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# Old-House





September / October 2003 Volume 31 / Number 5 Established 1973





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## Old-House









#### **Productive Experience**

If you're looking for a handy way to find quick answers to questions about old-house products, OHJ Online has a new feature that will help you out. Go to the site's home page, scroll down to "Looking for Restoration Products," and click on. You'll come to a list containing scores of companies offering products and services for the old-house owner. Click to one that interests you, and you'll discover a helpful package of facts, including a short description of the company, contact info, product pictures, a Web link, and the ability to order extensive product literature online.

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### Editor's Page

# On Turning 30 in '03

any times I've been asked if OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL ever runs short of fresh article ideas, or if the people who put it together ever lose interest in old houses. I've had the privilege of being on staff at OHJ for three major birthdays now and working with our team of trusted editors and contributors for more than a decade. Speaking from personal experience, I can say conclusively the answer is, "Not a chance!"



With the issue you hold in your hands, OHJ celebrates its 30th anniversary—a testament surely to the long and steady growth of a unique publication, but no less to the increasing scope and popularity of historic preservation. As many readers know, when OHJ began in 1973, it was as a black-and-white 12-page newsletter that more or less focused on Victorian inner-city dwellings. Thirty years later OHJ fills a full-color magazine that embraces the world of historic houses, from the earliest medieval examples of the 1600s to the ranches and split-levels of the 1950s. It's a world that will continue to expand with time and our increasing knowledge. Who could be bored in a field as rich and deep as this?

Just the other day a colleague noted, "When people ask me, 'What's different about OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL?' my answer is, 'We're 30 years old!'" That is precisely the point. OHJ did not materialize a decade ago to jump on some bandwagon when demographers suddenly noticed that half the American housing stock was more than 50 years old. Indeed, we helped get the wagon moving—even helped build it—and that is a story we've been highlighting all this year on OHJ's 30th "Anniversary Countdown" page. From championing the fight to save Victorian buildings, to recognizing the significance (and preponderance) of bungalows and mail-order catalog houses, to the new frontiers of preserving the architecture of the recent past, OHJ has been—and continues to be—in the vanguard.

Back in the 1980s, when OHJ was already in its teens, the oracles of magazine publishing announced that the general-interest magazine was gone, and the demise of *Life* magazine and other landmark titles certainly seemed proof. The new wave, they said, would be the special interest or "niche" magazine that provided a specific audience with specialized information and useful insights. Everyone at the editorial office said the same thing: "That certainly sounds like OHJ!" How could we be there ahead of the pack? By not being in any pack, of course, but by serving a real need, pursuing an intense interest, indulging a love.

Said the stranger to the woman with a clutch of kids, "How do you divide your love among so many children?" She replied, "I don't divide it, I multiply it." In the years to come we'll continue to multiply the articles and experiences in OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL for old-house lovers like me and you.

Georfeel



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### Letters



### **Unique Porches**

The July/August article on porches is beautiful, showing varieties and individualities lost in most of today's buildings. Alas. There is a street in Hudson, Massachusetts, that I drive down in a somewhat swivel-headed fashion. It has at least two dozen houses with porches that are all different. I look for the same posts, baluster turnings, rails, rail patterns, and brackets, but all are different. If the street were built today, all the bits and pieces would be the same. *John J. Rogers* 

Bolton, Massachusetts



**Open-and-Shut Case** The house in the photograph on page 90 of the July/August issue is almost identical to the Ryan House in Dubuque, Iowa. Its porch was open until the late 1960s, when it was glassed in, as seen in the photograph, shortly before the house was converted into a restaurant. In almost 30 years of experience as an architectural conservationist, I have yet to encounter an Italianate house with porches that were originally enclosed in glass. David Arbogast Iowa City, Iowa

The house shown is actually the 1869 Wesley House at Drew University in New Jersey. In fact, many porches of that era were partly lost—or very shortly afterwards—to make them more useful yearround.—Eds.

### More Tile Tips

I congratulate you on your sound answers to the inquiry about the tile mantel in the



July/August "Ask OHJ." Living in Kentucky/Ohio for eight years gave me an appreciation of the Rookwood designs, glazes, and production. The fact that Rookwood was started by a woman [M.L.Nichols] added to my interest. Before specializing in Ernest Batchelder tiles I spent some happy years detecting how Rookwood achieved their luscious glazes, which is what they are especially known for. Your reader's tiles may have either the soft buttery surface or the more glossy one. Either way, I would emphasize caution while wet sanding after a filler. If there is some dulling of the surface, a discrete dab of a good paste wax (such as BriWax) should bring up the sheen. Marie Glasse Tapp Tile Restoration Center, Inc. Seattle, Washington



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### Letters

### Faux Slate Source

We want to replace the artificial slate tile on our roof. I noted in your July/August 2002 article on faux slate roofing that there is one made of slate and resin and molded into shapes like real slate, but the company isn't referenced. *Kenneth Sterne* 

Alexandria, Virginia

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### After the Storm

The East Main Street Historic District in Jackson, Tennessee, was hit May 4 by tornadoes. Seventeen houses that range from 1857 to 1915 were all heavily damaged. We are a small, close-knit group dedicated to our homes. One home we are

in danger of losing is the McKinney House, an 1878 Grand Italianate 20-room mansion and one of the best on our street. The owners had insurance, but not nearly enough. They have worked on the house for 23 years and can't tackle it again, although they are buying another here on the street.

We need information

on support that we might get. The owners are willing to donate the home to a corporation that has the resources to redo it, perhaps as a hospitality house. *Russ Talley Jackson, Tennessee* 

### **Cool Solution**

I read with interest "Keeping Your Cool" (July/August) by Marylee MacDonald. As a historical architect and restoration addict, I'm well aware of the challenges inherent in upgrading HVAC systems of old houses, and the potential tradeoffs between function and aesthetics. After 30 years as only the second owner of my National Register Queen Anne, all the while changing storms and screens, lugging window air conditioners, putting up and taking down awnings, I decided it was time for central air.

I decided against a high-velocity system, shuddering at the thought of cutting through 100-year-old plaster and snaking ductwork through walls. Other approaches required cutting into pristine floors. The perfect solution had been there all along. In 1910, the heating system had been converted from gravity air to hotwater radiators. The wall ducts and grilles from the gravity system were still in place, the grilles beautifully framed by meticulously crafted woodwork.

Working with an engineer, we ran some numbers and found to our surprise that the original system (many of these



old gravity systems apparently are oversized by today's standards) would handle the task with the addition of only one supply duct to the kitchen. We ran new trunkline ductwork and installed the blower unit in the basement, and *voila*!

The Queen Anne is now delightfully comfortable in the summer and winter. In the summer, the blower unit circulates and dehumidifies the air. In the winter, hot water circulates through the radiators. And best of all, no more changing storm windows with a 40-foot ladder. *Charles W. Nelson South Park, Minnesota* 



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### Letters

### Another Side of Kragsyde

A feature article in the June 1987 OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL tells of the reproduction of Kragsyde, a house in Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts, designed by architects Peabody & Stearns and demolished in 1929. The new design, Kragsyde II, was built on Swan's Island, Maine, beginning in 1982.

The fascinating OHJ article takes the reader through the near-completion of the exterior of the house. Do you know the current status of the house and its owners? *Edward F. Turberg* (address withheld)

The original 1882 Kragsyde was one of the most inventive houses to come from the offices of Peabody & Stearns (who thereafter stuck to more conventional, Colonial Revival buildings), and today it is regarded as one of the lost masterpieces of the Shingle style. Scholar Vincent Scully is credited with rediscovering the house in the 1950s, and its famous photo of a rambling, multi-bayed building straddling a rocky site with a massive Richardsonian arch has become an icon of the style.

Inspired by the photo, Jane Goodrich (a graphic designer) and her husband Jim Beyor (a builder by profession) found the original plans at the Boston Public Library and adapted it to a new site by building a replica in mirror image. The results can be seen in the book Shingle Styles (Harry N.Abrams Inc., Publishers; 1999) with beautiful photos by Bret Morgan and text by Leland Roth. —Eds.

### Polished Brass

My wife and I just purchased a house built in 1928. Our problem is that all the interior oak panel doors have been painted. All the brass-plated doorknob backplates are painted as well. How can I remove the paint off the backplates without destroying the brass finish? Any special tricks for removing the paint from the hardware? *Derek Katz Cleveland*, *Ohio* 

Check out this issue's "Ask OHJ" on page 24 for tips on stripping paint from hardware.—Eds.

Send your comments to "Letters," OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL, 1000 Potomac Street NW, Suite 102, Washington, DC 20007. Please include your name, city, and state.

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### Annunciator

### Calendar

### September 7 WOODSTOCK, N. Y. Guided Walking Tour of Byrdcliffe

The Arts & Crafts colony of Byrdcliffe celebrates its centennial this year. Founded by Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead, it has 35 Arts & Crafts buildings spread across 300 acres in the Catskill Mountains just three hours from New York City. For more information on this free event call (845) 679-2079 or visit www.woodstockguild.org.

#### September 13–14 LUNENBURG, NOVA SCOTIA

Historic House Tour Lunenburg, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, celebrates its 250th birthday with a historic-house tour. House styles range from 18th-century to Arts & Crafts. Tickets are \$20. For more information call (902) 634-3749.

#### September 18–20 CHICAGO, ILL. Restoration & Renovation Exhibition and Conference

During this event, the Historic Resources Committee will hold two workshops: historic structures and historic tax credits. For more information visit www.restorationand renovation.com.

### September 20–21 PORT TOWNSEND, WASH. *Fall Homes Tour*

Port Townsend boasts the Northwest's greatest selection of Victorian homes and buildings on the National Register. The tour is selfguided. Advance tickets are

### Lampshade Chic By SANDRA BECKWITH

Flip the light switch in a dark room and your eye automatically goes to the light source probably a ceiling fixture or a lamp with an off-the-rack, vanilla ice cream-colored shade that disappears into the décor.

That frustrates lampshade artist Amy Noto, who restores old shades or creates unique custommade designs for older homes. "Lampshades from the turn of the century, for example, were eve-catching, with ornate beading and vibrant colors," she explains from her studio and shop, Archipelago, alongside the historic Erie Canal in Pittsford, New York."Back then, when electric lighting was so new, people used lamps to both illuminate and beautify a room. It's such a shame that we don't use lighting that way any more."

Noto restores older lampshades that customers bring from their attics, family homes, or flea markets, or she starts with a new frame selected to match a customer's home décor. Typically, she says, customers are part of the creative process





Custom lampshade artist Amy Noto stretches fabric over a frame she has wrapped with twill ribbon. Below: Noto's finished Victorian shades.

as they select the shade shape, fabric, and trim. A recent customer worked with Noto to create a design that was intended to become a family heirloom. Many customers provide leftover fabric from a decorating project, but Noto also stocks vintage and new fabric that catches her eye, or she shops for material based on customer specifications.

Interior decorator Greta Goss, who occasionally uses custom shades in decorating projects, advises her clients to make certain

> the fabric selected is appropriate for the amount of light needed from the fixture. Goss also suggests selecting a shade that complements the home's age. "For a bungalow, you will never go wrong with a cream-colored semitransparent linen or burlap or with tussah silk," she says.

Fabric lampshade making involves wrapping a wire frame with twill ribbon, which provides an anchor for fabric that is glued or stitched into place. The artist covers the seams with upholstery-type trim; the finishing embellishment is often a beaded or fringed border applied to the bottom edge of the shade.

Those ordering custom or restored lampshades need patience—Archipelago's customers wait eight to 10 weeks for shades ranging in price from \$25 to \$300. While it often takes eight hours to create a lampshade, Noto embraces each project with the enthusiasm of a child who buys a new outfit for the first day of school but can't wait until then to wear it. "I love the creative process of finding pieces that go well together."

Whether using a flea market frame updated with new fabric or a new frame covered with grandmother's tablecloth, Noto says a custom lampshade will add personality to any older home. "Lamps from the past always made such a statement in a room," she adds. "There's no reason why we can't revive that tradition."

You can view Noto's work at www.archipelagolamps.com.

Sandra Beckwith writes from Fairport, New York.

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### Annunciator

### Calendar

\$13 for adults and \$7 for children younger than 12. The event is sponsored by the Jefferson General Hospital Auxiliary. Funds raised will go toward equipment for Jefferson General Hospital. For more information call (360) 385-2722 or visit www.ptguide.com.

### September 30–October 5 DENVER, COLO. *National Trust for Historic*

**Preservation Conference** The theme for this year's conference at the Westin Tabor Center Hotel is "New Frontiers in Preservation." Topics include downtown revitalization, preservation of post-war resources, preservation planning and new urbanism, and heritage tourism. Full registration before September 25 is \$355; students \$130. For more information visit www.nthp conference.org.

### October 8-9

JACKSONVILLE, FLA. **Preservation Seminar:** Using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties This seminar, held by the National Preservation Institute in cooperation with the Jacksonville Historic **Preservation Commission** and the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department, will explore the standards in detail with attention to character defining details, preservation of historic fabric, and use of replacement materials. The cost is \$375. For registration information on seminars call (703) 765-0100 or visit www.npi.org.

## Learning Down on the Farm

The Preservation Trades Network's International Trades Network Workshop will be at Blandair Farm in Columbia, Maryland, October 9–11. This annual event brings tradespeople together for three days of hands-

on demonstrations in preservation of slate and metal roofing, plaster repair, decorative painting, timber framing, tool making, shutter and sash restoration, repairing lime mortars, building dry stone walls, and much more.



Participants at the Preservation Trades Network's International Trades Network Workshop can explore hands-on training in traditional building techniques.

A unique, preserved parcel of Howard County's agricultural past, Blandair Farm represents a rural oasis in the middle of the 1960s planned community of Columbia. The workshops will use much of the 300-acre historic farm complex for classrooms, demonstration areas, and camping.

The event will begin with a keynote address by Clem Labine, founder and publisher of Traditional Building and Period Homes magazines as well as founder of OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL. Labine will discuss the future of preservation and how the building trades will help shape that future. Training classes will be offered prior to the event in timber-framing repair, paint removal, and safe lead paint practices. For more information call (860) 633-2854 or visit www.ptn.org.



### Going for the Green

"Building Green" will be a major theme at the fall Restoration & Renovation Exhibition and Conference, September 18–20, in Chicago, with a Green Pavilion (of specialty products) and a Green Theater (of tips for professionals) to spread the philosophy of renovation and construction that protect the environment. Through a cooperative program with the U.S. Green Building Council, suppliers, manufacturers, designers, and other professionals will be encouraged to develop more sustainable sites and make better use of resources and materials.

One presentation within this green theme will be on green bungalows and will focus on a model city program to make 50year-old housing (there are more than 80,000 bungalows in Chicago) more energy efficient.

Homeowners should enjoy programs on regional architecture: Sears kit houses, middle-class residential architecture from 1900, unique features of North Shore Chicago houses, and the appropriate look of Arts & Crafts homes inside and out. Of interest to anyone who owns an urban or suburban home will be a session on adding on to a house that is on a small lot. Attendees can also hear a panel of experts discuss such great and controversial Chicago-based architects as Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan, Howard Shaw, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Mies van der Rohe. For more information visit www.restorationandrenovation.com.



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### Essay

# Fame: My More Than 15 Minutes

#### Spring 1977

It's 2 a.m. in New Orleans, and I'm sitting on an abused, off-balance washing machine. At this time of day, I can run all my clothes in a line of machines and read my new OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL. Strange for a college freshman? Not at all. I'm studying architecture and historic preservation in this beautiful city filled with ornate old houses. And I've set two goals for myself: 1) Save enough money to order all the back issues of OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL. 2) Restore a great old house and tell the story in this publication.

#### **March 1982**

The oil boom roars in Oklahoma City. For \$18,000 I buy a 1912 bungalow in Paseo, a streetcar suburb. The gas main rambles under two other houses, two driveways, two garages, and several large sycamores. Two weeks and \$3,600 later, the new lines pass inspection. I stage the ceremonial flush of the new pipes just as the state's economy goes down the Art Deco toilet.

#### Winter 1984

I live in a ghost neighborhood full of vacant dwellings selling for \$1,500. New "neighbors" have neither keys nor leases, so they enter and exit through side windows. One wakes me each morning with boisterous renditions of "Happy Birthday," aimed mainly at bushes. Another, wearing a Boy Scout uniform, entertains a succession of men in Mercedes, BMWs, and Ferraris.

#### 1987

While crime escalates around us, neighbors start an after-school program for latch-key children and hold house fairs to encourage people not to tear out their old windows and redwood siding.

#### 1988

I recruit one newcomer-Mary. She's definitely the one. Who else would take a halfrefinished bungalow in a sliding neighbor-

hood, stacks of broken-down Mission Oak furniture, a rusted pick-up, three cats, four dogs, and me? Every morning we wave to the prostitutes catty-corner across the street. The grandfatherly neighbor behind us sells crack through a hole in his front door.

### 1991

We no longer joke about the neighborhood being everything it's cracked up to be. Our nightly citizen patrols, in combination with aggressive police programs, move the crime, crack, and prostitution elsewhere. It's time for new leadership in the citizens' association. I've got to finish our house.

#### May 1993

Our twins, Frank and Tom, are born during National Restoration Week. They are the first infants to be born to neighborhood homeowners in 31 years. We realize our house is too small for twins, cats, dogs, and five fish.

#### January 1994

We decide to sell, expecting the process to take two years. Amazingly, the house sells in 35 days for \$49,500.

#### February 1997

There it is on page 50! My wonderful little bungalow in OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL. "Rich as Oil in an Oklahoma Bungalow" promotes the Paseo neighborhood and Oklahoma City. Somehow my front porch pose doesn't look too staged. After 12 years of restoration, the story can be told.

#### 1999

I take a job with an architecture firm in Oklahoma City. I learned that the office



a field trip

had

one day to find my house.

For a short time, I chair the Historic Preservation Department at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia. One day, I meet with a potential freshman and his mom visiting from Amarillo, Texas. When I ask what building type is his favorite, the young man responds "bungalows!" As I begin to tell him about my bungalow project in Oklahoma, his mother interrupts. "You're the guy! We know about your home. We read about it in OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL and planned a vacation to Oklahoma City to visit relatives and find your house."

#### 2001

I give a downtown revitalization workshop in Hobert, Oklahoma. One of the volunteers takes me to her old house to meet her family and see "that OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL with an Oklahoma story" on display in her living room.

#### Spring 2003

We first moved 12 miles away, then 1,200 miles away, and now we're just 12 blocks away in a restored 1921 American Foursquare. This morning, I stopped by the bungalow to photograph the new colors being applied by the third owners since we left. The house will look great. 🏛

**Ronald Frantz** is a preservation architect with the Oklahoma Department of Commerce.

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### Ask OH7

# 30 Restoration Tips

In Celebration of its 30th, OHJ offers 30 cleaning, stripping, and painting tips collected during the past 30 years!

### CLEAN IT

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Brand-name cleaners that are excellent for regular cleaning are often too harsh for restoration cleaning. When it comes to old surfaces, gentle cleansers are key. Some oldtime favorites are Bar Keeper's Friend and Bon Ami. Always start with the gentlest method; always do a patch test.

1 To clean porcelain or tile, use the abrasion and bleach of Ajax or Comet. Porcelain fixtures streaked with green verdigris drips from old copper plumbing or acidic well water can be turned white again with





a mixture of equal parts of Bon Ami and cream of tartar that is moistened to a paste with hydrogen peroxide. Let this paste sit on the stain for 30 minutes before rinsing it off. You can also buy a stain-removal product that contains phosphoric acid which is available at good plumbing supply houses.

2 Old glass is minutely pitted, so it's hard to clean. Forget Windex; use paste cleaner such as Glass Wax, which will buff off when it turns to an opaque mask.

**3** For rust stains in porcelain sinks or tubs, use a paste of oxalic acid crystals (follow manufacturer's safety directions) or a product such as Zud that includes this chemical.

4 For dirty walls and painted woodwork, soap-and-water washing works best. Ivory Liquid is a must. You'll need drop cloths or newspaper, a soapy-water bucket, a rinse bucket, two sponges (natural sponges work better than cellulose), a ladder, and lots of paper towels. Test first an inconspicuous area. Then clean 3'x 3' sections at a time. Contrary to apparent logic, start washing at the bottom of the wall, not at the top. If dirty wash water is allowed to run down over uncleaned sections of the wall, you'll get streaks that will be difficult or even impossible to remove.

**5** To revive wood finishes, mix a tablespoon of Ivory Liquid soap to a quart of warm water and whip it to create a lot of suds, then dip an old washcloth into the suds (not the water) and vigorously rub the wood. Then wipe the wood with a dry cloth to remove any dampness. This method will remove surface grime without harming the patina.

 $5^{\text{To remove built-up wax on varnished-wood floors, wipe the floor with a rag$ 

moistened with turpentine or paint thinner; then follow with a clean cloth. Work on only as large

### HONORABLE UNMENTIONABLES

For polishing furniture and floors, there's nothing softer, handier, or more absorbent than old cotton diapers.

an area as you can clean quickly so the wax doesn't reharden before you remove it.

**7** To kill mold and mildew, mix 2/3 cup TSP cleaner, 1/3 cup powdered detergent, 1 quart laundry bleach, and 3 quarts warm water and apply the solution—while wearing gloves and goggles—to the area with a medium scrub brush. Keep the surface wet until the stain has bleached; then flood with water.



### Ask OHJ

8 Sooty fireplace hearths are best cleaned with a hard-surface cleaner such as one containing sodium metasilicate (MEX is one widely used brand).

9 Marble is highly porous and prone to stains. The good news is many stains may be removed by applying certain cleaners or solvents in an absorbent poultice a preparation typically composed of whiting (powered limestone which is sold at hardware stores). To make a poultice you combine a proprietary marble cleaner and whiting into a "pancake." When this poultice is pressed over the problem area covered in plastic the stain is slowly drawn into the whiting as the solvent evaporates. For organic stains from coffee, tea, or berries use a poultice of hydrogen peroxide mixed with a few drops of ammonia.

10 To shine nickel on stoves, lamps, or other hardware use a nonabrasive such as Nev-R-Dull.



### STRIP IT

Every old-house restorer has had the messy task of stripping paint from everything from wood to windows to radiators. The following are 10 helpful tips to take it off:

11 Don't scrape off chemical stripper before you give it a chance to work. It should loosen all the paint down to the bare wood. If your application dries out before all paint is soft, re-wet with another layer right on top. Wait 30 minutes.

12 Use a polypropylene parts-cleaning brush (found at an auto supply store)



to apply stripper and scrub it off. The brush is stiff and stands up to solvents.

13 To strip cast-iron radiators in place, try wire-sanding wheels chucked into a drill or tap the radiator with a hammer to break the paint bond, then vigorously scrub the surface with a wire brush.

14 If you can't get the last flecks of paint out of the wood pores, brush on shellac cut with denatured alcohol. Let it dry a few days, and then strip with a thin layer of stripper. That usually pulls the paint out of the pores.

15 Scraping tools should be sharp. Touch up the edges every hour or so. It will be easier to scrape, and you won't mar the wood.

16 Metal hardware is easy to strip. Paint doesn't bond well to metal. Immerse the hardware in boiling water with a little vinegar; then hold it under the hot tap and razorblade the paint off. You can also dip it in a mini vat of stripper.

### **HONORABLE UNMENTIONABLES**

Working on hands and knees on a masonry or hardwood floor can be murder on your kneecaps. If so, try doubling up the cups from old, padded bras to make some ad-hoc cushions. When you're caught short for a simple dust mask, a single bra cup may help. The foundation fabric is often the same material used in disposable filters found in hardware stores.

### **HONORABLE UNMENTIONABLES**

When collecting materials to produce decorative wall glazing effects, be sure to grab an old pair of boxer shorts. Bunch the shorts in your hand and pat the paint on the wall so that the elastic waistband and fly seam create interesting patterns.

 $17^{\rm A}$  lot of Victorian woodwork has turned and incised detailing. After your stripper has worked, floss out the softened paint with twine.

18 To strip carved or molded areas with chemical stripper, let it work on recesses for at least half an hour, then scrub with a tooth brush. (Reach-brand tooth brushes don't dissolve in chemical paint strippers.)

19 Some paint strippers say they are "water rinsable" on the label, but be aware that flooding a wood surface with water will raise grain, open glue joints, and loosen veneers. Better to do a solvent rinse

(lacquer thinner, denatured alcohol, or mineral spirits).

20 If glass can be taken out of its frame, soak in hot water with a little ammonia or TSP. While it's still wet, scrape it off with a razor blade. A cloudy residue will remain; lye will take it out. A convenient way to buy lye is Easy-Off oven cleaner.

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### Ask OHJ



### PAINT IT

Another tedious project for restorers is painting. Here are some tips on how to put it back on once you've taken it off:

21 Pressure-washing clapboards is a good alternative to scrubbing clapboards by hand. The problem with power washing is that it can push water into the wood under clapboards and between seams. This can lead to moisture buildup inside walls, and it can cause poor adhesion of new paint. If you decide to pressure wash, give walls good drying time before repainting, and be careful while spraying. It is not wise to spray up at a wall from ground level—from that angle clapboards and shingles will not keep water out. Power wash

### HONORABLE UNMENTIONABLES

Never immediately discard worn-out panty hose. The fine, strong weave of the nylon mesh is great for straining dirt from paints and varnishes. Just stretch the hose across a suitable new container and decant the coating. Nylons are also ideal for polishing clear finishes, particularly shellac.

from a ladder or scaffolding.

22 A good paint job requires a good brush. For oil paints, use the best Chinese bristle or synthetic Chinex bristle brush you can afford.



23 To avoid cleaning the brush daily, wipe off the handle and ferrule at the end of the day with a rag dampened with mineral spirits, wrap the bristles and ferrule in a plastic bag, tape it, and put it in the freezer for as long as a week. For latex paint, select a professional quality, nylon/ polyester or Chinex blend brush. Clean these bristles in water and a little detergent after each use.

24 Before you prime weathered or new woodwork, sand down to bright wood to remove dirt and cellulose fibers that prevent a good paint bond.

25 Keep the paint on the wood and off the window. Protect



the sash with the edge of a wide blade wallboard knife when scraping off excess paint.

26 When painting a double hung sash, pull the upper sash down and push the lower sash up. This allows you to paint the inner sides of the meeting rail.

27 Before painting, make all woodworking repairs such as tightening joints with glue and clamps.

28 Before repainting enameled doors or trim, roughen up the old painted surface with 220-grit sandpaper to create a mechanical bond for the new paint.

29 Before painting apply Safe Release or Easy Mask Painter's tape to separate various areas. Once the paint is dry, pull the painter's tape away for a clean edge.

**30** A time-honored OHJ technique to improve a new paint job on even severely dried out, weathered wood is to treat it with linseed oil before priming. Mix boiled linseed oil and turpentine 50/50 and liberally brush into wood. Allow it to dry for 24 hours and repeat the process. Allow three days for the oil to dry before sanding and priming.

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### Plots & Plans

# Secret Door

or this special anniversary issue of OHJ we have decided to offer an offbeat but often asked-about subject: the details for building a disappearing "secret" door. Though the doors sound mysterious, they actually have a long history in classically styled interior architecture where they are sometimes employed to improve symmetry or coherence by downplaying the presence of an awkwardly placed or numbered door—a solution that is the opposite of adding a false door "to nowhere" for similar reasons. The entrance to the Oval Office at the White House is a famous example.

The details for the secret door shown here date to the 1920s, and while we can only speculate what its original purpose was during that speakeasy and racketeer era, we know that the woodwork would fit many Colonial or English Revival houses from that time. **Drawings by Rob Leanna** 

8'3

### Plots & Plans

Note that the secret door itself is actually a stock core door built up with a veneered raised panel and moulding to match the room paneling. The choices of hardwood core door and working hardware (pivots and latch) are more varied today than in the '20s and are subject to the builder. The cut of the room base and door jamb depends upon the clearance required when the door opens.







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### Conservator

# Going with the Flow

BY STEVE JORDAN

Making

nyone old enough to remember some of the great characteristics of oilbased enamel might recall that, besides producing a tough and durable film, it also flowed out to a satiny smooth, brush mark-free surface. This is a quality that many contemporary painters have forgotten or never knew because acrylic water-based enamels have replaced oils in most markets. Those of us learning to use the new paints—indoors and out—have often been frustrated when trying to get a smooth enamel finish on doors or trim with latex paints.



What makes an acceptably smooth finish? To exaggerate, it's the difference between glass and corduroy. Realistically, it's not seeing brush marks across a room on a door. It's not feeling brush marks while pulling your fingers across a painted finish. Today's paint manufacturers strive for a balance in products acceptable appearance but fool-proof applicability for nonprofessional painters. Prior to the 20th century, brush marks were indicative of paint that did not have the flowing characteristics of modern paint. The visual effect of brush marks was diminished by a final swipe of a dry brush, moving with the wood grain, to even out all marks. In high-style homes with the finest

quality work, such as the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, painted trim was allowed to dry, then buffed with pumice and rottenstone. Walls were stippled with large brushes similar to shoe-shine brushes to remove brush marks. water-based enamels flow like oils isn't easy, but with a few techniques and a little patience, you can achieve excellent results.



Developing enamel that flows out like liquid glassavoiding the "ropy" appearance of telltale brush marks, vet not so runny that it creates sags and teardrop runs in panelshas always been a paint chemist's conundrum.

#### Preparing the Surface

As with any building material, some paints are better than others. If you know a good painter, ask him or her which enamels have the best flowing characteristics. I've used some products directly from the can with good results. I've also used enamels that gave unsatisfactory results after extensive experimentation. Yet paint alone is not the secret to a smooth finish—90 percent of a good job is preparation, preparation, and more preparation. Here are a few pointers:

• Never paint in direct sun or in an environment that is excessively hot or cold.

- Never paint in a dusty, dirty, or windy environment.
- Fill dents and gouges with two or three coats of Spackle or wood filler.

• Pour only the amount of paint you will use at one time in your work pot to prevent contaminating the unused paint; never pour work-pot paint back into the can.

• When painting over existing paint, the new finish will only be as smooth as the underlying finish. Sand old, oil-based finishes with 120-grit paper followed by 220-grit paper. Sand old, latex enamel finishes with 200-grit wet-or-dry sandpaper. (Latex enamel will gum up regular paper.)

• Vacuum and tack off the finish before applying paint or primer.

Viewed microscopically, a shiny paint finish (top) covers the surface in a smooth, flowed-out film. In a dull, rough finish (above) the film retains furrowlike bristle marks.

ILLUSTRATIONS ROB LEANNA

www.oldhousejournal.com

### Conservator

Undercoats are used to create a good bond between the old paint and new paint. When painting latex over old oil-based paint, an undercoat is a good idea. When painting over old latex paints, an undercoat is not necessary, but it often helps improve the appearance of the final product.

• Oil-based enamel undercoats usually flow evenly and sand to a smooth finish. Acrylic primers don't flow as well and are more difficult to sand smooth. It's your choice.

• Apply the undercoat in the direction of the wood grain and take care to smooth out all brush marks before it sets up. Acrylic primers dry quickly, so note if the dried film exhibits excessive brush marks. If so, thin the undercoat up to 10 percent.

Sand, vacuum, and tack the primer after it dries.

#### **Applying Latex Enamel**

Most quality latex enamels are 100 percent acrylic formulas or vinyl-acrylic combinations. For the best chances of durability and color retention, use only the 100 percent acrylic enamels on exterior applications. However, creating a superior finish coat with acrylic enamels sometimes means applying an extra coat or two. Here are other strategies to try for a smooth finish:

• Before beginning your paint project, experiment with the paint you have chosen on a sample board or discreet area of the room. If the paint doesn't flow out to meet your expectations, thin it with a little water—say two to four tablespoons to a pint of paint. Continue this until you get it right. Remember that thinning the paint might mean putting on extra coats to get the appropriate coverage.

• Another method of thinning paint is to drop a few ice cubes in your work pot. The ice will melt slowly and thin the paint as you work.

• Paint additives for thinning water-based paints such as Floetrol (a product of the Flood Company) are available at all paint stores. Floetrol thins the paint without making the paint excessively runny. I often use Floetrol with a little water.

• When painting a primary or important door, you'll get the best results by removing the door and laying it horizontally on sawhorses.

• On paneled doors, wainscots, or built-in furniture, don't overlap paint coats at joinery intersections—for example, where stiles and rails meet on doors. Keep a crisp line by removing overpaint with a damp rag or using painter's masking tape.

• Always work from a wet edge—that is, the "shoreline" of the just-applied paint. Never return to earlier areas. Once the paint has started to flash off (evaporate solvents), any brush marks in the sticky paint will not smooth out.

• On large, flat expanses, such as slab doors where maintaining a wet edge is difficult, use a low-nap or foam roller to lay out the paint. If preferred, quickly pull out the roller stipple with a brush.

• Plan your approach and work clean in good light. A good enamel job takes patience, but it will remind you it was worthwhile every time you see the beauty of a silky smooth paint surface.

Contributing editor and historic building specialist **Steve Jordan** has been writing about finishing techniques for OHJ since 1992.

Part of the technique of producing a smooth. brushstrokefree finish is to always work from the wet-edge of the paint, Never return to previous work. In addition to meticulous preparation, paint with a top-quality brush with bristles that are well-flagged (similar to split hair ends).

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#### Artsy Walls

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### Fine Design



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### **Preservation** Perspectives

## New Horizons in Historic Preservation

No longer is historic preservation about the oldest or best. nce upon a time, historic preservation meant saving the houses of the rich and famous, and that was about it. Today the practice of historic preservation encompasses much more: in the 21st century it's community revitalization, the adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings, an effective "smart-growth" strategy, economic development, heritage tourism, the protection of cultural landscapes, and restoring that old house with which you've fallen in love. As OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL celebrates its 30th anniversary, it's useful to review where historic preservation has come from and where it's headed.

#### **Historic Historic Preservation**

One of the first efforts in this country to preserve a historic site was the 1853 campaign to purchase and restore Mount Vernon. That early preservation model continued into the early 20th century as private groups—mostly community based and usually comprised of women, such as the local chapters of the D.A.R. and Junior League—restored the houses of our presidents or other historical icons. Paul Revere's house, restored in 1905, is a good example.

The preservation movement has grown beyond single-mission campaigns since then. During the 1920s and '30s both local and federal agencies and legislation were established to identify and protect the country's historic resources. In 1924 New Orleans created the nation's first historic commission; in 1931 the first historic-district ordinance was passed in Charlestown, South Carolina. The restoration of an entire area (Williamsburg, Virginia) began in 1926. The Historic American Buildings Survey began during the Great Depression (see Downtowner, page 125). The National Trust for Historic Preservation was chartered in 1949.

Congress gave federal and state governments a role in historic preservation with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The U.S. Bicentennial in 1976 saw a national reawakening of all things historic. That year the first major tax-incentive program, part of the Tax Reform Act, provided financial impetus for the eventual restoration and adaptive reuse of tens of thousands of historic buildings by the private sector.

#### **Preservation Proliferates**

When OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL first appeared in 1973 it was partly a response to a growing segment of homeowners who loved old houses but they lacked the know-how of building restoration methods and architectural background and the "know-where" to finding historically appropriate products and services. Thirty years later, in addition to OHJ, there are now a host of popular TV shows and publications supplying everything from initiation to aphrodisiacs in support of America's continued love affair with old houses. What's the future for historic preservation? Here are some trends I see:

 Our definition of what's historic will continue to broaden. OHJ has been a forerunner in bringing understanding and appreciation to the residential styles of 20th century.

Independence Hall is an early example of a historic building as icon. It was rescued from possible demolition in 1816 when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania sold the building to the city of Philadelphia.



### Preservation Perspectives



Hands-on training like this workshop in historic stained-glass restoration is sustaining and expanding traditional crafts. Soon we will fawn over 1950s ranch houses and post-war developments like Levittown in New York. Los Angeles recently designated a mobile-home park as historic, and the National Register of Historic Places added a "historic" post-war landfill dump. The range of the built environment—from the places that embody popular culture (think Graceland), to working-class tenement houses, to atomic-age relics (such as Nike-missile silos now being converted to houses)—will be seen as worthy of preservation.

• The burgeoning restoration industry will expand. Phrases like, "They just don't make that anymore," or "You can't find people who do that work today," will disappear. Trade schools with restoration curricula and college historic-preservation programs will continue to proliferate. It won't be long before restoration products for the mid 20th-century modern era will find a market.

• We'll see the value of preserving entire historic environments as more cost-effective than isolated buildings. With neighborhoods, heritage "corridors," and cultural landscapes, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. There will be more emphasis on conserving, for example, the agricultural landscapes of historic

farmsteads or the traditional mixed uses—mom-and-pop corner stores and neighborhood schools—in a historic residential community.

• Historic preservation will become more cross-disciplinary, and it will play crucial roles in the environmental movement, "smart-growth" initiatives and policies, and urban, rural, and regional planning efforts. Along with open-space conservation efforts, historic preservation will become a cost-effective alternative to the sprawl that is devouring this country's rural and exurban environments. Reinvesting public and private dollars to our

existing traditional communities often located in older city neighborhoods or so-called first-ring suburbs will help redirect growth away from the wastefulness, inefficiencies, and "characterless-ness" of sprawling new development. Traditional, older communities, with their built-in advantages, will become hotbeds of restoration and historic preservation activities.

• Preservationists will become more sophisticated as advocates. The "us-versus-them" battles, though necessary at times, will be replaced by



Historic

preservation

will be more widely

appreciated for

the economic

development, such as

bringing jobs,

people, and

investment

communities

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like the

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proactive and savvy preservation activism that partners with local government, civic groups, businesses, and real-estate developers.

For these trends to continue, we will need to promote historic preservation as a civic value that improves our quality of life, stimulates local economies, provides preservation incentives to developers and homesteaders, reins in unmanaged growth, and offers the public a more accurate portrayal of our diverse American history.

*J. Randall Cotton* is associate director of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and an OHJ contributor since 1984.

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### Outside the Old House

# A Short Lawn Tale

rying to concoct an appropriate front garden for a house that's 150 years BY D. KEITH CROTZ old or so? The good news is that you may never need to

Golf-course textured yards are a (relatively) new invention.

buy another lawnmower. When I started to collect old horticultural volumes 20 years ago, I was first puzzled by the landscapes I saw in them-no foundation plantings, and only rarely what we would think of today as a lawn. The surrounding "grass" was green all right, but it consisted of many different groundcovers. And it wasn't smooth. You walked on worn footpaths to keep from stepping in manure (superphosphate fertilizers didn't become common until the 1880s). It soon became apparent to me how much technology had shaped the early American landscape.



Prior to 1826 if you wanted a lawn, you needed wandering sheep

pounds. For the small

these

landholder,

or a flock of gardeners armed with scythes. The lawn as a foreground to the estate was not cut weekly but perhaps monthly with the newest invention, the sickle bar mower. This heavy cutter left windrows in the growing surface from its iron

es surrounded by English-style swards, but most homeowners couldn't

hope to create a well-manicured surface until 1830 when Edward

Budding, an English textile-mill engineer, produced the first reel-type

mower. Even then, these mowers were employed exclusively in England

to these babies, which had a cutting width of 12" and weighed 150

The exercise that treadmills provide today is nothing compared

until 1855 when Henry Winthrop Sargent imported the first one.

wheels and the hooves of the horse that powered it. Books by tastemakers like Alexander Jackson Downing showed hous-

Above: In the early 1800s, this would have been a typical lawnmower, which left huge lumps in the lawn. Below: Later that century, trade cards such as this showed lawnmowers being used by women and

children.



The earliest "mower" that didn't involve horses was the scythe. You could fine-tune the garden a bit more, but it took a lot of energy, so for a garden of any size it was generally employed by those who could afford an army of workers.

machines would provide a neat, even surface. Owners of larger estates, however, had to choose devices that still left lumpy greenery and potential sprained ankles. An estate-sized monster would typically have a 42" cutting width and require a horse to pull it. The mansion-sized version, three and a half times wider in its cut, weighed almost 500 pounds. Imagine the divots a horse would create when starting out! Curvilinear designs were crucial because the turning radius was immense.

The U.S. Patent Office issued 38 patents for lawnmowers between 1868 and 1873. The patents were given primarily to inventors in New England and the Mid-Atlantic. By 1880, there had been 138 patents issued, but only about one-half of one percent of American households owned a mower. They were still a toy for



ALL PHOTOS AMERICAN BOTANIST EXCEPT

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WHERE

### Outside the Old House

the wealthy in a small stretch of the nation from the Northeast to Illinois. By the end of the 1890s hand-powered lawnmowers had become lighter and more maneuverable, allowing more homeowners to establish a patch of green around a few small blooming specimen plants sprinkled about the homestead. Mail-order catalogs like Peter Hendersen's pushed the sale of mowers and other lawnrelated equipment. The Sears, Roebuck catalog offered eight models by the turn of the century. The models ranged in price from \$2.40 to \$4.54, according to Virginia Scott Jenkins' *The Lawn: A History of An American Obsession*.

In 1902 the lawnmower received a boost from the internal combustion engine. Edwin George, a Detroit real estate speculator and industrialist, attached the gasoline engine to a reel-type mower, which left the user less exhausted in creating an even, green surface. Lawns could now receive a routine trim at a moment's notice. No harnessing the power to the mower, just pour in some fuel, prime the carburetor, and off you went. The weight of the wheels and roller required you to cut in two opposite direc-



The Growth of Industrial Art, published in 1892, depicted the evolution of the lawnmower during the previous few years. But at that point it was clear that smooth lawns were limited to the wealthy.

tions to prevent matting of the surface the wheels passed over, and people were soon creating patterns in their newly cut yards. Grass seed for lawns became a popular addition to the seed catalogs of the early 20th century.

The quest for the perfect green monoculture had begun, and it would require a lot of water. The timing couldn't have been more fortuitous. By 1860 most American cities had some form of municipal system that moved the water from a storage tower or other source through an array of lead, wood, or cast-iron pipes. Gardeners could now spew streams of water on the lawn or thirsty bedding plants without hauling buckets from a well.

The water company that serves my own metropolitan environs used a steam engine to pump water to the surrounding villages as late as 1883. Such power-driven pumping stations delivered water under pressure and pumps were replaced by spigots. The pres-



sure was not always sufficient to reach large areas, but water could be delivered with less toil and in greater volume. The first lawn-sprinkler patent was issued in 1871, and seed catalogs of the 1880s were filled with rubber garden hoses, nozzles, and reels for keeping the new contraption organized. The catalogs also carried sprinklers in an array of fanciful designs.

Today, noise pollution from mowers and blowers, drought, and other environmental concerns are leading landscape gurus of the 21st century to encourage a reduction in the size of our lawns. Those who do go back to a somewhat wilder look will, intentionally or not, create the perfect surroundings for a 19th-century house.

**D. Keith Crozt** is an antiquarian bookseller and publisher of The American Botanist Press in Chillicothe, Illinois.

This image, from an 1869 gardening calendar, may have been a bit unrealistic in its depiction of the formally dressed mother and children gardening while the servants looked on, but the technology level was probably on target.

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Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is everlasting life in Christ Jesus our Lord."



BY JOHN CROSBY FREEMAN

#### Illuminations on late Victorian interior lighting.



SRIAN VANDEN BR



Dietz & Company highlighted table lamps in its 1860 catalog, but the catalog also included an exhaustive line of wall and ceiling fixtures—many equally ornamental.

Judging by the open shades, the small, inexpensive three-branch gas chandelier in the 1849 Farnsworth Homestead in Rockland, Maine, is probably from 1880s. enesis got it right. The victory of light is the key to human existence. However, not until the late Victorian decades

did kerosene lighting end the tyranny of night for nearly everyone in the United States. Gas lighting was the posh, prettyboy, poster child of Victorian interior lighting, but its technology and expense restricted its use to wealthy urban homes and public places. Likewise for electric lighting, which began in 1879 when Thomas Edison perfected the commercial incandescent lamp and, more important, a system to power it. Here's a glance at how, just more than a century ago, these three sources brought new levels of light into houses for the first time and the impact they had on fixtures, décor, and the people who used them.

#### Oil for the Lamps of Columbia

John D. Rockefeller is stigmatized as one of the bad boys of late Victorian capitalism, but his consolidation of petroleum refining made kerosene affordable for everyone. Delivered down the web of post-Civil War railroad tracks that united a largely rural country, there was also shipped a vast array of kerosene lighting devices from the fundamental to the fancy. There's no need to get lost in lumens to appreciate how much light output improved, but a kerosene flame will



The two-light kerosene pendant fits the era of the 1870 Norlands House in Livermore, Maine. Decorative glass chimneys were also sold for use in such public rooms and to complement the painted ceiling.



Elaborate paper shades often came from Germany. Most fantastic are "Transformation Lampshades" with shading on the back that dissolve from daylight to night scenes when the lamp is lit.

provide about three times the brightness of a candle flame—with a candle flame being about equal in brightness to an overcast sky. Kerosene lighting was superior to candle but not inherently safer. Remember how a kerosene lantern kicked by a cow started the Great Chicago Fire of 1871? There are numerous gruesome accounts of women burned to death while refueling kerosene lamps when the fuel ignited after it spilled on their billowing skirts. Explosions were common because unscrupulous suppliers adulterated kerosene with more volatile fuel that was less expensive. Few then would disagree with the Victorian domestic sages Harriet and Catherine Beecher. In their famous 1869 guide, *American Woman's Home*, they pronounced, "good kerosene oil gives a light which leaves little to be desired."

If you restore some Victorian verisimilitude to your house via working kerosene lighting, plan on making a safe place to clean,

BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

trim, and refuel your lamps away from where they are burned. The Beecher sisters suggested "a lamp filler, with a spout, small at the end, and turned up to prevent oil from dripping." They recommend lighting the lamp "with a strip of folded or rolled paper, of which a quantity should be kept on the mantelpiece."

A wood engraving from the title page of the 1860 Dietz & Company lighting catalog (see previous page) displays how diverse the market for kerosene lighting had become by



Center slide chandeliers that could be lowered and raised were designed to simplify lighting large gas fixtures. This 1876 Archer & Pancoast model for drawing room or library included a center light.

the mid-19th century. From the small, utilitarian hand lamps at the outside, the models march up the social mountain to the "very rich tripod lamp" in the center. Printed paper lampshades on the pair next to the hand lamps are among the rarest ephemera of Victorian lighting. Dietz apparently supplied them ready-made and possibly patented them as such. Chromolithographed paper lampshades also were available as uncut flat sheets for home construction.

If you like prism hula skirts on your late

Victorian kerosene ceiling fixtures, there is an ample supply of old and new examples available in a variety of colored shades. If your budget is limited, come down from the ceiling and consider more modest kerosene lamps on mounted wall brackets. Lamp brackets and flowerpot brackets appear together in late Victorian hardware catalogs. From a distance, they look the same. Although you are more likely to find antique flowerpot brackets, don't use them for kerosene lamps. A flowerpot knocked on the



Lighting stores and specialists that sell kerosene burners and lamps should also carry wall brackets, mercury type reflectors, and small smoke bells that attach to chimney tops to protect walls.

floor is a mess; a kerosene lamp is a disaster. A must for any functional kerosene ceiling lamp is a smoke bell to collect the soot and keep it off the ceiling.

#### **Historical Gas**

Gas lighting is dead. To my knowledge, the only place and time Victorian gas lighting comes to life is the Christmas Eve service at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, in Roxborough, Philadelphia. They say it's quite a sight to see two people racing around the outer aisles, one opening the late Victorian gas jets that "St. Tims" never took out and another lighting them. My only experience with gas lighting took place more than 30 years ago during a Victorian Society in America annual meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio. As a special treat, we were taken "over the river" to Covington, Kentucky, for an evening at what turned out to be a Victorian time capsule. Our hosts removed dust covers from the original seating of a double parlor-containing not one but two suites of Belter furniture. But it was the gas jets on the wall that overwhelmed me. The hiss, the heat, the hot colors. At that moment I realized why and when the expression "Let's step outside for a breath of fresh air!" entered the American idiom.

The technology of gas lighting is dead, but not its outward forms. In the social scale of Victorian lighting devices, gas lighting fixtures remain where they always were: at the top. A good example of an electrified reproduction gasolier is the fivearm fixture with open shades (page 69 bottom) that imitates what originals looked like during the 1880s and '90s. Compare this with the ball globes of the doubletiered, 12-branched gasolier (page 69 top)-the kind popular from the 1850s through the 1870s in Italianate or Second Empire mansions. Why the shift? The "new style" globes of the 1880s were made wider at the base as well as across the top to increase air flow and reduce flickering.

For the majority of lighting's history, any artificial light source has never been sufficiently beautiful in its own right. It needed a base. It needed a container. It needed a shelter. It needed a reflective device to make the most visual contribution to the room, and gaslight was no



BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

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The 1858-1860 Morse-Libby House (also called Victoria Mansion) in Portland, Maine, is renowned for its lavish gas chandeliers-one of the few known original examples in the Neorococo style. The large ball globes of this 12-arm extravaganzadesigned to fit the Gustave Herter interiorhave minute bases typical of the date.

The variety of quality electrified reproduction gasoliers on the market, such as this post 1880s design, makes them both affordable and practical for an old-house lifestyle. Historically appropriate finishes help complete the room.







Dietz & Company featured gorgeous colored overlay cased glass kerosene fonts, cut-to-clear or cut-to-color, which are the heart's desire of any Victorian lighting collector today.

Though the Homeport Inn in Searsport, Maine, was built in 1861, this early all-electric "shower" fixture from the 1910s is now part of the historical décor. The anachronistic oil font in the center appears on many Colonial style models of the time and is actually Flemish inspired.

This so-called Mission chandelier (below) mixes four arms of unabashedly electric lighting with backup gas candles—a common twist in the 1910s.





BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

Combination fixtures married gas and electric service in multiple ways. The upward shades here are gas, while the rest is electric. different. Fixtures were based upon all of the prevailing decorative styles of the era from Neoclassical and Rococo, to Neo-Grec, Aesthetic, and Eastlake.

A good reproduction gasolier cannot convey gaslight-era ambiance on its own. In the best Victorian manner, the reproduction interior (page 69) is a harmony of light, color, pattern, texture, and scale. A big help is the proper arrangement of dado, fill, frieze, ceiling, and centerpiece wallpapers. Their tertiary colors bask in the warm spectrum that emits from reproduction carbon filament incandescent bulbs. I'm especially glad to see the ceiling centerpiece. To the sensibility of a Victorian eye, plugging a chandelier in the modern manner into a bare ceiling looks bad because it was bad manners for anything or any person to meet another without a proper introduction. I also like the portiere drape and the proper use of the picture moulding with a medallion and wrapped wires.

#### **The Electric Circus**

During the 1890s, as electric lighting gained in popularity, makers of gas lighting devices added electric lines and sockets to their gas jets. It's easy to tell the difference between a gaslight fixture and an electric light fixture. With the exception of later Welsbach mantle incandescent lights, all forms of Victorian combustion lighting have shades that point up. Late Victorian incandescent lamps usually have shades that point down. An authentic late Victorian electric fixture is never at a near-horizontal angle. The reason is the large, fragile carbon filament of early lamps (commonly called bulbs) could break under the stress of gravity or vibration. (Welsbach mantle fixtures, which operate like gasoline camping lanterns, always point down and were popular from 1890 to about 1910.)

If authenticity is your goal, it's worth finishing your late Victorian electric lighting installation with authentic lamps. Though spending up to \$16 each for reproduction carbon filament lamps seems expensive, they burn with a low, warm, amber glow that is the intended spectrum and intensity for the fixture and the room. The popular alternative to low-level lighting is putting modern lamps on a dimmer. This is not only inauthentic, but also it does not have quite the same visual effect. Inspired and educated eyes of Victorian interior designers, like their predecessors, learned by trial-and-error what colors looked best under available lighting conditions.

Late Victorian low-level lighting got a lot of its allure from associations with the interiors of 17th-century Dutch genre painting, revered at the time and throughout the Arts & Crafts period of the early 20th century. Released from dealing with



Electrified gasoliers can also be historic. The body of this Morse-Libby House chandelier is original to the building, but the improved-style shades were added when the fixture was electrified in 1902.

For a list of SUPPLIERS, see page 130.

heat and exhaust, fixtures were free to become artfully placed pools of light capped with stained-glass shades that scattered a jewel-like spectrum of colors towards delicious shadows. Perhaps more than the Victorian lighting that preceded it, the light fixture—especially its crowning glory—was a work of art. Nothing less could have been expected from a period called Art Nouveau or Arts & Crafts.

If anyone seriously wants to revisit late Victorian interiors, today's bright and pervasive interior lighting must be banished. Be patient when you enter a late Victorian interior. Let your eyes dilate. It's a wonderful experience to wait and see colors, patterns, and shapes emerge. Life among the shadows is relaxing. It's comfortable. And its richly beautiful concern for proper lighting conditions is a small, but significant, part of what makes us devoted supporters of old houses.

John Crosby Freeman, "The Color Doctor" and author of the book Joy of Color, has been enlightening the pages of OHJ since 1982.

BRIAN VANDEN BRINK



Gas chandeliers were often sited over tables. In some versions of this three-arm model, the central light could be lowered for reading.



North Bennet Street School students remove rotten wood from the cupola's finial.

# Revolutionary Carpentary EVANCY EBERT

Using traditional building techniques, preservation students restore a historic cupola.



Just 25 years after its first major restoration project the cupola's wood siding had rotted.
Built between 1747 and 1751 for Royal Governor William Shirley and later owned by Federal Governor William Eustis, the Shirley Eustis House in Roxbury, Massachusetts, is one of only four remaining Royal Colonial Governor's mansions in the country. The house is Georgian in design but was restored to its Federal period in the 1980s.

SABRINA MURPHY

wenty-five years after its first restoration, the cupola on the 1747-1751 Shirley Eustis House in Roxbury, Massachusetts, needed a facelift. In 1978, a state-run preservation group looking for a viable way to keep the crown of this historic house from deteriorating had removed all the original Eastern white pine clapboards, and replaced them with modern versions, covered the windows and siding with plexiglass, and caulked all seams with silicone to protect the cupola from Boston's harsh weather. The well-intentioned fix created an air-tight capsule that trapped moisture causing the replacement wood to decay.

By 2002 the siding had rotted and the cupola was in danger of being lost. Director

and instructor of Boston's North Bennet Street School's preservation carpentry program, Robert Adam, stepped in to re-restore the failing structure last fall. Observing the methods Robert Adam and his students used to reconstruct the cupola's exterior envelope while saving as much of the building's original materials as possible provides a unique education in state-of-the-art restoration carpentry.

## **Taking Notes**

#\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

The team began the project by documenting the structure's existing repairs and materials. The students sketched each side of the cupola and then numbered and recorded each component, so when the structure was dismantled any pieces still intact could be placed in their original locations. After the students cataloged the details, they removed the plexiglass and silicone that covered the cupola. The team relied on crowbars to break the stubborn silicone bond; once they removed the plexiglass, the students scraped off any residual silicone. They worked carefully not to damage any underlying original materials. Then the students removed all clapboards, architectural mouldings, windows, and window frames.

The students found much of the cupola's original 3/4" Eastern white pine sheathing in good condition. The 25-year-old replacement clapboard was not so lucky. Because much of this plantation-grown sapwood was sealed behind the plastic, moisture became trapped, and this started rot in the clapboards. Adam and his students replaced the clapboards with quartersawn

## **History Lesson**

Tucked away on a narrow street in Boston's historic North End is the North Bennet Street School, a fourstorey brick structure filled with the sounds of buzzing saws, humming violin stings, and tinkling piano keys. The school has been training students in the traditional trades for more than 100 years. Founded in 1885 by Pauline A. Shaw as the North Bennet Street Industrial School, it began as a charitable organization that taught immigrant men and women skills so they could find work in their new home. As the demographics of the neighborhood changed, the school shifted from social service to training professional craftsmen. Today the curriculum includes furniture making, jewelry making, violin restoration, and carpentry skills among others. Robert Adam began Massachusetts' first preservation carpentry program at North Bennet Street School in 1985. Seeing a need for more tradespeople skilled in preservation techniques, Adam developed a program that teaches pre-20th-century building construction and how to work effectively on older structures using traditional building methods and today's conservation practices-occasion-

illustration of a classroom at the North Bennet Street Industrial School shows a woodworking shop.

An 1885



ally incorporating restoration work on New England's 19th-century privies. "These structures offer all the building components of a wood-framed house on a much smaller scale," says Adam. For more information on the school visit www.nbss.org. Eastern white pine from Western Massachusetts' Sky Lodge Farm. The quartersawn clapboard is exceptionally durable because the board follows the trees' natural structure; the growth rings are perpendicular to the wide surface of the board creating a true vertical-grain material that resists warping and wear. The original clapboards were hand-rived (radially split) from logs. The boards used in the 1978 restoration were flatsawn, a method that creates a board prone to warping and splitting.

At the school's carpentry shop, the new boards were hand planed to remove any mill marks that could telegraph through the final paint job. Then the students primed the boards on all sides to help protect the wood from moisture penetration. They primed the ends of the boards as well because the end grain is prone to wick water.

## **Trade Secrets**

Staying true to original building methods, Adam didn't use a weatherproofing membrane between the original sheathing and exterior cladding. Without this extra protection, the students had to ensure all boards fit tightly together to make a weather-resistant cladding. The cupola's walls are 8' wide, but the mill had a limited supply of 8' boards. To work around this, the students interspersed 2' and 6' spliced boards for every other course. To create a splice, the students cut a board at a 60 degree angle. To complete the 180 degrees needed to fit the two boards together, another board was simply flipped onto its opposite side and cut on the same angle-this way the angle of the saw blade does not have to change. This creates a fairly weather-tight joint.

Adam instructed his students to lap the boards from the bottom of the sill line down to the roofline—lapping boards from top to bottom in this manner was common in colonial house building. The students slid each clapboard underneath the previous one—wedging the courses together in this fashion creates a tight fit. The top and bottom boards were then fastened with 2 1/2" stainless-steel nails—a method called "two-course nailing." (Although not a traditional material, the 21st-century stainlesssteel nails will offer a clue for future preser-





Left: Dave Lewis pried the silicone and plexiglass free with a crowbar while trying to protect any original materials that might be salvaged.



To create the corner boards, Tom Reidy and Nick Beasley cut three boards of Western red cedar. They fastened the three pieces using a resorcinol glue, a waterproof glue used in boat building that yields less of a glue line.

Once the exterior boards were removed, much of the original 1747 white pine sheathing was revealed to be in good condition.

Wood Savers The students worked hard to save as much of the original wood as possible on the cupola. Although all window jambs were conserved, only two out of the five window sills could be salvaged using dutchman repairs.



Top: Before making a dutchman repair, the rotted wood must be cut away to create a reproducible angle. Left: A new piece is cut larger than the space to be filled and glued with epoxy. The piece of wood is left clamped overnight to create a secure bond.



Above: Andy Ingalls brushes a mix of linseed oil and turpentine onto the aged wood to add integrity.





Above: Shown here is a splice on the window jamb. With time the wood will weather to a grey tone.



For more information on the Shirley Eustis House visit www.shirleyeusti shouse.org.

Above: Once the new piece of wood is chiseled and hand planed to the original dimensions of the window frames, it is ready to be put back into the cupola.



Once the boards were in place, Andrew Harvey went over the siding with primer one more time before it received a topcoat of paint.



Lead-coated copper casings were placed over joints at the sill line to prevent water penetration. Below: Reidy removes any mill marks from the Western red cedar by hand planing the board.



vationists of the timeframe of this project.) Then all lower clapboards were cut at an angle to fit the strike of the hipped roof.

To create sturdy vertical corner boards above and below the sill line, the team chose to use Western red cedar, a wood resistant to rot. First, three cedar boards totaling 30" in width were glued together with resorcinol glue. Then the three joined boards were cut down the middle. The outer faces of the two boards were hand planed again to remove any mill marks. Adam instructed his students to use a lap joint to join the two boards. The boards were again glued with resorcinol glue and screwed together every 14" to create a tight bond. Once all the clapboards were in place, the corner boards were fabricated in the shop and brought to the job site and installed.

After 250 years of weather and settling, nothing on the cupola sat plumb. Using a compass, the students scribed the awkward angles of the original boards onto the adjoining new boards, which had been cut longer than the alotted space. The extra material was then cut away.

Although the method used for laying the boards created a snug fit, the students covered joints along the sill line with leadcoated copper casings that would withstand the salty seacoast air and protect against moisture penetration. The cupola envelope received additional primer and a topcoat of paint. Using these traditional carpentry techniques, this crowning touch on a 256year-old piece of American history will be preserved for future generations.

Special thanks to school graduate Tom Reidy who has recently started his own preservation carpentry business in the Boston area. To contact Reidy call (617) 230-7016 or email thomasjreidy@hotmail.com.



In the Arts & Crafts quest for health, simplicity, and design unity, furniture became house.



ew design philosophies have cast houses in a new mold like the Arts & Crafts Movement, and few features bring together so

many of its forward-thinking ideas as the legendary built-in. Though examples of these innovative pieces of "permanent furniture" are still doing service in bungalows, Foursquares, and even Tudor- and Dutch Colonial Revival houses from 1900 to 1930, many have been reduced to little more than quirky cabinets or empty alcoves during decades of changing tastes. For anyone owning or interested in re-creating these frequently ingenious elements, here's what was behind the built-in craze and where it went.

## **Reactions and Inventions**

Like so many things Arts & Crafts, built-ins were part of a wave of reform-an aesthetic about-face from the prevailing tastes of the Victorian era and a charge in new directions. Rejecting the mass-produced, overwrought furniture of the late 19th century (and the eclectic houses and interiors that went with it), designers sought to unify the house's design elements while simplifying the occupants' lifestyles-a functional necessity in the smaller, servantless suburban houses of the early automobile era. Their solution was not only to coordinate pieces of furniture with the overall architecture of the house but also to fuse them into the structure with seamless schemes and cunning joinery.



Besides creating a distinctly novel look and space-saving efficiency, the aim of many built-ins was also to be more hygienic. In a day when germ theory and its connection to public health was just sinking in, eliminating dirt and the places it could hide became a crusade. Built-ins helped heed the call by reducing dirt-catching areas—especially the underspaces around legs—that could harbor dust, insects, and most insidiously, microbes.

Ironically, the inglenook—one of the classic built-ins of the Arts & Crafts era had been a favorite of adventurous Victorian architects working in the Shingle and Colonial Revival styles. H.H. Richardson is sometimes credited with importing this idea (two fixed bench seats bookending a hearth for reflective warmth) from England, and he made frequent use of it in his medieval, yet modern, interiors. The fact that the inglenook was almost ancient doesn't seem to have been an issue for American Arts & Crafts designers and tastemakers; they pop up everywhere from Gustav Stickley's house plans to the ultimate bungalows of the Greene brothers. Though central heating made the hearth obsolete for warmth after 1900, it carried renewed symbolic and aesthetic significance as the center of the house, and an inglenook only highlighted its importance.

Where an inglenook could not be had, there was sure to be a pair of built-in bookcases flanking the fireplace. An almost ubiquitous feature in planbook and ready-cut bungalows of all breeds, such bookcases presented the opportunity not only to shelve



Stickley's magazine, *The Craftsman*, extolled the inglenook as the essence of domestic coziness. Also called chimney corners, they came to America from 15th-century England and English architect Richard Norman Shaw. Among the most malleable of built-ins was the breakfast nook or Pullman alcove. Benches that had an open back could be turned into "buttress cabinets" with more storage-even drop-front desks. At least one manufacturer marketed a complete nook that collapsed into a closet like an ironing board to be "out of sight when not in use."





LINDA SVENDSEN



Built-in cabinets of all types were readily ordered from catalog millwork manufacturers or, in the case of kit houses, from the likes of Aladdin or Sears. This 1912 sideboard from Sears is typical of the generic Arts & Crafts styling available everywhere.

Built-in bookcases added an erudite air as well as precious storage to the minimal living rooms of many bungalows. A house without a fireplace might substitute a built-in writing desk in the same space.

and display books or pottery but also to protect them behind a veil of decorative artglass doors. Storage made aesthetic was taken to heart in the dining room. Pantries were not an option in the majority of smaller, Arts & Crafts houses, so a built-in sideboard or "buffet" was all-important for berthing flatware and linens. In the best layouts, it could be built into an alcove so the drawer fronts were flush with the wall, and the mirrored counter was a recess. At the least it was solidly anchored to the wall as a footless mass and commonly ordered as a prefab unit from a millwork manufacturer.

Built-ins are firmly secured to the building, but that does not mean that they must meld with a wall. The prime example is the colonnade that provided definition between living areas without actually separating them into rooms. Colonnades are pairs of waist-high cabinetwork that support tapered A wall of beautiful doors can hide a complete boudoir suite of dressing table, drawers, and hanger closets. This opened floor space for other activities while it minimized dust-collecting surfaces. piers or vaguely classical columns that typically run to a box beam across the ceiling. Though the beam and piers are nonstructural, the casework often overcompensates in practicality by incorporating bookshelves, drawers, a fold-out desk, or combinations thereof.

Bench seats under windows or attached to walls are deja vu too. Starting with Richardson and his acolytes, the bench's popularity continued unabated with the next gener-



Plans for built-in sideboards such as this were widely available from publishers like William Radford. The faceted bay of the upper cabinet is an idea popular in Europe at the time.



ation of designers such as Harvey Ellis, who appended them to colonnades in a now famous illustration in *The Craftsman* magazine. Bench seats also tucked between a newel post and wall at the bottom of a staircase, where the seat surface could be hinged like a chest for storing footgear.

## Ultimate Compactness

Kitchens caught the brunt of the space crunch in the smaller houses of the early 20th century, and, along with other helpful marvels like gas stoves and electric appliances, built-ins were supposed to make up the difference. Purely utilitarian built-ins such as fold-away ironing boards got double duty out of precious space, but the hyper-compact centerpiece was the dining booth or breakfast nook. Whether the nook was a culinary version of the fireplace inglenook or was transported from the railroad world (some were called "Pullman Dining Rooms"), it was space saving to a fault. Facing benches surrounded a peg-legged table that often folded up for stowing. Seats typically opened into chests, and backs could even be built into linen or china closets.

Even bathrooms and bedrooms benefited from the built-in concept. In-wall medicine cabinets and tubs first appeared during the built-in heyday, but there were fold-up seats and built-in linen cases too. Disappearing beds, such as the famous Murphy In-A-Door bed, freed floor space during daylight hours while built-in dressing tables—actually a vanity and drawers flush in the wall—barely entered the room.

As with the Arts & Crafts Movement itself, World War I spelled a shift away from built-ins in their largest and most original forms. As tastes swung back to the familiar Colonial Revival during the 1920s, the once daring, squared-off lines of Arts & Crafts built-ins looked clunky. Even worse, being fixed-in-place they couldn't be retired to another room or house, so breakfast nooks and colonnades were simply pried out. Though actual Arts & Crafts built-ins faded from millwork catalogs by the 1940s, their concepts and convenience live on in the Eurostyle closets, diner booths, and hightech entertainment centers that continue to serve us everywhere. 🏦





Thinking of buying new double-hungs? The choices aren't necessarily clear.

Old wood windows are warm and beautiful, but they can deteriorate as the result of insect damage or from moisture on the sill or in joints. They should be inspected regularly for failure of paint or glazing putty.

Many major window manufacturers offer wood windows with divided lights. Andersen's new Woodwright series offers a number of features, such as a taller bottom rail, intended to

make them look more like old windows. f eyes are the windows of the soul, windows are the soul of a house. Old windows can be beautiful without a mountain or water view, stained glass, intricate leading, or gothic arches. There is nothing so pleasurable on a spring morning as gazing out my old doublehungs with their shapely muntins and wavy glass. So for as long as I possibly can, I'll putty and paint their divided lights, fill any rot with epoxy, and replace broken panes with old glass rescued from architectural salvage.

But situations arise when you need something new. Perhaps you're building an addition. Maybe your house has been remuddled with cheap aluminum windows that you simply can't look at any longer, or a tornado has ripped out an entire wall. What are the options?

The first contractor you call may push for vinyl replacements as though there is nothing else available. Not all historic districts require wood for every window. True, historic landmarks may demand not merely wood for every window but a certain shape and size of muntins. But residential historic districts may specify wood only for the first storey or for the windows facing the street. Don't let contractors kid you though. Nearly all big-window manufacturers offer wood windows with true divided lights.

Andersen, for example, this year has introduced a "Woodwright" collection of double-hungs in 99 different sizes, with the option of ordering custom sizes. "We're seeing a lot of interest in traditional home design, in both the new and renovation markets," says Paul Landgraf, an Andersen home improvement



ANDY OLENICK

Old glass gives a special perspective on the world. If your wood has deteriorated, a custom window-maker may be able to put the old glass in a new sash.



COURTESY OF ANDERSEN WINDOW

marketing manager who developed the Woodwright series. Andersen has given their sashes mortise-and-tenon joints (rather than mitered joints), a taller bottom rail than found on most off-the-rack windows, and a chamfer along the check rail all with an eye to making the windows look more like they belong in an old house.

The windows also have a wood jamb liner—the strip that runs up the side of the window pocket. Nearly all wood windows today have vinyl jamb liners that visually shout "new!" although Marvin Windows and Doors, for one, has recently narrowed its liners. Andersen's new line also offers true divided lights with several choices in the width of muntins.

Even buyers who opt for windows that are vinyl-clad outside want rich wood inside. You can now get interior finishes from Weather Shield in oak, mahogany, oak, maple, cherry, and fir.

## No Mere Beauty Contest

These architectural choices are only the beginning when window shopping. As long

as you're spending a lot of money—from hundreds to thousands of dollars per window—what else would you like to achieve? Is it mostly energy efficiency? Do they need to be easy to clean, block out sunlight that will damage furniture and carpet, or silence traffic noises?

If you have to replace a beloved old window, you have three choices: a full tearout, a sash-pack kit, or an insert. A full tearout means removing every part of the window-its mouldings, jambs, and sill-all the way back to the wall. It will be a messy and expensive process that damages wallpaper and plaster, so it may not be the best idea unless you're gutting your walls for other reasons. It may be one you want to consider, however, if your windows have been shrunk or moved by misguided remodeling, so that they are out of proportion historically or to the rest of your house's architecture. A sashpack kit will give you new sashes and jambs (generally vinyl), while an insert is literally that-new sash inserted into your old wooden jambs.

In old houses, which are unlikely to be

perfectly square, sash-pack kits can create problems with air tightness, says Tom Patterson, president of The Window Man franchise in Fairfax, Virginia.

He's a strong advocate of saving old wood windows and improving their energy efficiency and acoustics with storm windows (see "The Perfect Storms" page 85). As to sash-pack kits, he says, "If there is the slightest crown in the sill, you can have such a bad fit that you can see daylight off both ends." He thinks Trimline, a lesserknown window company, is ahead of the pack with its sash-pack kits because they have a more rigid frame, a noncompression jamb, and a caulkable window.

An insert is more likely to provide a good fit, he says, but you may have to forfeit a bit of glass in fitting the new window into its hole since you have to take the weight pocket into consideration.

You can get replacement kits with tempting modern features including tilt sashes for easy cleaning and low-E glass for energy conservation from large manufacturers, such as Weather Shield, or special-

and sizes, such as the curved windows in the 1889 Queen Anne-style John T. Howell House in Buffalo, New York, will need custom work. You'll want to compare prices of custom work offered by national manufacturers and by millwork specialists, who might actually be less expensive.

**Unusual shapes** 



ists, such as Bi-Glass. If the tilt-in option is tugging on your heartstrings, you can buy special hardware called pivot sash.

Finding standard window sizes with any of these options is difficult for houses built before World War II, after which windows began to be sized in standard increments of 4" rather than half inches. Many big manufacturers routinely offer custom sizes, but it costs more.

If you need special sizes and shapes, don't be afraid to shop the custom market, such as millwork companies. Blair Lee, president of Allegheny Restoration in Morgantown, West Virginia, says that while

## The Perfect Storms

Can't decide whether your old windows can be saved? The National Park Service has a useful document on repairing wooden windows. You can access it at

www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/brief09.htm. Maybe your beautiful old windows don't look bad, but you need better sound or weatherproofing. Tom Patterson the Window Man in Fairfax, Virginia, urges most owners of historic houses to consider storm windows instead of replacements. "No windows being made today are as good as the old windows," he says. "For one thing, they were probably made of old-growth wood, which has tighter grain and is going to weather better." In addition, the rope-and-pulley assembly of an old window and the small divided panes are easier and less expensive to replace. The air space between an old window and a wellinstalled storm window creates better weather insulation than the argon or krypton in a double-paned new window, and Patterson notes that you can buy any thickness of glass in a storm window that you might purchase for a new window to reduce noise.

Mon-Ray offers four standard colors (cream, white, brown, and silver) and two profiles, so you have some options for a more historical look. Other makers offer more colors, or you can pay a premium price for a custom color.



COURTESY OF MARVIN WINDOWS AND DOORS

Some nationwide companies such as Marvin Windows and Doors primarily do custom work rather than offering off-the-rack sizes. Here a Marvin employee eases glass into a specialty window







COURTESY OF KOLBE & KOLBE

Replacement sash kits are a less messy solution than full tear-outs. Kolbe & Kolbe offers custom sashes with either 9/16" or 7/8" insulated glass and exteriors either primed for painting or clad with their "K-Kron" topcoat. Hardware is another decision you'll have to make in buying windows. These kits offer locks in white, beige, or brass.

For a Vermont farmhouse, architect Jonathan Hale kept design lines clean with single-glazed two-over-twos from Brosco because he likes their knife-sharp muntins. He then specified dark areen paint applied on site to show the muntins against white curtains. The color was also appropriate to the age and region. He improved insulation with interior plexiglass storm windows.

## **A Well-Done Muntin**

The size and shape of muntins can make a surprising difference in a window, and historically they varied by period and region. Below are "fat muntins" that architect Jonathan Hale chose for an 1880s Watertown, Massachusetts, house, which give the windows a strong architectural presence.



Even more than old glass, a well-proportioned muntin is the holy grail of old-house owners seeking to match windows. "Where can I get TRUE divided lights in Washington, DC?" a reader recently asked. If you can't get them in the big city, indeed, where can you?

Muntins, of course, are the grid of narrow wood bars that traditionally divided the small panes of glass that were homeowners' only options when window glass was first manufactured. (As opposed to mullions, which are the vertical posts that separate entire windows.)

The number of panes in windows decreased during the years as technology improved and larger expanses of glass could be made, but only in recent years, as year-round climate control led to permanently shut double- or even triple-thick windows, did single panes become the rule.

Depending on the age and location of the house, window sashes divided by wood muntins above, below, or both were long the rule—thus architectural terms such as "three-overone" or "six-over-six." Now manufacturers are trying to mate consumers' desire for traditional-looking windows with their

> demand for the energy efficiency of double-thick glass. So far, manufacturers don't seem able to develop muntins that pass visual muster.

Instead they give us what they call grilles—patterns of wood strips that may be between the glass panes, or snapped inside and removable for cleaning. Double-pane windows with true-divided lights have aluminum or plastic between the muntins so that they lack the visual depth of old wood windows. Many manufacturers have simply given up and only offer true divided lights with single panes. This is just another factor to consider when shopping for replacement windows.



Above are some lighter muntins he picked for an 1840s Vermont house that let the gorgeous landscape do its own talking.

the company's custom sashes are a bit more expensive, they can actually be less costly when you need a specialty window involving something like curved glass. Allegheny has done jobs as far away as Massachusetts and Georgia.

## A Comely Glass

OK, you've figured out jambs, check rails, and bottom rails. Now on to glass. Low-E glass, which reduces ultra-violet light and heat loss through conduction and radiation, has been a standard offering since 1981, but not all low-E glass is equal.

When you're buying new windows, you're likely to see a sticker from the National Fenestration Rating Council, which measures energy performance with three decimal numbers: the U-factor (the amount of heat that escapes), the solar heat gain coefficient (the blocking of sunlight), and visible transmittance (how much visible light comes through). You want the first two numbers to be low to save on heating and cooling costs. The third indicates more light coming through as it approaches 1.0.

These are good measures of "static thermal performance," says Patterson, but there is also an American Architectural Manufacturers Association rating, often used by wood-window makers. Their system looks at structural performance, air infiltration, resistance to water damage, and to forced entry. If you live someplace like the Gulf Coast, you'll need to factor in the extra cost of hurricane glass.

In addition, some low-E glass has a tint that clearly marks it as not historic. You can also choose a glass called heat mirror, which has a thin coating of silver, gold, or titanium to block the sun. Some people think it's more efficient, but it will be even more apparent visually and is inappropriate for a historic look.

If noise is a problem, you should ask about the acoustics of your glass. The numbers can be a bit tricky since they are exponential. One rated at 40 is more than twice as good as one rated at 20. Glass in the low



Marvin Windows and Doors put 40 windows in the 1875 Samuel Beach House in Branford, Connecticut, ranging from double-hungs of six-over-six and four-over-four in their original openings, double-glazed windows with true divided lights in a new kitchen wing, and a cupola with round-top windows reconstructed from an old photograph.

to mid 20s range is average, but if you get one rated 56, it will be the sound-dampening equivalent of a 12<sup>°</sup> masonry wall.

If you want old, wavy glass, you can still get it. Patterson's dealership displays a window with old glass, which he says raised the price \$300 per window. If your window wood is rotten but your glass is sound, consider having the old glass set into custom frames.

Millwork companies can also laminate tempered glass to old glass to make it less prone to breakage. Blair Lee of Allegheny Restoration cites studies showing that laminated glass has an insulation value as high or higher than insulated glass. "It has almost the same safety factor and sound properties, and that way you don't have to retrofit. You will have to upgrade your window weight system due to the added weight."

There's a world of windows out there. Don't settle for something less than your house deserves.  $\square$ 

For a list of SUPPLIERS, see page 130.

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# The Bare Naleed House Brence

Once a lone pioneer dwelling in a sea of comfields, the Ranney Homestead now sits among the carefully curving streets of late 20th-century Colonial Revival suburbia—so close in style, so far apart in feeling. While the house looks abandoned, details unveiled in the raw interior tell of a colorful past.

## A Look at the basics of architectural investigations.



Trees from the farmer's own land were converted into floor joists. Viewed from the basement, it's easy to see the remaining bark—even a truncated twig.

rowsing in the sun behind a tall evergreen, this old house in rural upstate New York is concealing a secret. To the casual passerby, the building is just another Greek Revival farmhouse, a lonely survivor of a vanishing breed, but don't let that quiet air deceive you. Beneath the modest outer cloak of clapboard siding and shingle roofing, this is a Bare Naked House.

Indoors, the walls of the house have been stripped of all plaster and wood finishes to expose the networks of framing, spider webs of wiring, and many other details of its makeup. Viewed from inside, the Bare Naked House has become an object lesson in early vernacular constructionan uncommon chance to physically investigate so many hidden parts at once that a group of local architectural historians and preservation specialists took the opportunity to study it. Shivering in the empty house on a midwinter day, they held a hands-on seminar examining every clue that might explain how the original builder put up his first home-clues that can help in identifying and understanding the origins and changes behind many other old houses from the early 19th century.

## Frames of Reference

Historians call this house the Ranney Homestead, one of the oldest houses remaining in the town of Perinton, a suburb of Rochester. Built about 1830, this house was once the center of an extensive farm that raised crops for the active Erie Canal market. This part of New York was not settled until after the Indian Treaty of 1787. When the first settler came to this land, he was following the stagecoach road from Canandaigua to Rochester—a 30-mile stretch with few other inhabitants.

Working without factory-produced lumber or nails, the original settler put together this basic house before there were local architects or professional carpenters. He built in the simplest, most direct way by follow-







From the front entrance, the Bare Naked interior reveals the first floor and staircase plan through the original paint on the ceiling near the door. Early beams are painted to match; later 2x4s contrast in both size and color. Also note how the early partition studs (left in photo) are mortised into the beam. Right: Lighter, perhaps later, joists of sawn lumber rest on an intermediate beam in shouldered (stepped) housed joints; some houses also used dovetail joints. Inset: Holes bored through this mortise-and-tenon joint received the pins that held it together.

ing precedents that originated in England. The resulting house is an example of

true vernacular construction—a functional, unpretentious building that displays the nowforgotten techniques employed and developed by the earliest settlers in the area. The "house detectives" found that the thrifty farmer used materials such as timber and stone obtained from his own land. Sawn lumber was expensive and had to be hauled in by wagon. Since the fields had to be cleared

Another view of original first-floor beams shows how they are essentially trees left in the round except for the adzed top. Squaring at the ends allows them to be housed in a pocket in the sill. of trees anyway, why not put some of them to use?

In a house that has gone through several building and alteration campaigns, the first interesting discovery was that the skeleton is a true timber frame—a system of heavy timber posts and beams held together with intricate mortise-and-tenon joints. The house detectives found that some of the earliest remaining floor joists are trees roughly dressed on one side with the rest of the bark left on—a common labor-saving practice where there was no need to see or



cover the rest of the timber. In the Rochester area, the sawn floorboards in such early houses were often irregular in thickness, so another economical move was to plane them back at places where they rested on joists to make the finished floor surface as uniform as possible.

Heavy corner posts and beams, roughly 12" x 12" in cross section, came from larger trees squared off on-site with hand tools. Early sawmills could furnish boards and smaller structural lumber, but, according to one expert, beams this size were commonly cut by hand. Using an axe, the farmer or carpenter would first score the side of the log with perpendicular cuts to a controlled depth. The farmer or carpenter would then switch to a broadaxe and hew the side flat. To hew the top he would stand on the log and work with an adze (a hoelike cutting tool). Pit sawing, a centuries-old method where two men hand-saw a tree into lumber, was uncommon in the Rochester area, according to one expert. Before circular sawmills appeared in the 1840s, however, there were powered mills that used an upand-down sash saw that imitated human movement.

The original frame of the house was assembled from these handmade materials, and in places where the joinery has been altered it's easy to see how the pieces of the puzzle are held together. The "tongue" or tenon of one member fits into the socketlike mortise of another, and they are secured together with a drawpin—a construction technique just like that in the earliest me-



dieval-style houses in New England. Subsequent structural repairs to floor joists clearly came later because there are lengths of "modern," regularly dimensioned millcut lumber. Between the wall studs it's possible to see the inside surface of the outer sheathing: rough-cut boards that vary in width as they might come from a sawmill in a rural area or before lumber dimensions were standardized. The boards show the marks of water damage and age-the mellow darkening of the wood as the tannins react with the air-along with hints of the saw blade marks that are characteristic of the method by which they were cut.

## **Beyond Wood**

Using his own land as a source of materials, the thrifty farmer even built his foundation with stones culled from his fields. The foundation is laid in a cobblestone pattern of round, fist-sized stones with a raised ridge of mortar between each course-this is a vernacular masonry style that became popular just after the completion of the Erie Canal. The signs of brick masonry, however, are conspicuously absent. When one detective in the party questioned the lack of evidence of a hearth or open fireplace, another explained that in this part of New York State, open fireplaces were rare after 1825. This is the date the Erie Canal was completed, and



Left: Exposed studs still show the ghosts of

scraps of lath.

dimensions and the immense widths of the

horizontal

lumber.

sheathing are

The Bare Naked interior exposed an original summer beam (top in photo) with mortises for a long-gone wall, but the beam still carries second-floor ioists.



with the advent of this easy transportation system, cast-iron stoves quickly replaced inefficient open fireplaces for cooking and heating.

With the interior stripped bare, the house fabric also showed the effects of recent modernization. Truncated plumbing lines help identify the location of a 20thcentury kitchen and bathroom. A clue to earlier plumbing appears as a circle of rough stones under the floor. Though now filled in, this was once the top of the original well.

Demolition of the interior walls exposed another type of informative building material: the wood lath that anchors the plaster. As building construction became more sophisticated through the 18th and 19th centuries, lathing evolved through four general types: riven lath (sticks split out of logs); accordion lath (thin boards sawn on two sides, then spread with a hatchet); split lath (boards sawn on two sides, then split into sticks); and fully sawn lath (wood sawn into regularly dimensioned strips). Fragments of lath clinging to a few posts appeared to be split lath, which fits the date of the building. In some cases, the posts retain the pattern of thin, white stripes—the "ghosts" of plaster keys that were forced through the splits. The type of nails attaching the laths could also suggest a general range of dates for when they were installed.

The investigating team could even trace a change in the floor plan. The stairway now leads up from the south door at the side of the driveway, but physical evidence shows that it once ascended from the front door facing the road. The team found paint on the underside of the second-floor flooring —indicating that originally the interior ceiling was not covered. This was particularly evident in the hall just inside the front door, where the ceiling paint covers the old beam, but not at the newer joists that parallel it.

Up the stairs, the second floor once held bedrooms. While there are full-sized windows at the sides of the house, typical Greek Revival frieze windows face the front. Testimony from those who lived in this type of house reminds us that these tiny, floor-level windows provided little light or ventilation—which was less than desirable in hot summers. Though they are no longer covered with the usual decorative tracery, the

The evolutio	on of plaster lath fr	om The
handmade t	o machine-made	CARTER
can add evi	dence about the ag	le Alex
or changes	apparent in an	THE
old house.		

Riven (ca. 1725) Strips hand-split from logs are uneven on all four sides with no saw marks.

rubblestones marks the top of the original well. To its right stands a bit of the cobblestone foundation with raised-bead mortar joints. Inset: The same garden-variety cobblestone masonry also shows up on the foundation exterior.

A circle of





A closer view of the stairway area highlights the telltale shift between original paint and later unpainted changes.

windows are, however, one of the few stylistic details of this modest house. The remaining building fabric hints that relocating the staircase also altered the bedroom layout at least once.

In the future, the Bare Naked House will take on a new suit of clothes to prepare for its next possible role as a residence or a cozy restaurant. The interior will receive new plumbing, wiring, and insulation to meet current standards before the walls are resurfaced and a new kitchen and bathroom are added. Maintaining their irreplaceable historic detail, the frame and exterior will keep their place as a town landmark as well as a real-life lesson in the construction of preindustrial houses.

Jean France is an architectural historian and former professor at the University of Rochester.



**Nail Form Benchmarks** 

Nails have taken more varied forms as they evolved to their modern versions. Recognizing some major types can also help add historical context to old-house features.

Modern wire common nail (ca. 1880 – present) Round-shank nail manufactured from steel wire with machine grip marks under head.



Accordion (ca. 1725 to 1825) Thin boards are partially split then pulled apart while being fixed to the wall.



Split (ca. 1725 to 1825) Thin boards are split into individual strips and then fixed to walls. Saw marks are on two sides.



Sawn (post 1825) Wood is sawn into regularly dimensioned strips as long as 48" with saw marks on all sides.



## Anonymous, Washington, D.C.

## **INVESTMENT IN LAUGHING STOCK**

To say that the 1970s Silo Moderne addition to this 1930s English Colonial lacked curb appeal is a serious understatement. Nearly the size of the original house and solid glass across the front, it was described by neighbors as "a public library" (*sans* books) and "a dumpster" (*sans* chicken bones). While the house had gone unsold for two years, its price was right for almost a half acre in northwest D.C. Contractors told the couple that the only thing that could

## UnRemuddlings BY KATHLEEN FISHER



Wade Freitag and Stacy Green, Portland, Oregon

## **A SLAP IN THE FACE**

This poor 1905 structure was granted only five years of life before it was remuddled with a "sunroom addition" that doesn't seem to have provided much sun but did obliterate the large front window and most of the porch and a garage that encroached physically on the front steps and visually on the front door. The

owner then turned the home into a boarding house.

Fortunately, when Wade and Stacy bought the house in 1990 they found that the wood moulding removed for many of these "improvements" was stored in the basement.



## Steve Backhaus,

Quincy, Massachusetts

## **PINKING, SHEARED**

In 2001, Steve bought this 1905 house in Wollaston Hill, where President John Adams used to walk from his estate a half mile away. Because of the pink aluminum siding, he and co-owner Jay Dee called their abode "the pink marshmallow." They were also appalled by the porch enclosure but failed to find any photos of the original at the local historical society.

In 2002 they hired two friends to tear off the siding and paint the shingles underneath. They were amazed to find an arched doorway with mullioned windows next to the storm door. "We learned that if you start pulling pink siding off your house, you really start to meet your neighbors," Steve wrote. "One woman stopped to tell us that her aunt owned the home in the 1940s and that originally there were arches running along the entire front of the porch." The neighbor provided a photo from a cousin's wedding showing part of that porch (lower right). Using it as a guide, along with footprints of the original arches, Steve, Jay, and contractor friend Matthew Austin reconstructed the porch. Steve says, "The best part is that our friends have quit asking, 'Why did you buy that house?"

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOMEOWNERS EXCEPT WHERE NOTED



be done with the addition was to tear it down and start over, a too-costly option. The husband sketched an idea on the proverbial napkin, and an architect friend agreed there was potential in the basic structure. Using neighboring Tudors as inspiration, they designed a new façade and roofline. The silo—once serving as nothing more than a lengthy access to the master bedroom—was bumped out into a bay with a second-floor sitting room. "Surprisingly enough," say the owners, "little work was needed to the areas of large modern windows, beyond filling in with casement windows."

As a 30th birthday present to readers and ourselves, we asked you to tell us about some happy endings to your own personal Old-House Living sagas. Here are just a few.





## Robert and Denise Wood, Jacksonville, Florida

## CAN WE KEEP IT? WE FOLLOWED IT HOME

Robert is an attorney and Denise works for an architectural photographer whose husband is a loan officer. When they let Robert's boss's husband know they were looking for their first investment property (they'd honed their skills on minor restoration of their 1938 home), he thought of this repossessed 1920s house in a neighborhood just beginning to make a turn-around. Sided with asbestos, its porch had been enclosed during the 1940s or '50s and jalousie windows had been added. The previous owner had the right idea and had begun to tear off the porch when he ran out of money. So when the couple first saw the place in early 2002, it looked a bit like a hurricane had ripped into it. Yet like an abandoned puppy it stole the Woods' hearts. "Later we drove around



## Marcia and Gloria Miele, Williamsport, Pennsylvania

## THE HERDIC MENTALITY

Millionaire's Row in this central Pennsylvania town was once seven blocks of stunning houses, but some of the most beautiful were torn down—or worse. In 1854 Peter Herdic, a lumber baron, built an Italian villa with ornate mouldings, acanthus columns, and a mahogany stair that curved three floors to a cupola. It remained a single-family dwelling until 1957 when it was converted into apartments with a lumbering addition for a TV repair shop. Twenty years later fire swept through, leaving it charred, water damaged, and vacant for seven years until a local man, Richard Lundy, began to mend it with







the neighborhood to look for ideas from other houses," says Denise, "but a lot of them weren't in good shape. We finally found one on the block behind us that helped us with the porch design." They were ready for a renter less than a year later. This past summer, the Woods were going out to look at another old house to rescue.



support from the Preservation Fund for Pennsylvania. Gradually, he persuaded Marcia and Gloria—who both own historic homes in Williamsport—that they should graduate from the café they ran and turn the house into a first-class dining establishment. They've now been running the Peter Herdic House restaurant for 19 years. Their 84-year-old mother, Daisy, does the baking. Marcia credits late decorator Sam Dornsrife for making the inside both lovely and authentic.



Greg Caruthers and Allen Metzgar, Denver, Colorado

## **GETTING HER GROOVES BACK**

The 1890 Queen Anne that Greg and Allen bought in 1986 had been "updated" to a Tudor after a fire in 1920. The second-floor porch was enclosed to create a sleeping room that reminded Greg of a chicken coop. An oriel window was replaced by a steel casement window, probably around 1950. Like many of the homes in the neighborhood, it spent some time as apartments (five in this case). Although the most recent owners had set it on the road back to single-family, "All of the work was substandard, so we ripped out most of the 'improvements,'" says Greg.

They learned a few details about the house when a neighbor assigned his design students to research the history of the block, but Greg and Allen still had no photographs to guide their restoration. The battleship grey paint had to be stripped off chemically because the house was built with a soft brick common in Denver from the mid- to late 1890s, and the process revealed the ghost of the oriel window on the upper left. "We removed all the Tudor sauce that had been poured on," Greg says, "and re-



placed it with Queen Anne details we borrowed from surrounding houses. Most of the gables and porch details were borrowed from books. I photocopied and reduced features to the proper scale and pasted them on a photograph of our house." Greg did the detail work, including the stained glass.





## Julia T. Bradley, Cromwell, Connecticut

## FORWARD TO THE PAST

Julia started her letter by saying, "This will not be the most dramatic unremuddling you will get." That's why OHJ liked it. On first glance, the novice old-house lover wouldn't notice a lot of problems, except for the truly bizarre placement of the shutters. But wait! Doesn't that chimney seem painfully truncated? Doesn't the front porch seem a bit too overstated and large since-clue number one-it overlaps two of the windows? The Bradleys bought the house in 1985. The upgrades had been made in 1917, a year that would normally grant genuine old-house status, except that the original construction date was 1807. That means that the oneover-one windows were decades out of whack, for instance. Then there was the stucco cladding and the brownstone foundation painted to match.

Ten years later, they had a new chimney, restored clapboards, custom 12-over-12 windows, and a door surround rebuilt following the paint shadows under the 1917 porch. And those well-intentioned, almost 90-year-old porch columns didn't go to waste—the Bradleys used them for a pergola in back.

## Adam J. Goetz, Elwood, Utah

## A ROCKY HISTORY

Adam always had a soft spot for the family home 70 miles north of Salt Lake City. His parents moved in when he was nine, and when he was in his early teens ("already an avid OHJ reader," he says) he obtained the oldest documented tax photo of the house from 1940 (lower right). He learned that the house had been built in 1900 by a Mr. Hill who used railroad ties to build the house so the walls are more than a foot thick. The original structure was 33' square with one dormer on each side and doors with covered porches on three sides. In the early 1970s, squinty little aluminum windows replaced the wide-eved wood ones, ceilings were dropped from 10' to 8', and mouldings and porches on the first level were removed." My parents dropped the final ax when they had aluminum siding installed," says Adam. This removed what remained of the exterior moulding. His parents divorced



and moved in 1980, but Adam continued to fantasize about returning the house to its original form. He would drive by and talk to the new owner, who wanted an outrageous price for the remuddled structure. In September 1999 he noticed that the house was both for sale and vacant, repossessed by the local bank. "Three and a half years later the Farm House, as we call it, is well on its way to a bright future with restored proportions and new dignity," he says.







Diane Hurst, Portland, Oregon

## SWEET BOARDS OF YOUTH

Diane was only 18 when she bought her first house. She was inspired by a high school economics teacher who challenged his class to invest in something more lucrative than video games and funky clothes. She knew the money she had saved for college wouldn't get her through four years, so she took a construction class at the local community college. Nine years later she's owned 11 houses. "I have a special place in my heart for all of them," she says. "Some were 'tear downs,' but I was able to restore them and still make money doing most of my own work." This battered little cottage in Vancouver, Washington, was her fifth house. The court records for it were wiped out in a fire, but she believes it was probably built around 1910 and re-sided with pressed board shingles around 1950. When she stripped away the moss-covered and rotted siding she was surprised to find the original clapboards intact and in fairly good shape. "I ended up patching a small area with salvaged siding, and adding some trim, porch rails, and a new door," she says. "I spent hours scraping and priming; then I painted the whole house with just a paintbrush and a bucket of paint or two." After a year she sold it for a profit and then studied social work for two years. "But I decided I liked fixing up old houses more than anything I could learn in college," she says.



A complex interplay of geometric shapes and forms often runs under the uniform cladding of Shingle-style houses like the 1882 Skinner House by McKim, Mead & White. Note the subtle shingle patterning under the tower roof.







BY JAMES C. MASSEY AND SHIRLEY MAXWELL



In the Watts Sherman House, H.H. Richardson put an American spin on the **English Queen** Anne dwelling while introducing ideas like shingled walls and more horizontal and flowing interior space that later became Shinglestyle hallmarks.

Though no single building is typical of the Shingle style, there are several masterpieces, and one is the Isaac Bell House in Newport, Rhode Island. Here McKim, Mead & White deftly interweave the expansive shingled exterior with the novel shapes of the tower, rounded piazza, and "cat's ears" gable ends.

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oes it seem to you that shingles are suddenly everywhere you look? On old houses, new houses, rehabs and add-ons, in

town and country, even at the lake and on the shore—it's shingles, shingles.

Your mind isn't playing tricks on you shingles actually are more visible on today's housing scene than they've been for 100 years or more. In fact, shingled houses are presently enjoying an architectural comeback. If you're doubtful, just ask your internet search engine to find "Shingle style," and get ready to jump out of the way. There are more than 400 entries! You'll find brief but serious treatises on the origins and characteristics of the historical Shingle style, photographs of many of the best and earliest examples, neighborhood tour notes, and a multitude of illustrations and plans for new Shingle-style McMansions.

From Maine to the Hamptons to the Outer Banks, in Berkeley and San Francisco, shingled houses decorate American shorelines like silver-grey sculptures of weathered wood. And there are lots more, both old and new, between the two coasts as well.

The shingled house in America dates to early colonial times, when wood shingles provided an economical, easily renewed, weathertight covering for small buildings that needed to withstand the rigors of wind and water. Shingle-style houses are a different story.

## Scholastic Shingle

The term "Shingle style" didn't come into play until the 1950s, when Vincent Scully's ground-breaking book, *The Shingle Style: Architectural Theory and Design, From*  This 1880s house is Somerville, New Jersey, might have been a Queen Anne except for the Shingle-style treatment of the exterior. Curving the wall into the recessed, second-storey widow bay is a common Shingle feature. The distinctive tower owes much of its effect to the shingled surface.



JAMES C. MASSEY

Richardson to the Origins of Wright, was published. Scully was the first scholar to make a serious study of what was then a not particularly popular architectural phenomenon—a building type that most of his contemporaries regarded as merely oldfashioned rather than old in a historically interesting way. The late 19th-century Shingle-style house that was inspired by the Colonial shingled house was far from a fashionable research topic.

Wood shingles, particularly cedar shingles, were part of a vast wood-building boom that followed the Civil War. Riding the crest of the Centennial celebration of American independence, Henry Hobson Richardson, an endlessly inventive Boston architect, brought shingles back into the architectural vocabulary of an appreciative public. His first big splash with shingles was not on a Shingle-style house, however, but on a Queen Anne mansion, the Watts Sherman House (1874-75) in Newport, Rhode Island. Richardson took some of the features of the supposedly medieval English half-timbered Queen Anne "cottage," which was strongly resurging in England at that time, added his own penchant for building in stone, and then wrapped them around an open interior designed to suit the needs and tastes of an affluent American family.

The Watts Sherman House impressed many of his contemporaries—as well as later scholars—with its innovative take on Queen Anne. The house came to be seen as a harbinger of what was hailed as the first uniquely American architectural style, the Shingle style. The wood-shingle and masonry house was impressive yet informal, as befit the summer retreat of a New York lawyer and his well-born wife (a Rhode Island Wetmore). Furthermore, the wood shingles that Richardson used on the upper walls of the house gave the architect an opportunity to play with texture and light in an intriguing new way.

The interior of the house expressed a distinctly American approach to domestic life as it was evolving at the end of the late 19th century. It moved away from the idea of a house as a series of self-contained spaces ranged about a stair hall. Instead, Richardson tweaked the medieval "great hall" concept—in which a large entry hall serves as a primary living space as well as a ceremonial entrance and stair hall—to come up with a large but welcoming space where family members and guests could congregate around a fireplace and cozy inglenook or move into other areas of the house at will.

Richardson's youthful employees, Charles Follen McKim, William Mead, and Stanford White, took their boss's ideas a step further when they set up their own firm. One of their early commissions—before the advent of Newport's oh-so-classical Beaux Arts period—was the Newport Casino



Above: Many Shingle-style houses are architect designed. This 1890 house by F.L. & W.L. Price outside of Philadelphia shows how the informal. ground-hugging appeal of high-style examples could be brought to a more suburban scale.



PHOTOS THIS PAGE JAMES C. MASSEY



Left: The innovative concepts of the Shingle house fit the goals of the young Frank Lloyd Wright, who built the original wing of his Oak Park home and studio in the style. The ribbon of windows is a Shingle idea that became stock-intrade with Prairie School architects.



After 1900, the wave of grand, seaside Shingle-style house had crested, but its influence continued to ripple through to the mainstream. This St. Davids, Pennsylvania, house is evidently built from a plan by architect E.G.W. Dietrich offered in Ladies Home Journal in 1904.





Left: Central heating may have made the open floor plan viable but the large hall pioneered by **Richardson** is what made it work. At Naumkeag, Stanford White have the staircase and nearby rooms flow freely from this central space.



Left: Architects working in the Shingle style also found a felicitous shape in the double pitch of the gambrel roof. In the 1893 Dart House by Stone, Carpenter & Willson in Providence. **Bhode Island**, the top of the end wall is extended in a way that plays up the roof and recessed shinales in the storey below.

(1879-81), a lively playhouse with great screened piazzas, a central courtyard, a blend of Colonial and Japanese decoration-and, of course, acres of wood shingles on the outside.

As the Newport social scene moved out of hotels and into the homes of summer residents, McKim, Mead & White also capitalized on what we now know as the Shingle style for private residences. Their design for the Isaac Bell House (1881-83) in Newport is regarded as the epitome of the style. A contemporary critic pegged it, pretty accurately, as being a "modernized Colonial style." Its multigabled façade is beautifully balanced but not symmetrical; its curving

porches suggest days of leisure deeply savored; its many large windows with tiny panes of glass whisper of antiquity; and fish scale shingles cover every inch of the exterior except for a low first storey of brick. Inside, the big rooms flow seamlessly through one broad opening to the next, with enormous pocket doors to close them off at will; and all around, there is a feast of tasty decorative details drawn from Japanese and English Arts & Crafts sources. In other words, it was a thoroughly lovely, modern 1880s house.

Before moving away from the Shingle style, McKim, Mead & White also won praise for their lighthearted, sophisticated

JAMES C. MASSE

design of another summer house, Naumkeag (1884-87), in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, as well as for the threestorey shingled tower addition at Kingscote (1880-81) in Newport where they installed a glorious new Arts & Crafts dining room on the first floor and made other needed amenities on the upper floors.

From the 1870s onward, the Shingle style was kept in motion for several decades not just by McKim, Mead & White, but by a list of America's finest architects-Bruce Price, Wilson Eyre, Will Price, John Russell Pope, William Ralph Emerson, and others. During its heyday, the Shingle-style concept spread far beyond the East Coast. The

e

Picturesque shingles became passé by the 1930s, but their appeal started to rebound in the 1960s with architects like Charles Moore and Robert Venturi, who sought new realms for residential building. This understated house by Venturi & Rauch is in-where else?-Nantucket.



young Chicago architect Frank Lloyd Wright picked up on the idea of open living spaces and a shingled exterior for his own home and studio (1889-94) in Oak Park. Wright's houses became legendary for their organic designs, in which the house seemed an integral part of the earth it was built upon, as well as for their strong horizontal lines and open-floor plans that brought the outdoors inside—qualities that the Shingle style embodied too.

On the timber-rich West Coast, shingles were an obvious architectural choice. Ernest Coxhead, A. C. Schweinfurth, Bernard Maybeck, Julia Howard, and others used shingles to stunning effects on houses, churches, and women's clubs. And, of course, Charles and Henry Greene's Arts & Crafts masterpiece, the David Gamble House (1908-09) in Pasadena, California, is a shingled wonder.

## Shingle-Style Influence

Is every shingled house a Shingle-style house? Where does Colonial Revival end and Shingle style begin and Arts & Crafts take up? The answer to the first question is simple: No. The answer to the second is at least a book or two beyond the scope of this article.

The typical Shingle-style house, though it often has Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, or Arts & Crafts decorative details (such as multi-paned casement windows or



Ample, informal, gambrel-roofed houses from the turn of the 20th century like this straddle the line between Shingle style and Colonial Revival, but the investment in new cladding and other details is clear evidence of a shingle renaissance.

### MORE FROM OLDHOUSEJOURNAL.COM

For a related story online, see "Shingles Club." Just click to "The Magazine" section, and check out the alphabetical list of recent features.

JAMES C. MASSE



BRIAN VANDEN BRINK / SCHOLZ & BARCLAY ARCHITECTURE

More than any other recent building trend, shingled houses have brought back the tower and distinctively shaped or grouped windows—focal points in large façades of stone and shingle that blend the house to the site.

bright tilework), is distinguished by horizontal lines, massiveness, broad porches, and stout towers, and shingles from roof to foundation that create the sheltering effect of a huge wooden umbrella. Inside, the house is the modern in its openness and general informality and charms us with its lighthearted yet seriously beautiful ornament. It is big and important without being formal or pompous.

The Shingle style's popularity in Newport, Rhode Island, and elsewhere waned as new money brought the marble mansions of the Beaux Arts period. Just as the aftermath of the Civil War ushered in the rise of the Shinglestyle era, the advent of World War I saw the end of its best days.

Still, the life hadn't quite gone out of the

Shingle style. It resurfaced in the 1930s in enjo designs such as the National Forest ters Service's Timberline Lodge on top of Mount auth Hood, Oregon, in the 1950s in the California Bay area in houses by Joseph Escherick and mal others; and reappeared, with quirky variations, in the 1970s in Nantucket, How Massachusetts, and New York houses by sun

And it's with us still—or again. Its generous, comfortable shell and open interior speak as eloquently to Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers as they did to the old Newport crowd.

Robert Venturi and Robert A. M. Stern.

In fact, the wood shingle itself as a surfacing or resurfacing material, which was scorned as too expensive, hard to find, install, and maintain, seems also to be

enjoying a return to favor in certain quarters as builders and rehabbers opt for authenticity at any price.

BRIAN VANDEN BRINK / ARCHITECT MICHAEL QUINN FAIA OF QUINN / EVANS ARCHITECTS

The Shingle style, it has been said, makes one think of old money. It also makes one think of stability and, as George Howe Colt in a recent memoir of a beloved summer home on Cape Cod (*The Big House, A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home*) tells us, of "an unchanging place in a changing world." That's good enough for most of us.

Contributing editors James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell, the authors of House Styles in America among other books, have been OHJ's resident architectural historians since 1984. ADVERTISEMENT

## A Dining Room You'll Really Use

## An affordable built-in bookcase in this Shingle-Style House makes the difference

As contemporary lifestyles demand more flexibility in the layout of the home, the traditional function of nearly every room



in the house is changing, especially the dining room. The owners of this *shingle-style* house, for example, found that they were using their dining room as a home office and

study as much as a place to eat and entertain. So they decided to fill one of the room's blank walls with a bookcase that would give the room the feel of an intimate library but wouldn't look out of place when dinner was served.

Rather than install an expensive solid mahogany bookcase, the owners chose medium-density fiberboard (MDF), a strong, affordable alternative to solid wood, for the frame and shelves. They trimmed the bookcase's exposed edges with stock wood moldings selected at a local lumberyard. To achieve the luxurious look they wanted without busting their budget, the owners turned to Minwax<sup>®</sup> First, the bookcase interior was painted

taupe to match the dining room walls and to "frame" the books and decorative objects to be



placed on the shelves. Then came the piece de resistance: the bookcase facings—as well as stock dentil crown molding and baseboard that wrap around the entire room—were stained with Minwax<sup>®</sup> Wood Finish<sup>™</sup> Red Mahogany. Lastly, three coats of Minwax<sup>®</sup> Fast-Drying Polyurethane Satin were applied to protect the surfaces—and to add a soft, luminous topcoat. The completed bookcase expands the room's function in a style both upto-date and rich in tradition. Which is what this dining room is all about.






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## Downtowner

## The Historic American Buildings Survey Turns 70 By JAMES C. MASSEY

OHJ salutes a sister birthday and the preeminent archive of all building types. he National Park Service's Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) is America's oldest federal historic preservation program. Although the survey started inauspiciously in 1933 as a temporary, Depression-era aid for underemployed architects, the significance of its products—carefully measured drawings supplemented by professional photographs and historical data—quickly became apparent to its sponsors within the park service and to historic

In 1934, HABS was formalized and given perma-

nent status with a tripartite



preservationists.

One of the strengths of **HABS** drawings is architectural details. This attractive. rendered sheet, typical of the 1930s, shows the front door of a New Orleans house in a split drawing (half inside, half outside). complete with full-size moulding profiles suitable for making a replica.

agreement among three coordinating organizations—the National Park Service (NPS), which carried out the work; the Library of Congress, which maintained the records for public use; and the American Institute of Architects (AIA), which provided professional guidance. The partnership continues to this day, and HABS is now the world's foremost documentation of historic buildings.

HABS is an indisputable cultural treasure—a magnificent collection of (at last count) 51,910 professional measured drawings, 167,126 large-format view-camera photographs, and 17,165 carefully compiled historical and architectural reports on 28,825 buildings—all archived and made accessible for public use by the Library of Congress's

Division of Prints and Photographs. Unlike other surveys which dead ended, the HABS collection continues to grow as it documents both the great and the typical among America's historic buildings of all types—from dwelling houses to courthouses and commercial buildings. HABS records are listed in national and state catalogs and can also be viewed and downloaded from the Library of Congress Web site. Photographic prints and

full-size reproductions of drawings can be ordered by mail.

"That's great," you may be saying— "but what's it got to do with my old house?" Granted, you probably won't find your own home in the HABS archives, but it would be a mistake to ignore this massive resource as a way of placing your house in context within your town, your state, and the nation. It provides detailed, accurate information on periods, styles, houses, and building types. Chances are you'll find at least one HABS project from your own town—possibly even your local





documentary photography, this HABS photo shows a California bungalow in San Jose exactly as it is, including overgrown shrubbery. Below: This 1934 HABS photograph of the 1818 Ware-Sibley-Clarke House in Augusta. Georgia, records the unrestored condition it presented 70 years ago.

## Downtowner



The splendid, freestanding, winding staircase of the Shrewsburv House in Madison, Indiana, recorded by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher, demonstrates the artistic quality that can be achieved while precisely presenting the architectural features of this 1841 house.

house museum.

Probably the most valuable records are the precise scale drawings. These drawings provide floor plans that show the rooms and spaces of a building, generally from the basement up. They also show sections, which are like a vertical slice through the building in one or more places; elevations, usually of all four facades; and extensive details of ornament, cornices, mouldings, stairs, paneling, and hardware. If you're restoring the porch of an 1840s Greek Revival house in Ohio, for instance, you can search for comparable examples to guide your work. If you are looking at groups of late Federal houses, you can get a feeling for what plans were typical or unusual. Professional photographs graphically detail the buildings; and, since HABS is 70 years old, early ones may well show the house as it was two or three generations back, perhaps before a major alteration or restoration. Such historic photographs and drawings are an invaluable and reliable research tool, and they frequently appear in scholarly books on American architecture. They also form an important reference for historic district research or for architectural guidelines.

Many buildings recorded by HABS have been demolished or altered, and the drawings and photographs provide a unique record from a vanished past. Indeed, some buildings have been accurately reconstructed after a loss from fire, as was the case with St. Michael's Cathedral in Sitka, Alaska.

The HABS drawings are not the earliest ones, however. The idea of recording endangered historic buildings developed in the 1890s as architects studied colonial buildings and then used ideas from them to create new structures in the Colonial Revival style. In the early 1900s, books of measured drawings had become common, and following the



1929 Depression, some local groups (such as Philadelphia's Old Philadelphia Survey and New York's Architects' Emergency Committee) were formed to record historic buildings. HABS's work, however, marked the first time that such documentation was done systematically on a nationwide scale.

This opportunity for a national, uniform approach came in 1933, when a proposal by NPS architect Charles E. Peterson brought together New Deal emergency funds and architects and draftsmen around the nation, to work under the direction of NPS. Although World War II temporarily halted formal NPS efforts, the survey continued using AIA-sponsored donations, and the Library of Congress continued to archive the collection and make it available to the public. In 1966, the park service resumed recording and has continued it to this day, now under the leadership of Paul Dolinsky as chief of HABS.

Along the way, HABS has fathered two companion programs: the Historic American Engineering Record, established in 1969 to record historic engineering and industrial structures, and the Historic American Landscape Survey, established this year to record landscapes and gardens.

Today the fieldwork is done mostly by advanced architectural students organized into

Documentary photography not only captures the architectural features but also allows the setting to reveal the period of the photograph itself. This shot of the Nathaniel Holmes House in Dennisville, New Jersey (built in 1750 and added to in the early 19th century), was taken in 1961-as the television in the corner attests.

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### Downtowner



national summer teams for architect/professors. Although, traditional hand measuring and inked drawing are giving way in large projects to photogrammetry and CAD (computer-assisted drawing), photography still holds to large-format view cameras, with archivally processed black-and-white film. HABS now uses some 5x7 color transparencies for selected buildings. Problems of color permanence over an archival 500 years remain to be resolved.

The uniformity of HABS standards for documentation and its comprehensive cataloging made copies from the Library of Congress by photographic prints easily available. Now you can also use the internet,

#### This 1934 exploded

isometric drawing shows the roof construction of the 1826 Beauregard House in New Orleans. where the catalog and the collection itself can be viewed and downloaded at a high resolution without charge (go to http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/hhhtml).

You can also write to Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540. To contact the central HABS office write HABS (20070), NPS, 1849 C St., N.W., Washington, DC 20240 or visit the Web site at www.cr.nps.gov/habshaer. The standards and procedures for documentation are contained in *Recording Historic Structures* edited by John Burns, FAIA. The latest HABS inventory is the 1995 America *Preserved: A Checklist of Historic Buildings, Structures, and Sites*, published by the Library of Congress.

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# Remu Dolling



# In a Landslide

No no, the house was actually in a fire, but what happened to it afterwards drew a staggering number of responses from OHJ readers. The expanded and opened up 1920s Omaha, Nebraska, bungalow was featured in the local newspaper and honored by a committee of local architects for what they called skillful juxtaposition of contrasting materials on the interior. That included exposed ductwork, concrete flooring, and steel stairs and railings. Walls were covered in cement board and subflooring material. Although most readers sent the newspaper clipping with minimal comment, one who sent before-and-after photos observed: "The final slap in the façade was to paint the front porch school-bus yellow, compromising the harmony between the surviving elements of the original house." He quoted poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "I call architecture frozen music," and he added, "If that were literally true, I'd shudder to think what this one would sound like if thawed."

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OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL (ISSN 0094-0178) is published bimonthly for \$27 per year by Restore Media, LLC, 1000 Potomac St., NW, Suite 102, Washington, DC 20007. Telephone (202) 339-0744. Subscriptions in Canada \$35 per year, payable in U.S. funds. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional entries. Postmaster: Send address changes to OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235.

Opinion