Gilded Age, but still far from modest, the Neoclassical as it appeared on main street in many American towns: an imposing full-height porch with balcony—albeit with fewer columns—fronting a wood-frame building.

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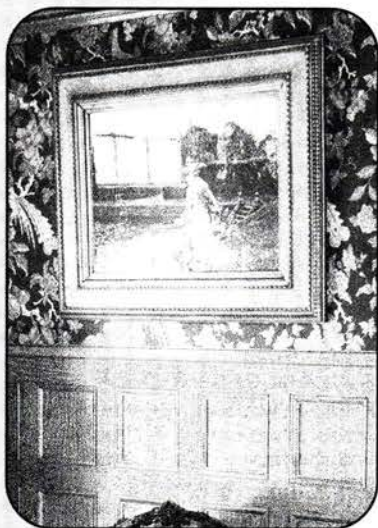
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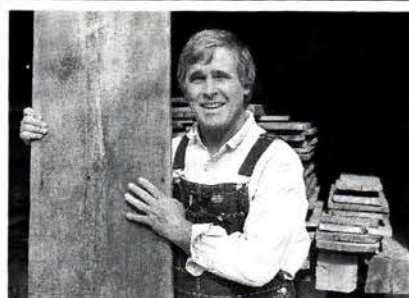
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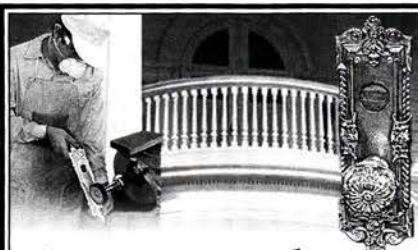
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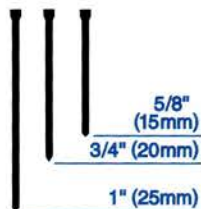
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WoodEpoxy: structural adhesive paste fills and replaces missing wood. It is applied in any thickness, and can be sawn, nailed, stained and worked like wood.

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AboWeld 8005-6 bonds new concrete to old concrete permanently.

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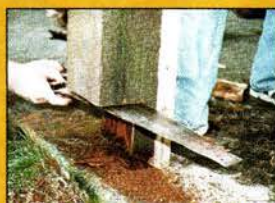
MasterMold 12-8: liquid version of MasterMold 12-3.

AboCast 4-4: liquid moldmaking and casting compound. Machinable.

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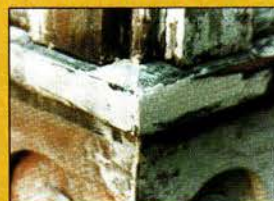
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Rotted loadbearing column base sawed off and replaced with **WoodEpoxy**.



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Consolidation and rebuilding of rotten windowsill with **LiquidWood** and **WoodEpoxy**.



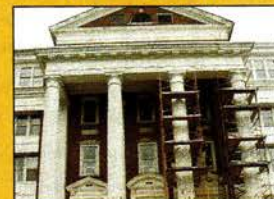
AboCrete is much stronger than concrete and bonds permanently.



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A glossary of terms for
in-town dwellings.

Getting Those Ducks in a Row

BY JAMES C. MASSEY AND SHIRLEY MAXWELL

What's in a name? Could be plenty, when it comes to the confusing array of multiple-house types Americans have lived in through the ages. Here's a quick run-down of the many ways houses have been joined at the hip.

Row House This is the classic multiple house, found in the earliest U. S. cities and built ever since in urban—and in recent times, even in some decidedly exurban—areas. It is found in a linear formation (i.e., row) of three or more narrow

buildings sharing common, or party, walls with their neighbors to either side, with no space between them. Only the end houses in a row could have windows on their side walls, except in the narrower rear wings, which were common until the 1920s. Row houses are most often two- or three- storeys high, not counting the basement and attic, and usually three bays wide (two windows and a front door) with the entrance most often off-center. Since the 18th century, the shared walls have been designed as masonry fire walls, extending up past the roofline to prevent fires from spreading through the attics. The row house may or may not have front and/or rear yards, and the rear of the house is approachable only by an alley, if at all. In the case of the ubiquitous early 20th-century worker's row house in eastern cities, block after block featured identical houses varied only by an end unit that might be a store or a tavern.

Airlite In the 1930s and 1940s the row house became wider (16' to 20' rather than 12' to 16') and lost its rear wing, along with its dark middle rooms.

Town House (Town Home) A more modern term for the row house. "Town home" seems to be the currently favored term of real estate brokers and developers. Nowadays, more than in the past, there is a conscious effort to vary the size, design, and placement of adjoining units in order to create an effect of individuality.

Twin House or Double House Another venerable house form, this one has

Twins, such as these Tudors in Langley, Virginia, are side-by-side dwellings often designed as mirror images.



PHOTOS: JAMES C. MASSEY

A tasty mix of Georgian Revival *façades* enlivens this block of row houses in Washington, D.C. Note the classic bow-front version, just right of center.





The double-deck entry porch hints that this house in Dearborn, Michigan, is a duplex with separate occupants on each floor.

been around since the 18th century. It is actually two separate houses, with two different owners, that share a single party wall but not a single tax parcel. Each house has one side yard and possibly a front and rear yard as well.

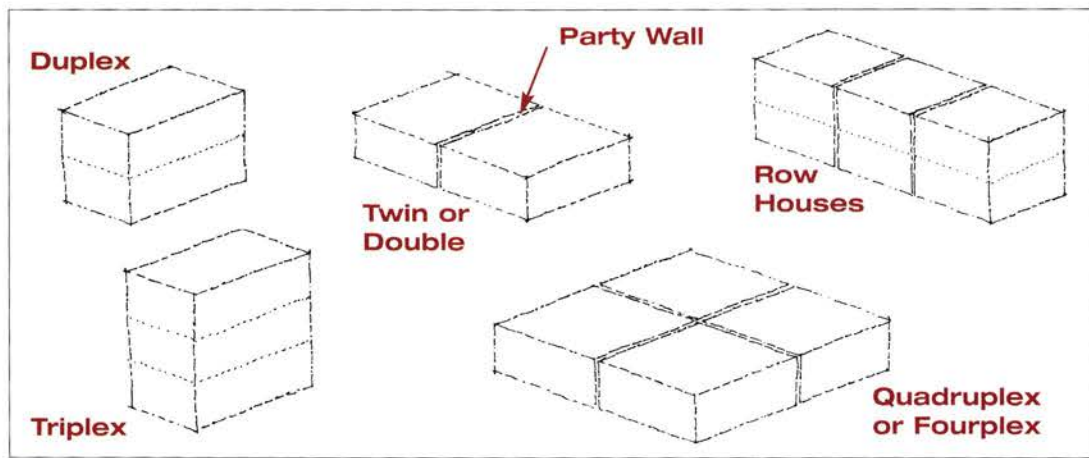
Duplex The duplex is really one house, although it may have two owners, or at least two separate occupants, one on each identically laid-out floor. Here, the division is horizontal rather than vertical. The building could be two rental apartments or two owner-occupied condominiums. In earlier times it was common for the owner of the building to live on one floor and rent out the other.

Triplex Same idea as a duplex, but with three storeys and three apartments. In Boston and Providence, these are called “triple-deckers.” Anything bigger than three storeys, such as the Chicago Six-Flat, is more properly termed an apartment house.

Quadruplex Sometimes called a “fourplex,” this 20th-century house type has a cruciform plan, with a separate house at each of the four corners of a building block. In this case, each house has two party walls that meet in the center of the group and two yards, one in front, one on one side.

Suntop This famous version of the quadruplex by Frank Lloyd Wright was built in 1938 in Ardmore, Pennsylvania—elegant, convenient, and, as its name suggests, filled with light. 🏠

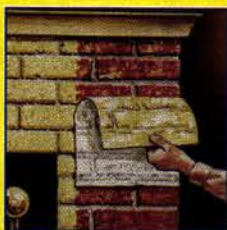
The most common multiple houses in urban areas are different combinations of two to four single-owner living units.



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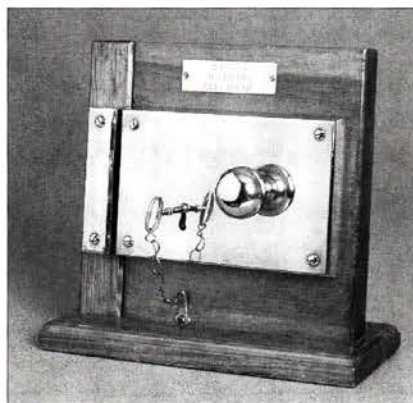
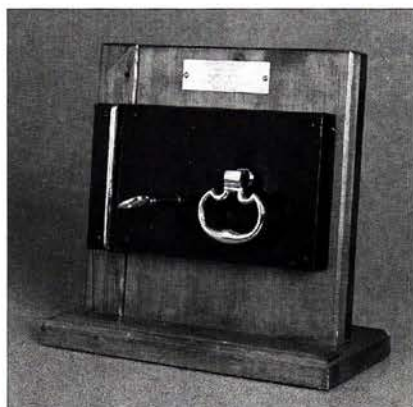
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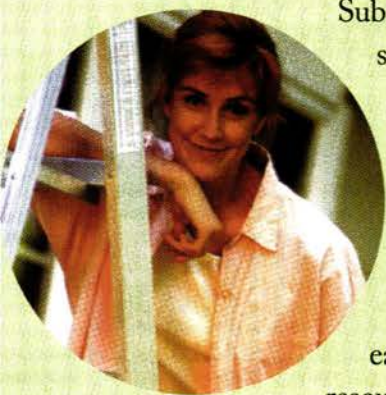
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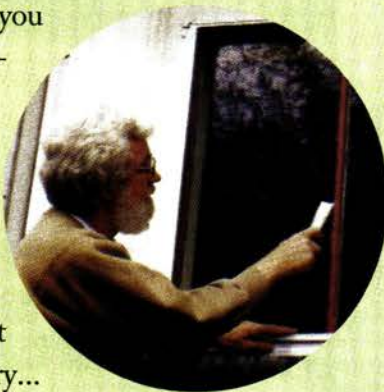


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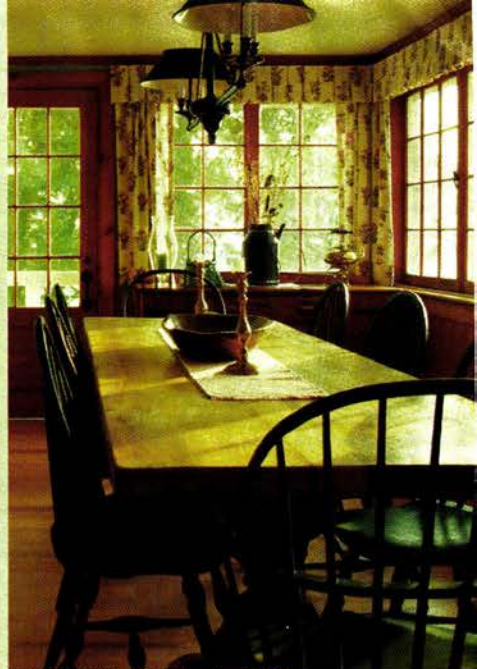
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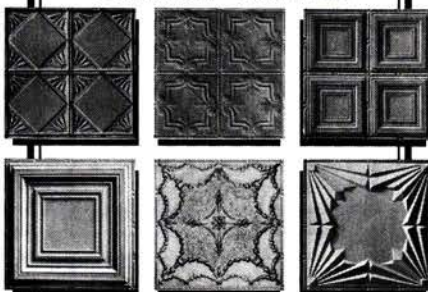
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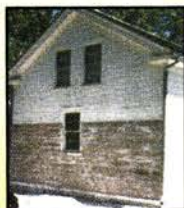
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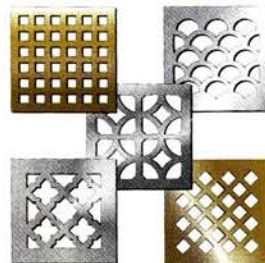
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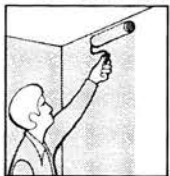
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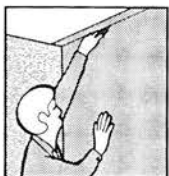
1. Cut fiberglass mat 2" longer than height.



2. Apply saturant to area to be covered.



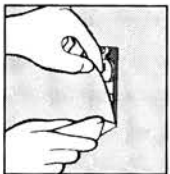
3. Apply fiberglass mat to wet surface.



4. Trim excess mat where wall meets ceiling.



5. Trim mat at baseboard and window.



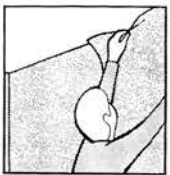
6. Trim mat at outlets, switches, etc.



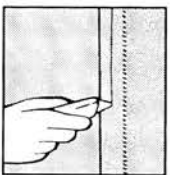
7. Apply second coat of saturant to wet mat.



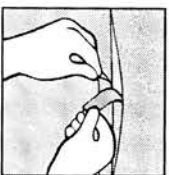
8. Apply 1st coat of saturant to adjacent area.



9. Apply mat to 2nd area, overlapping by 1".



10. Cut down center of overlap (both layers).



11. Remove mat strips on both sides of cut.



12. Apply 2nd coat of saturant (include seam)

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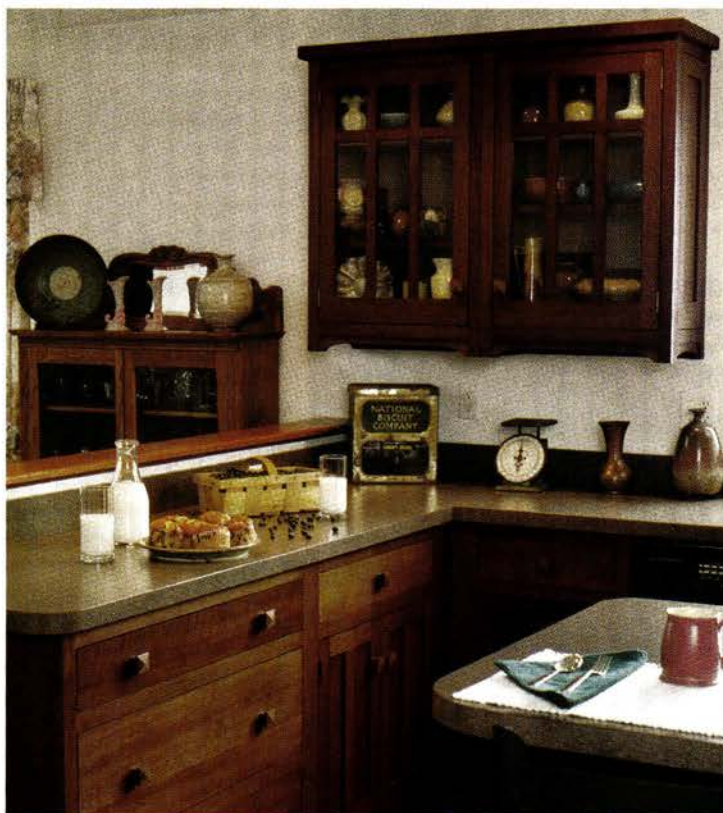


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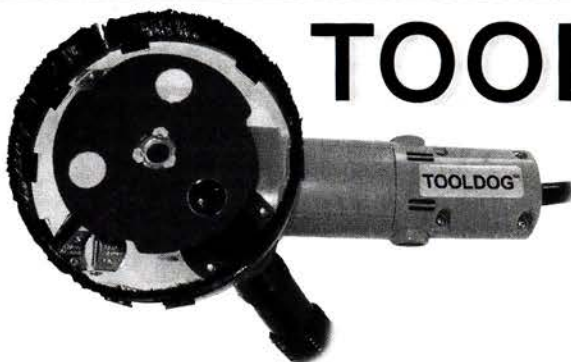
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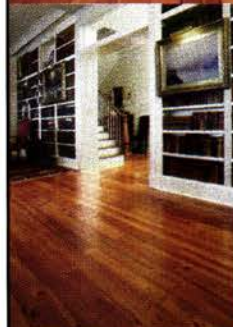
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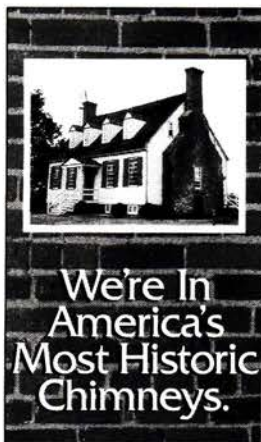
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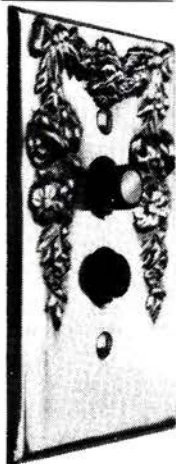
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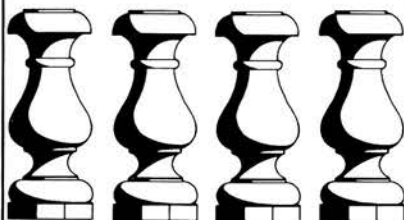
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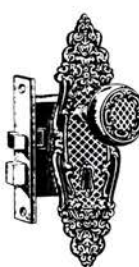
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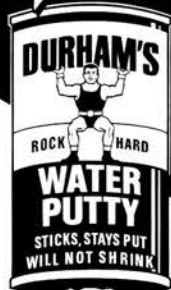
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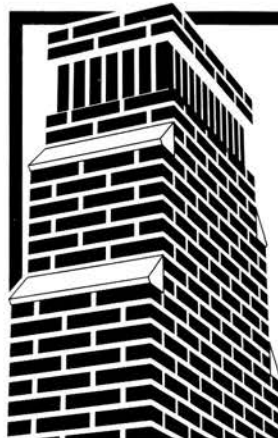
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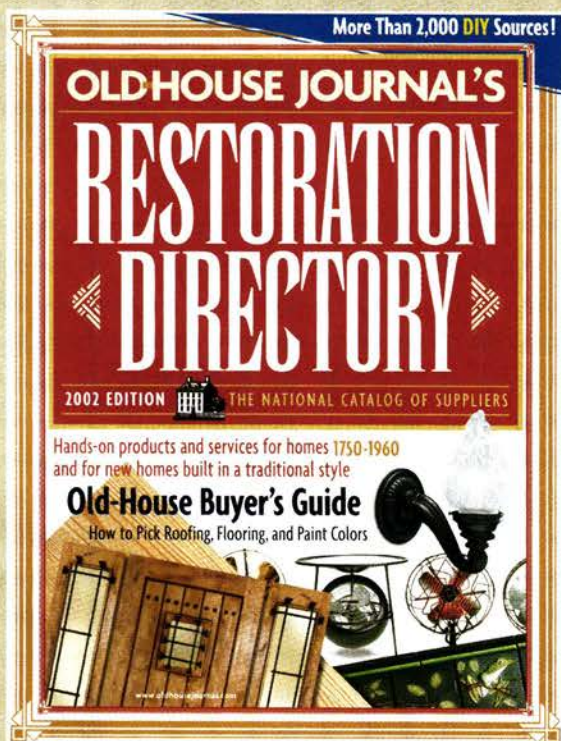
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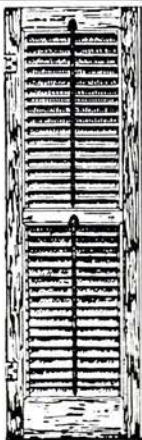
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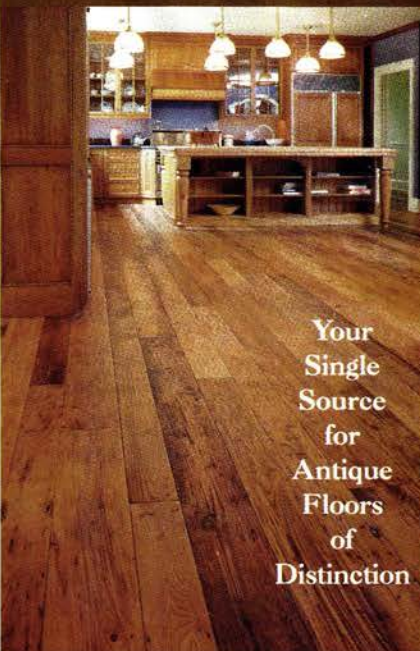
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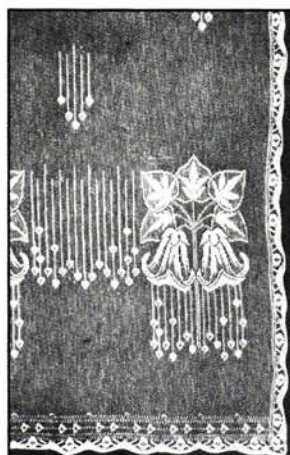
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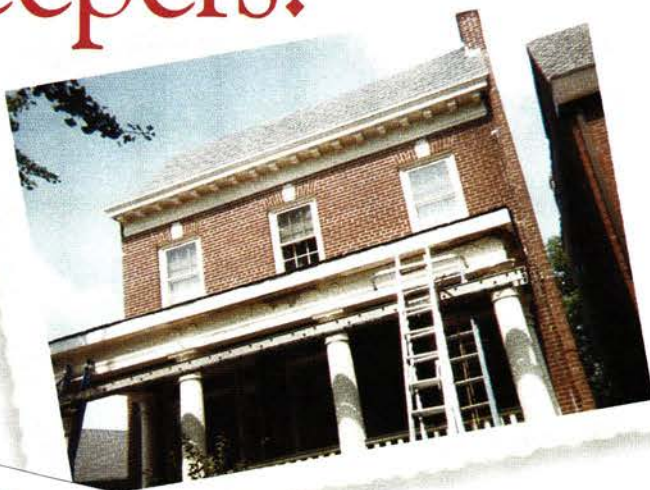
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