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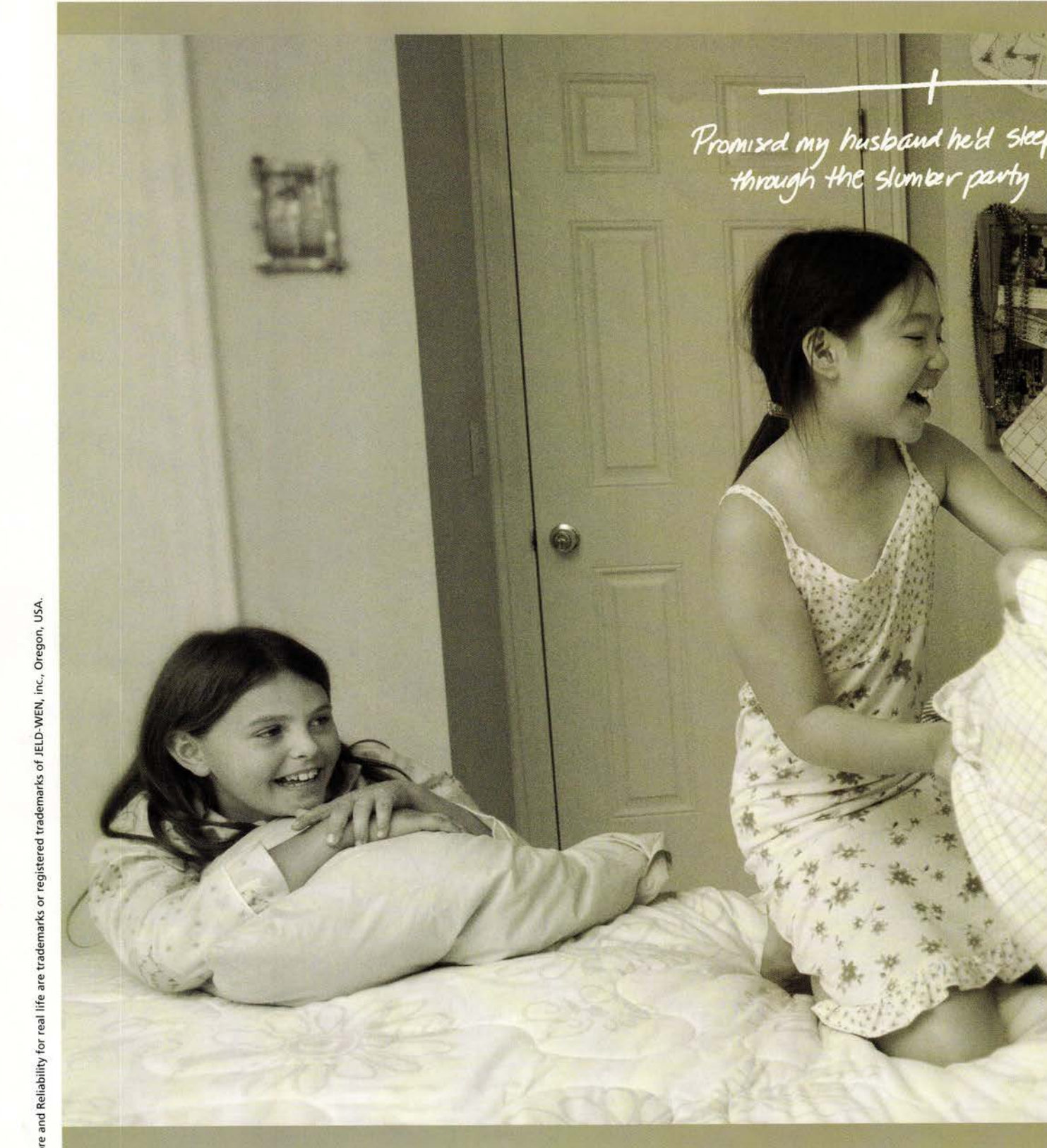


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"GET LOST IN THE COLORFUL DETAILS."

Circle no. 88

Features

50 The Vary Best Colors

By Steve Jordan

Rochester, New York, homeowners wanted to paint their 1880s house to bridge Victorian and Arts & Crafts eras. The steps they took can be helpful for anyone planning a new old-house color scheme.

56 Brownstone Rides Again

By Regina Cole

OHJ visits a newly reopened brownstone quarry in Connecticut to learn more about what brownstone is, and how such a quarry can serve as a source for repair and restoration.

62 Blue Ridge Rescue

By Deborah Huso

Unusual, hand-painted moulding on a 19th-century Blue Ridge house spelled its salvation from becoming firewood. It's now filled with primitive North Carolina furniture and serves as the hub of an "eco-retreat."



July / August 2004

Volume 32 / Number 4

Established 1973

ON THE COVER:

Photo by Andy Olenick. This 1885 high-style Queen Anne in upstate New York got a colorful makeover with a period paint scheme. Story on page 50.



66 The Color of Money

By Alexandria M. Mason

We'll look at paint analysis methods at the House of the Seven Gables in Salem, Massachusetts, and how those methods have allowed the museum to re-create a room in authentic 17th-century colors.

72 The Mania for A-frames

By Chad Garrett Randl

From its rediscovery in the 1930s to becoming the essence of the American vacation house in the 1950s, the A-frame represented the fun side of mid-century modern architecture.



Departments

12 Editor's Page

14 Letters

19 Annunciator

Restoration at Montpelier,
Jane Powell's *Linoleum*.

23 Ask OHJ

Prefabricated houses, fuel for cookstoves.

27 Plots & Plans

Classical details from early
19th-century revival architecture.

31 Fine Design

35 Outside the Old House

By Lee Reich

Got a medlar in your orchard? These and
other fruits uncommon today—currants,
gooseberries, persimmons—were held in
esteem by our ancestors.

41 Conservator

By Allen Charles Hill

A look at historic timber-shaping methods.

44 Essay

By Timothy Mather

This old-house owner reveals the secrets to
his house's melancholy past.

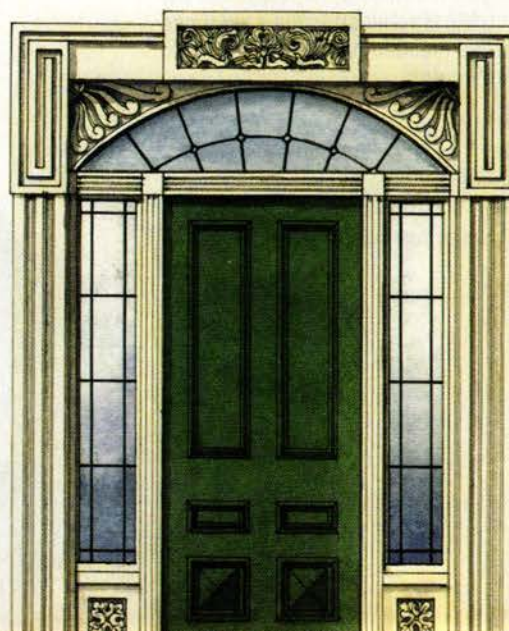
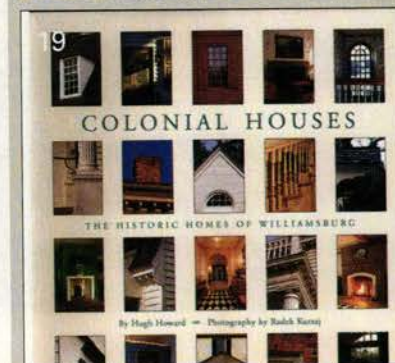
83 Old-House Products

84 Suppliers

117 Swaps & Sales

Historic homes for sale, antiques,
and architectural services.

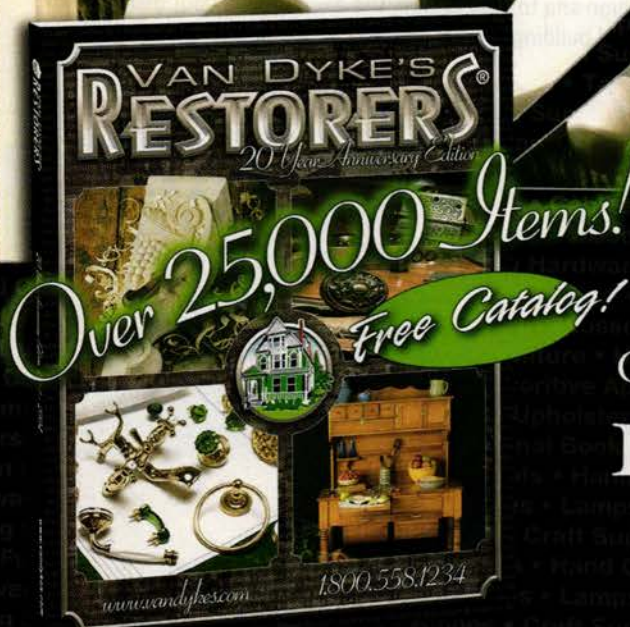
122 Remuddling



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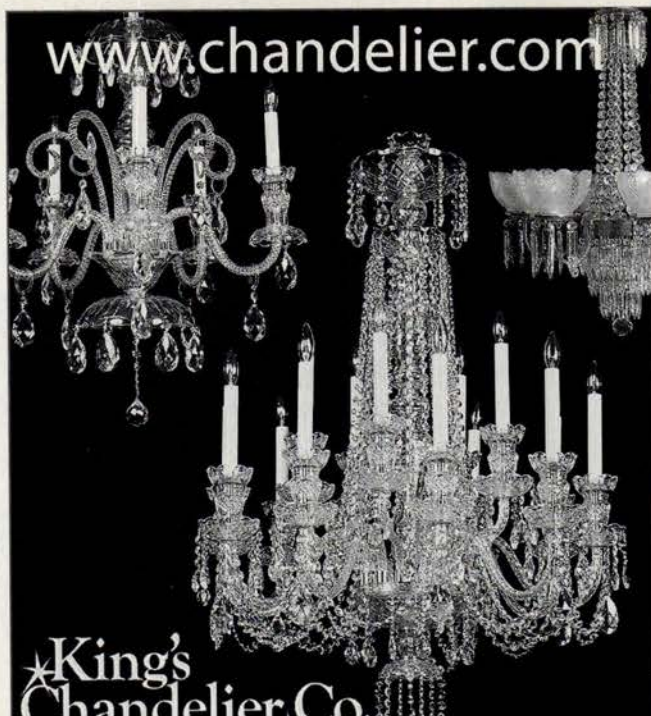
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Editor's Page

Eyes on the Prize

Have you wondered to yourself, or whined to someone else, "When are we ever going to get this finished?" You are not alone.

A major challenge in complex or long-term projects like working on old houses is simply keeping the original vision for the final results, then sticking to the plan and upholding standards, until you achieve them. Of course, it's often prudent to adapt to new conditions and better ideas that pop up, but the trick is to not become distracted or disillusioned before you're "out of the forest."

According to an old saying, "Children and fools should never see anything half done." These outsiders may be quick to judge the merits of a project before it's fully realized, yet we insiders who are up-close and familiar with old houses can become short-sighted too. Nobody enjoys the appearance of naked wall studs or half-patched plaster cracks, but it takes living with them for a while—sometimes quite a while—to get to the pretty, fun stuff of wallpaper and hardware and paint finishes. For example, when light fixtures, mouldings, and decorative fittings are the first things to come down in a room under repair for many weeks or months, it's hard to remember what the space originally looked like—much less how terrific the future finished room will be.

Whether you're working on the exterior or the interior of an old house, attention to detail is what makes the final product look great, but attention takes time. Like a good paint job, the bulk of most building restoration is preparation—both on-paper planning and hands-on work—before the details can come. Sure, it's time-consuming to level and square the framing for floors and walls as much as possible before the finishes go on. However, if your plan is for patterned wallpaper or a tile wainscot, these finishes are going to accentuate every wavy surface and bad angle in the final job, and you'll waste expensive materials (not to mention effort) trying to work around them.

Having a clear, tangible picture of your goal—a conceptual drawing, say, or even a photo clipped from a magazine—is very inspirational and useful, but past images can be just as much help. Taking photos of a project before you start, and then at regular stages during the work, not only documents the specific construction but also the progress you have made—providing encouraging benchmarks to take pride in when it seems there will never be light at the end of the tunnel.

In our age of instant, worldwide communications and new houses that materialize seemingly overnight like mushrooms, it requires a bit of fortitude to stay the course with old-house work and keep in mind the satisfying results ahead. As the Japanese sponsors are reported to have said in the 1870s when asked about the building they were erecting at the Centennial "Wait, till comes time, you then see."



Edna Beck

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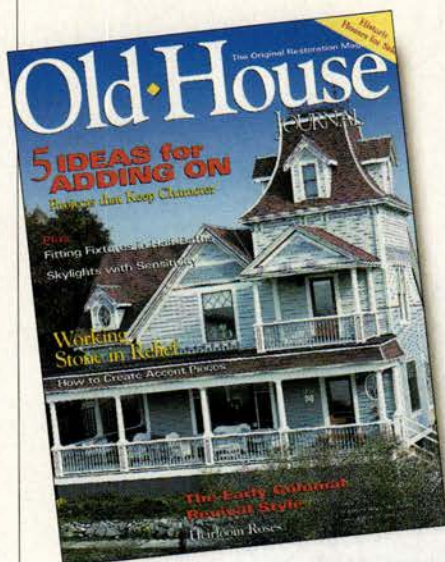


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Growing Pains

I enjoyed your article on sensitive additions "Room to Grow" (May/ June). I have a 1,500-square-foot half Cape, and my family is growing (I'm due in October with my second child). You've given me sound advice on how to proceed with growing this little house. Thank you for a great, informative magazine.

Elizabeth Gale

Brewster, Massachusetts

New England in Florida

It was a pleasant surprise to turn to "After the War" (March/April) and see a photograph of the house I grew up in: a Royal Barry Wills Cape (below). My parents built the house on the last lot in the neighborhood, when we moved from Tampa, Florida, to Jacksonville after World War II. My mother, always an admirer of New England life and design, researched magazines and books, and, after reading Wills's *Houses for Good Living*, ordered the

plans from his office in Boston. They were modified for Florida living.

Before my mother passed away in 2000 she was recognized as a 50-year resident by the neighborhood's San Marco Preservation Society. In 2001, our daughter and her husband moved into the house and in 2002 my granddaughter was born and now lives there as well.

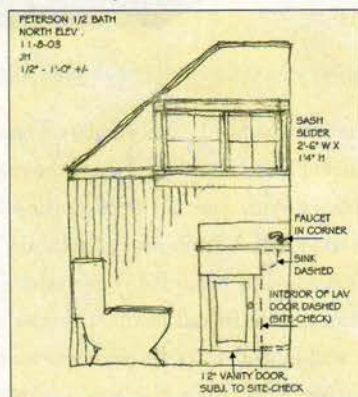
I know they would have been as proud to see the lovely photo and kind commentary about their beloved home as I was.

Jinny Pepper Fish
Jacksonville, Florida

Whole-Hearted Half-Bath

I enjoyed Gordon Bock's article "Half-Baths & Tiny Toilets" (May/June). The article was published at the perfect time too—I am designing an under-staircase half-bath in an 1890s house for some friends. Here's my rendering—the window, with little four-pane sliders with "hammered" translucent glass, creates a nice touch.

Jonathan Hale
Watertown, Massachusetts



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Letters



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A Sign from Above

A few decades (!) ago you invited readers to send in stories of the hidden treasures they found when restoring their homes. I'm a little late but think this story is worth sharing. We live in an 1891 Victorian home that had been in my father's family for 65 years.

The property's outbuildings aren't particularly fancy and were probably thrown together quickly out of necessity. From a practical standpoint the barn should've been bulldozed, but we're a couple of romantics who feel that leveling the barn would be akin to cutting off an arm. We hired a crew of house restorers, but to trim the costs decided to do some of the site prep work ourselves.

One afternoon the job foreman casually mentioned that he found a piece of an old wooden sign when cutting through the upstairs floor. It seemed to be an old Studebaker sign used for shimming. That night my husband, Fred, carefully began removing the upper floor, and we found to our delight that the entire floor had been shimmed with these signs. Fred managed to pull out over 30 of them intact and located many more that had been cut apart to fit the spaces between the floor joists.

We later learned that these signs that advertise "The celebrated Studebaker Wagon for Sale" by the Coffin & Northrup Hardware Store date back to around the 1890s. They were made of a thin pine veneer by the Cross Press & Sign Company in Chicago. They are quite rare and rather valuable and will go a long way in funding our barn restoration. I'm convinced that someone up there is smiling down on us for saving that barn and found a way to drop the money into our laps.

*Carolyn Fritchman
Boise, Idaho*



Origins of Remuddling

We found a *Popular Mechanics* from 1955 at a flea market in Burlington, Ontario, and it has an article on modernizing that old "clunker." This picture (above) shows window and door "updates" for a Foursquare. Remuddling at its beginning? Thanks for your great publication.

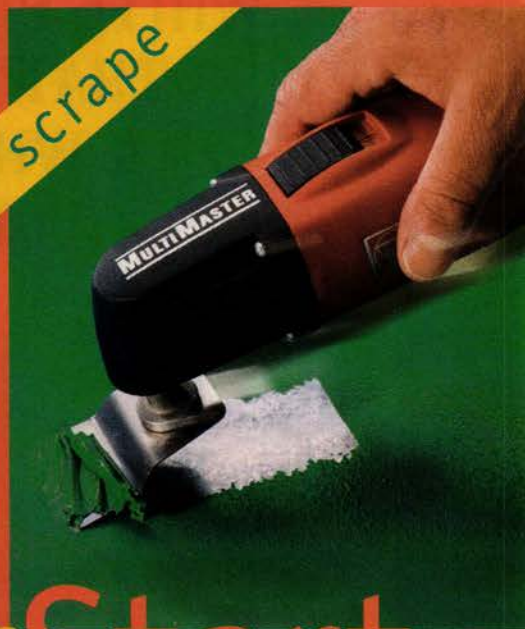
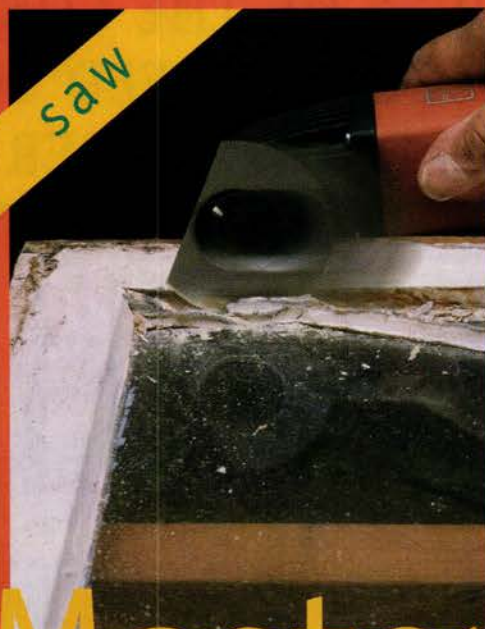
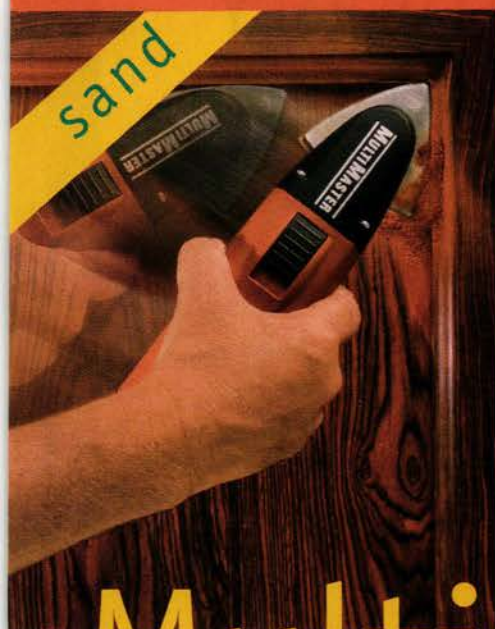
*Julie and Donald Fraser
Clarksville, Georgia*

Omission

In Ask OHJ May /June 2004, we failed to credit the mantel and hearth shown on page 25 to Fires of Tradition (www.firesoftradition.com) and the cast arch and gas inset to Valor (www.valorfireplaces.com).



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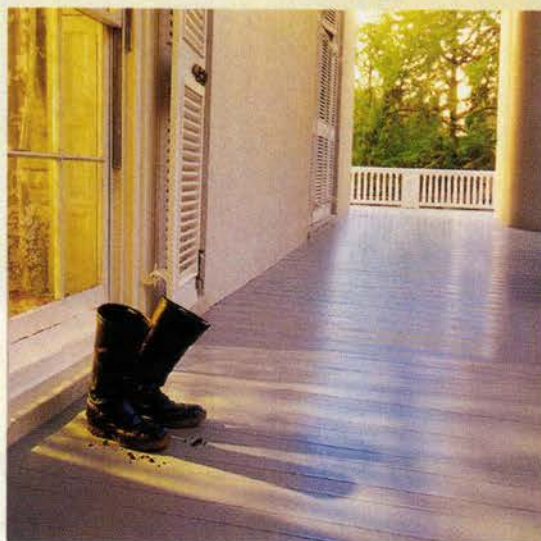
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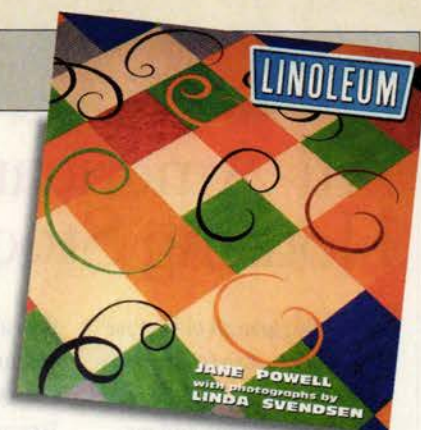
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Linoleum Lover

If you cherish found scraps of vintage floor covering, you'll love author Jane Powell's and photographer Linda Svendsen's *Linoleum* (Gibbs Smith; \$29.95; 128 pages). Through the pages of this book, Powell gives an overview of the history of linoleum's invention in 1863 until its almost complete eradication in the 1960s due

to widescale vinyl production. Powell shares wonderful antique linoleum advertisements, illustrations, and a vivid kaleidoscope of historic linoleum patterns. She delves into the care and repair of this "green" building product and how homeowners in the past could find "kitchen beauty on a budget"

with this versatile floorcovering. Powell even shares the secret of whether linoleum is impervious to kitty cat urine as well as a list of today's linoleum resources.



Restoration Sneak Peek

In OHJ's June 2002 Preservation Perspectives J. Randall Cotton addressed the question: "What date to restore an old house to?" He used as an example the debate over the Montpelier restoration project—whether to keep the 1900 additions by the prominent duPont family or to restore the house to the 1820s, the era of President James Madison. This year restoration began to return this house, in size, structure, form, and furnishings, to the decades when the Madisons resided there. This deconstruction will reduce the building from its current 55 rooms to 22 rooms—and includes removing the lavish William duPont family additions.

Throughout this four-year restoration, some public spaces will remain open for visitors to get a glimpse of the work taking place, such as removing the stucco façade and restoring the brick underneath, adding shutters appropriate to the Madison period, re-creating the west portico and a stairway leading from the porch to the ground, as well as the restoration of Dolly Madison's chambers—complete with crimson walls and bed hangings. The interior restoration will also reintroduce the grand drawing room, formal dining room, Madison's office, sitting room, and president's library.

"The restored mansion will bring the era of James and Dolly Madison alive in a way that has not been possi-

ble, while the new gallery will present a vivid picture of the duPont's accomplishment and lifestyle," says Richard Moe president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "When this project is complete, Montpelier will be one of the country's most distinctive historic sites."

To identify what dated to Madison's lifetime and what did not, researchers pored through numerous old documents—builders' accounts, invoices, visitor's recollections, and other architectural evidence, including an insurance plat drawn in 1837 (one year after James Madison's death) that documents several outbuildings, and late 19th-century photographs that show many original walls, doorways, and windows. Portions of the additions removed will be reconstructed in a new gallery to honor the duPont family's heritage.

A National Trust Historic Site Montpelier is open to the public year-round from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. April through October and 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. November through March. To plan a trip to the museum or to read about the latest restoration efforts visit www.montpelier.org.



All-American Housing Stock

Although I love all old-house styles, I have a special affinity for Colonial. As a child, my parents packed me and my seven siblings into the Country Squire wagon to visit Colonial Williamsburg, where I fell in love with the old buildings. It was like stepping back in time, walking among those handsome brick and clapboard structures. My imagination turned to the people who built these houses and what their lives must have been like. I knew then that our 1967 "Garrison Colonial" paled in comparison to the simple beauty of

the early 18th century.

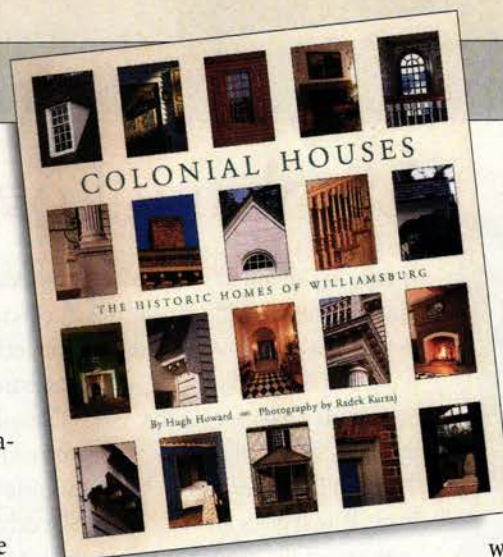
Author Hugh Howard and photographer Radek Kurzaj brought my imagination back to life in the beautifully-photographed *Colonial Houses the Historic Homes of Williamsburg* (Harry N. Abrams; \$24.95; 127 pages) Howard visits 13 meticulously preserved houses in this famous historic district where "more than 88 original buildings were identified as having survived from the early 18th and 19th centuries." Howard

gives an account of John D. Rockefeller's anonymous role in purchasing these houses and his preservation efforts to re-create the colonial "Shangri-La." Howard explores the exteriors, interiors, floor plans, and individual political and economic histories of both public and private houses such as the

home of Robert King Carter, who at the time of his death in 1732 had acquired 300,000 acres of land and 1,000 slaves, and the home of Colonel John Tayloe II who owned a profitable iron-

works and was a member of the Governor's Council. You'll learn about design, structural, and finishing details as well as how these houses have changed or been altered through time. Howard offers a glimpse of the past and reminded me of why I love the history and antiquity of this all-American style.

—Nancy E. Berry

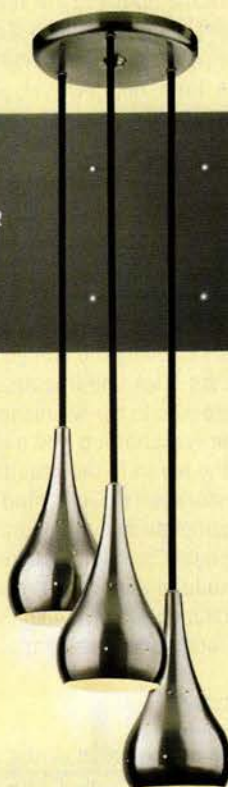


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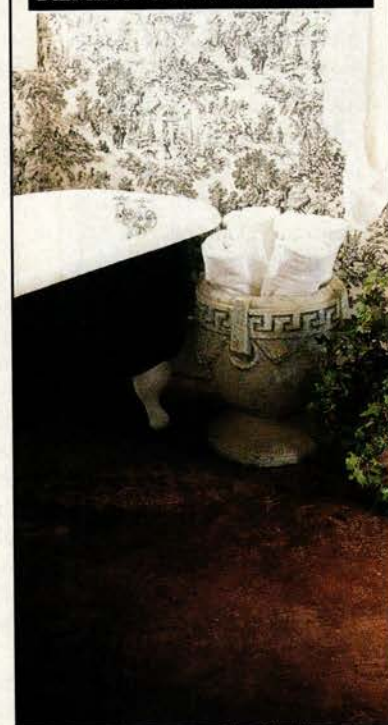
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A photograph of a classic wooden rocking chair with a spindle back, positioned on a wide plank floor. The chair is made of dark wood and is set against a light-colored wall with a large window in the background. The floor is made of wide, dark wood planks.

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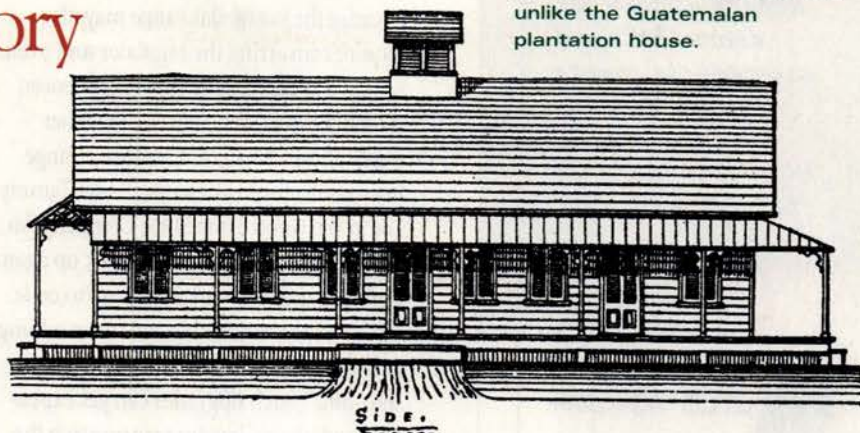
Prefab Prehistory

While researching turn-of-the-20th-century coffee-farm architecture in Guatemala, I was told that the houses in these photos may have been imported from the United States (probably California) as portable or sectional houses. What's OHJ's opinion?

Virginia Adams

Seekonk, Massachusetts

While books and magazines have regularly touted prefabricated houses as a revolution in construction over the last 80 years—most notably during the postwar housing crunch of the late 1940s, and again in the housing boom of our own era—recent research shows they go much farther back as a concept and successful industry. In *Houses From Books*, Daniel Reiff notes that “During the second half of the nineteenth century, several companies in the United States manufactured ‘portable’ and ‘sectional’ houses... made for shipment to California during the Gold Rush, for use in the Civil War, and for vacation cottages during the 1870s and 1880s.” Among the buildings offered in 1881 by one of these firms, The Portable House and



Designed for the tropics, the 25' x 44' Plan 18 (below) is only one example of buildings shipped knocked-down to equatorial markets in the 1880s, and not unlike the Guatemalan plantation house.



further in 1880 by manufacturing buildings for export “especially adapted for the West India, Mexico, and South America

Manufacturing Company of New York City, were dwellings for plantations “for all countries.” Should there be any doubt about what countries they had in mind, the Flushing Lumber and Building Company of New York took the idea a step

markets.” Their Plan Number 18, for example was “made for the Central American market” and designed with features (multiple porches, central ventilator) and materials (pitch pine) that were “most suited to the location.”

Fueling Around with Cookstoves

Is there something I can buy and hook up to an old gas stove in order to have it run on propane instead of piped-in gas?

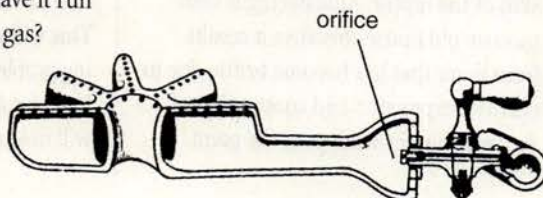
Anne Cunningham

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Highly versatile because it can be delivered as a liquid and stored in tanks, propane, or LP (liquefied petroleum) gas is derived from processing natural gas or refining crude oil. It has been marketed for cooking, among other applications, since the 1920s, and many cooking ranges manu-

factured in the last 50 years are capable of being converted from natural gas to propane. Basically this involves changing the orifice fitting on each burner assembly to one with the appropriate diameter for propane.

While the process is straightforward, it is a job for a professional



Typical orifice locations on lever-handle and dial-handle range burners of the 1920s.

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because the particular range may also require converting the regulator and oven, as well as adjusting the flame. Moreover, switching stove fuel sources has other implications. "Once you remove a range from its original installation," says Tammy Lee at the Good Time Stove Company, "in most areas you can't hook it back up again until the appliance is brought up to code. With vintage stoves, this can mean adding features like insulation and gas-safety shut-offs." Such upgrades can get expensive, and always involve transporting the range to and from the restoration specialist. Good Time Stove, however, will provide a free estimate of the work to anyone who mails them a picture of their stove and its manufacturer data to: Good Time Stove Co., P.O. Box 306, Goshen, MA 01032; www.goodtimestove.com.

Crazed and Confused

Lots of the exterior trim on my 1910 Foursquare has paint that is still solidly adhered to the wood, but full of deep minute cracks that are unsightly—especially since they show the old trim color. Should I fill the cracks or simply paint over them?

Paul Martin

Lincoln, Nebraska

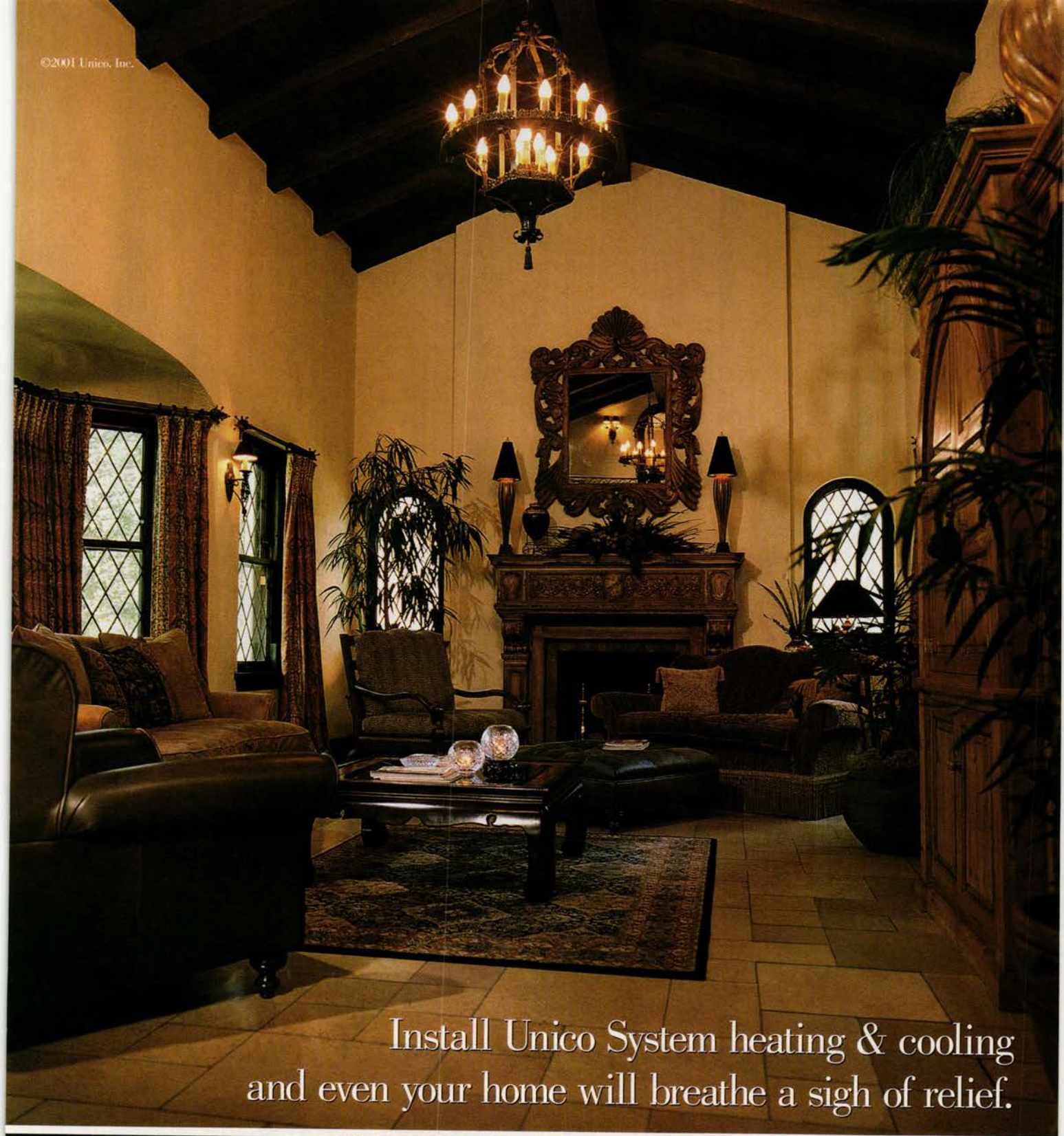
The paint condition you describe sounds like "alligatoring"—an advanced case of crazing where the paint film fractures into myriad rectangles that resemble the skin of the reptile. Alligatoring is common on old houses because it results from paint that has become brittle due to age. The expansion and contraction of the wood underneath puts the paint

under tremendous stress, and since the film is no longer elastic enough to move with the wood, it fractures repeatedly to relieve that stress—often down to bare wood. Alligatoring is particularly prevalent and severe where there's thick paint buildup. Many quick-and-dirty painters simply brush right over alligatoring, and while a speedy recoat won't obliterate the cracks it will mask the problem—for a while, anyway. The problem is, as soon as the wood moves again in a few weeks, the cracks will return in the same locations,



The reptilian paint cracks called "alligatoring" will only come back if they are simply painted over.

this time even deeper due to the additional coat of paint. Filling the cracks is also only cosmetic and does not prevent the alligatoring from reoccurring. The solution is to remove the alligatored paint down to bare wood by a proper method, such as chemical or mechanical stripping—taking care to observe lead paint precautions. This will not only eliminate the alligatoring problem for good, but also create the basis for a smoother, crisper paint job that will hold up for many years. 🐊



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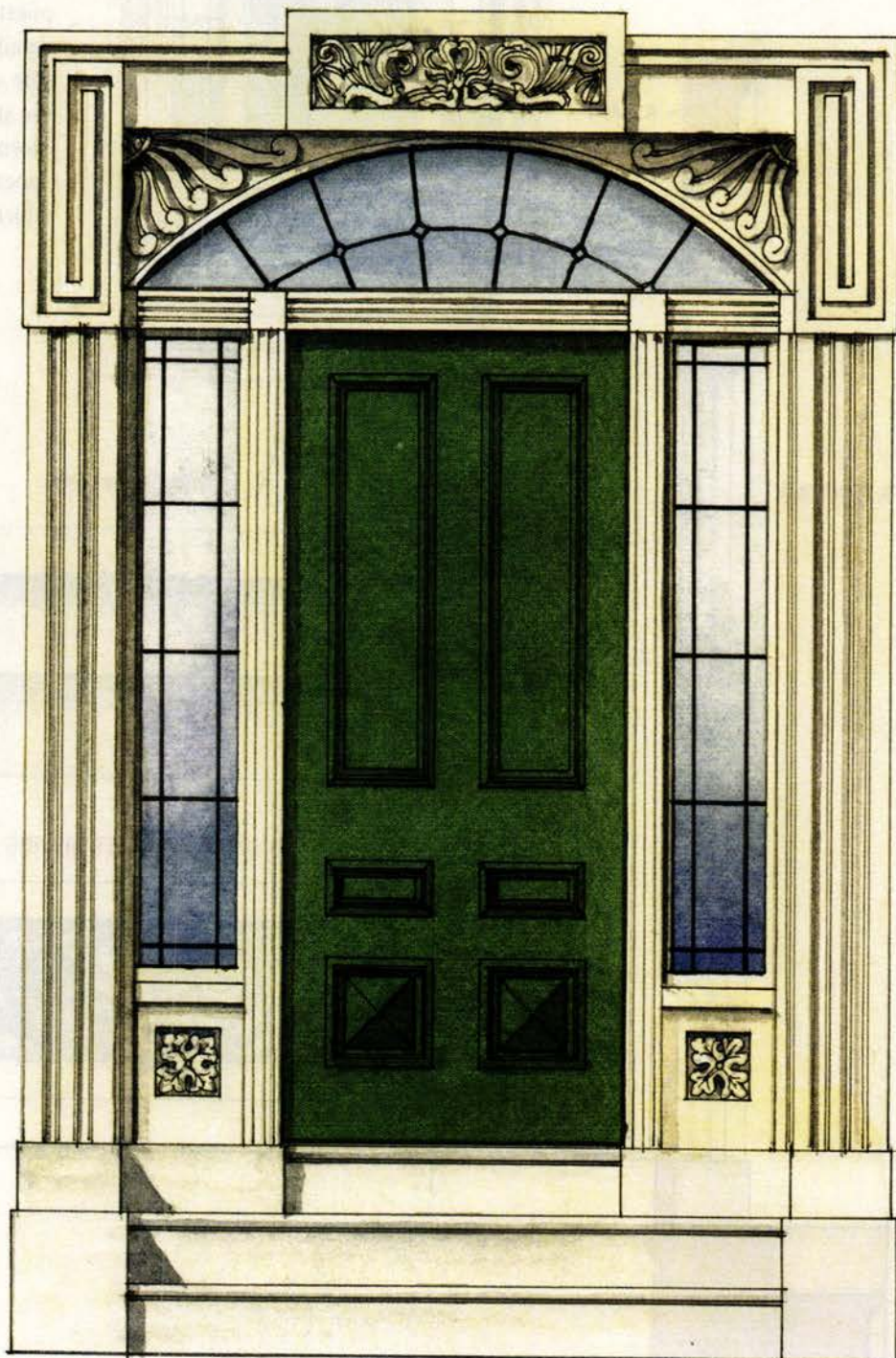
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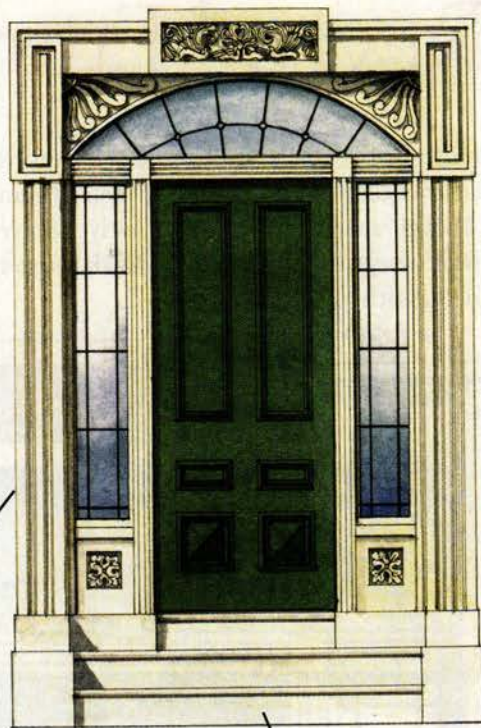
Greek Revival Entrance

**Drawings by
Rob Leanna**

Since the inception of OHJ's Plots & Plans over two years ago, we've always felt the Greek Revival style and the austere beauty it creates in wood would be an ideal subject for the department. Though sources for authentic early 19th-century details are rare, we got lucky while researching one of the seminal designers and popularizers of the style: Asher Benjamin of Massachusetts.

This "frontispiece" with sidelights and segmented fanlight dates to 1835 and is nicely embellished with many of the high-style motifs lavished on such an important element. The pilaster tops are decorated with a bold Greek fret—relatively simple to construct but producing striking shadow lines. In contrast, the spandrels in the corners at either side of the fanlight are filled with plain, stylized honeysuckle carvings, rich but equally effective when constructed as sawn and applied ornaments. Ever practical, even Benjamin himself noted that carved tablets above the door and below the sidelights could simply be left as plain panels should they "be thought too expensive."





Dimensional information is uncommon on plans of this age, but Benjamin's commentary does indicate the tablet to be 36" wide, and other features can be scaled from here. He also shows projected views of critical areas to help convey the relative depth of elements. The cap at A is partially recessed behind the pilaster tops, and the pilasters are detailed at their sides. At B there is a side view of the buttress that meets the steps and forms a plinth. A top-down view of the same elements appearing in C and D is a detail of the tablet carving. 🏠

A. CAP

B. SIDE VIEW

C. TOP-DOWN VIEW



D. DETAIL OF TABLET CARVING



36"

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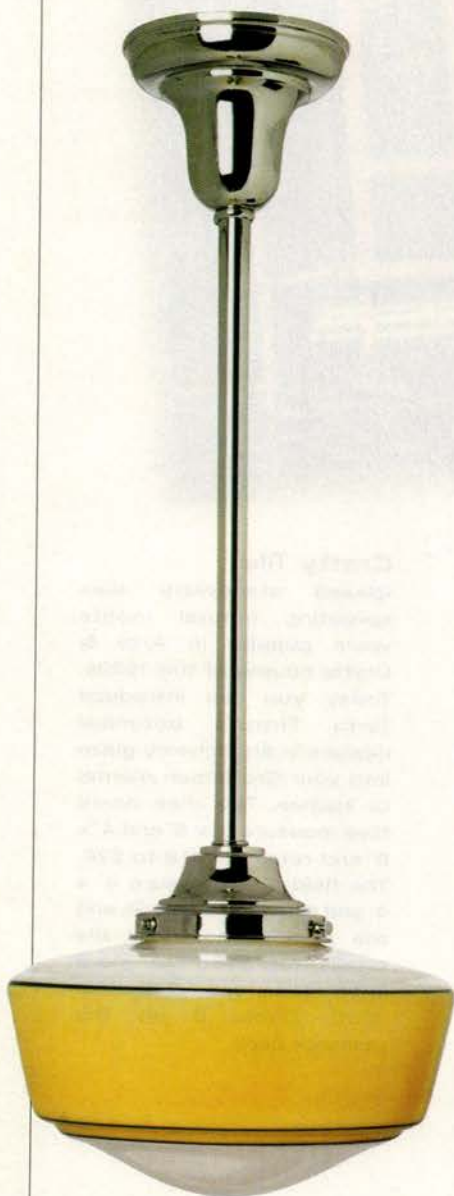


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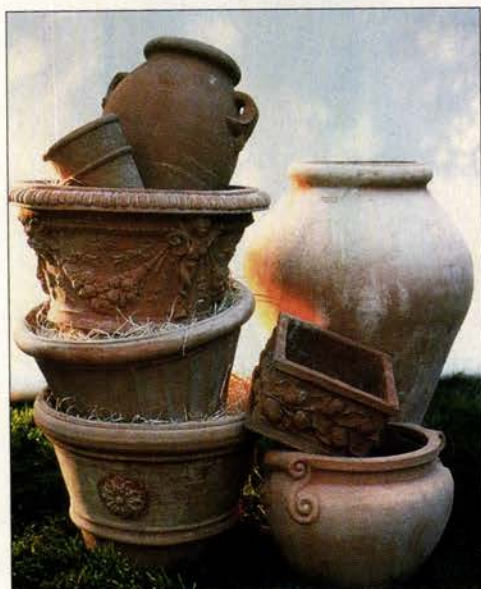
Retro Range

Elmira Stove Works introduces to its Northstar collection this 1940s-inspired range. The design comes with either high-speed electric elements under glass or sealed gas burners and self-cleaning gas or electric ovens and offers that nostalgic look with 21-century functionality. For more information call (800) 295-8498 or visit www.elmira-stoveworks.com. Circle 5 on the resource card.



Pot Luck

Terra cotta planters have graced gardens for centuries and are an appropriate accent to any old-house terrace. Seibert and Rice, makers of fine Italian terra cotta pots, are bringing two recognized Italian artisans to New York to re-create old-world designs. All urns are handmade using the coil method. For more information visit www.seibert-rice.com. Circle 6 on the resource card.



Wonder Walls

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Crafty Tile

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Outside the Old House

A Little Bite of History

A taste of neglected fruits grown by our ancestors beats a sound bite any day.

By LEE REICH

If you want to grow an heirloom fruit garden, your choices don't stop at decrepit trees that Johnny Appleseed might have planted, or even newly propagated specimens of old-time favorites like pears or cherries.

Generations past grew many fruits barely known today, which not only made enjoyable snacking and delicious preserves, but were borne on plants attractive enough to double as landscape trees and shrubs. The best reason to grow these now uncommon fruits, though, is for the unique and



LEE REICH

delectable flavors they offer, flavors you still won't find in upscale markets today.

If you walked past the kitchen garden of a 19th-century home and took a deep breath, your nostrils might fill with a sweet, spicy scent wafting from the yellow, trumpet-shaped blooms of a clove currant (*Ribes odoratum*) bush. Then you would know to return in July, when the flowers would have turned to half-inch-diameter berries, smooth, shiny, and blue black. The flavor is sweet tart and very aromatic, good popped right into your mouth or cooked into jams or tarts. In his 1845 classic, *The Fruit and Fruit Trees of America*, Andrew Jackson Downing states that the fruits "are relished by some persons." I am one of them.

Clove currant is not a bush for a formal garden. Its arching stems often root where they touch ground and new shoots arise from spreading roots. With a bit of pruning, though, the shrub graduates from wild to informal, and with even more pruning, the bushes can be trained as small trees. As would be expected of a native to the Midwest, from Minnesota down to Texas, clove currant plants are tough, able to withstand cold, heat, and drought. Pests—even deer—generally leave the plant alone.

Currant Status

More familiar, but still not widely grown today, are red and white currants. These fruits, the same except in color, were grown in America as far back as the 17th century. Downing lists 25 varieties. My favorites among the dozen I grow are

Above: If you think of gooseberries as small and tart, check out some of the large dessert varieties, with green, white, red, or almost black skin enclosing sweet flesh.



Above: Cornelian cherry, a dogwood relative, has yellow flowers in early spring, followed by attractive fruits that taste like tart cherries. Right: The spicy spring scent of clove currant flowers herald tart blue-black summer fruits, good in jam.



DAVID CAVAGNARO



LEE REICH



DAVID CAVAGNARO

Top: Interest in native plants and feeding wildlife has made *Amelanchier* an increasingly popular small tree, but you may have to race the birds to its blueberrylike produce.
Above: Alpine strawberries are a groundcover bearing season-long fruits.

or almost black skins enclose a sweet, aromatic flesh. I compare the flavors of my best varieties with that of grapes, apricot, and plum; each variety has its own unique flavor.

Gooseberries and red and white currants fruit best if they are pruned every year to remove stems more than three years old, and if the youngest stems are thinned so they don't crowd each other. The plants can be grown as small bushes, trained as small trees, or grown as espaliers, such as the red currants I have trained on the fence around my vegetable garden. These berry plants do suffer occasionally from pests, but some varieties, such as 'Hinnonmaki Yellow,' 'Poorman', and 'Glendale' gooseberries, and 'Red Lake' and 'Rondom' currants, are pest resistant as well as great tasting.

Neglected Trees

In addition to these berries, our hypothetical 19th-century yard might contain some trees we wouldn't recognize today. In spring the large, solitary, white or slightly blushing blossoms of the medlar (*Mespilus germanica*) are every bit as showy as wild roses. Unlike most other fruit trees, medlar opens its flowers after the stems begin growing, so the blossoms are framed by a backdrop of dark green leaves.

I feel safe in predicting that the fruits, which ripen in autumn, will never appear in the marketplace. First, they're too ugly, resembling small, russeted apples, tinged dull yellow or

'Pink Champagne' and 'Primus'. Red and white currants rose in popularity up to the turn of the 20th century, but then were all but forgotten around 1920 when mistaken blame for spreading white pine blister rust led to a ban on them. The ban was lifted some decades ago and red and white currants are now experiencing a revival.

Leaves appear on these currant stems very early in the season, soon followed by strings of pale green flowers, not individually showy, but, taken together, give the whole bush a lacy look. The fruits, ripening in July, hang from the branches like shiny, translucent chains of beads. When they're backlit by the sun, you can see the seeds floating within the delicate spheres.

Closely related to currants and suffering the same rise, fall, then resurgence of popularity are gooseberries. Too many people consider gooseberries to be small, green, tart fruits, suitable only for cooking. In fact, there are many varieties of large "dessert" gooseberries—I grow about 30 of them—whose tender green, white, red,



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Outside the Old House

Right: Red currants are a decorative fruit that, like their white cousins, got a bad rap for spreading disease. Below right: Captain John Smith of Jamestown was a fan of the sweet and spicy American persimmon.

red, with their calyx ends (opposite the stems) flared open. "A crabby-looking, brownish-green, truncated, little spheroid of unsympathetic appearance" is how J. C. Woodsford described the fruit in *The Gardener's Chronicle* in 1939. And second, before being eaten, medlars must be bletted, which means harvested and put in a cool, moist room until their flesh turns brown and mushy.

The flavor of that brown mush is, however, delectable, something akin to rich, spicy applesauce, refreshingly brisk with winy overtones. The tree recommends itself to backyards in any century because it's also easy to care for, needing virtually nothing in the way of pest control or pruning. Medlar reached its peak of popularity during the Middle Ages but was a market fruit in Europe as late as the end of the 19th century.

You might also be surprised to find a white or common mulberry (*Morus alba*) being cultivated in the yard. This species was brought here from China so silkworms could feast on its foliage, and is rarely planted today because wild ones are so ubiquitous, but was valued a century ago. Henry Ward Beecher (reformer and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe) wrote in 1846, "I regard it as an indispensable addition to every fruit garden; and I speak what I think when I say that I had rather have one tree of Downing's Everbearing Mulberries than a bed of strawberries." Downing's 'Everbearing', selected and propagated for its superior tasting fruits, is no longer available, but I grow another variety, 'Illinois Everbearing', whose fruits are especially tasty.

Mulberry's status as the second most common weed tree in New York City is testament to its tolerance to abuse in the form of drought, pollution, and poor soil. Don't plant them near walkways, or stains from fallen fruit will find their way indoors on the bottoms of shoes. Red mulberry (*Morus rubra*), a native species, is attractive in the landscape because of its large leaves. If you want an especially appealing ornamental, look for one of the weeping forms, which not only produce delicious fruit but form "tents" big enough for a small child to hide in. 🍷

Lee Reich grows heirloom fruits in his backyard in New Paltz, New York, and is author of Uncommon Fruits for Every Garden (Timber Press, 2004).



LEE REICH

More Uncommon Heirlooms

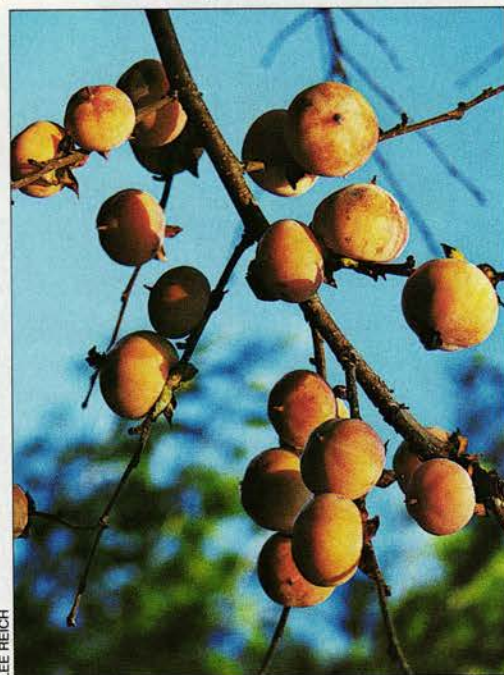
ALPINE STRAWBERRY (*Fragaria vesca*): These diminutive strawberries pack intense flavor and bear fruits throughout the growing season. You can buy white-fruited forms that are ignored by birds.

AMERICAN PERSIMMON (*Diospyros virginiana*): Highly recommended by Captain John Smith of Jamestown. Fruits are the size of small tomatoes and taste something like wet, dried apricots that have been drizzled with honey and dashed with spice.

CORNELIAN CHERRY (*Cornus mas*): This fruit, enjoyed by humans since Neolithic times, is a dogwood species and looks and tastes much like a tart cherry. The carefree tree is one of the first plants of the season to unfold its blossoms, which are yellow.

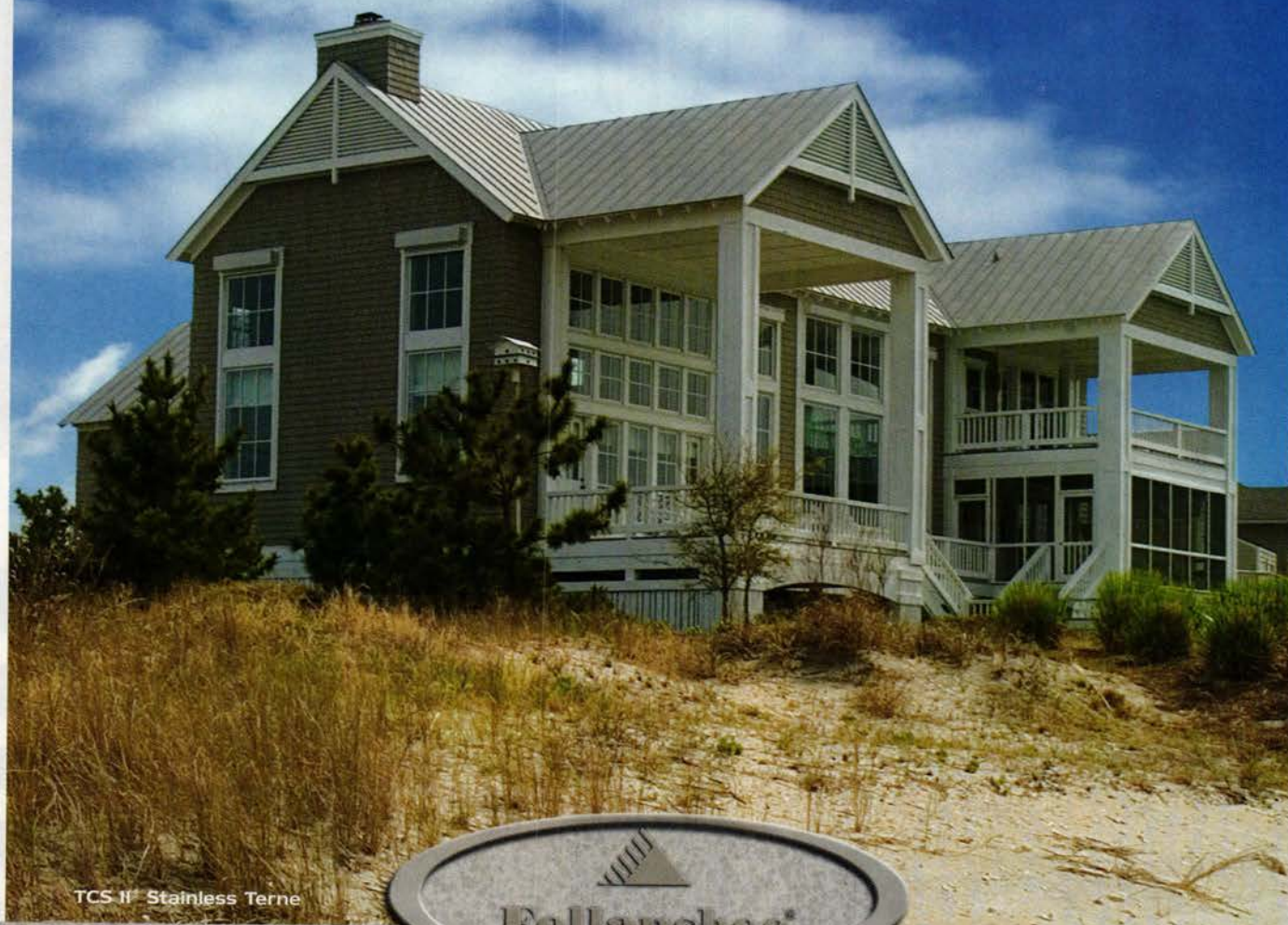
JUNE BERRY (*Amelanchier spp.*): Another early spring bloomer, Juneberry has delicate white flowers that are followed by fruits that look like a small blueberry, tasting rich like a sweet cherry with some almond flavor. It can also have colorful fall foliage. Depending on the variety, the plants are bushes or small trees. The first variety, 'Success', was selected in 1878.

For a list of
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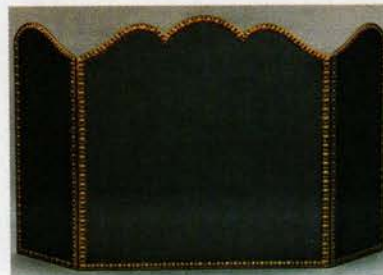
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Telltale Timber Techniques

The marks of wood-shaping methods can sketch a larger picture about a house.

One of the delights of working on old houses is the fact that we're always learning and dealing with new information. Just looking closely at the timbers supporting floors and frames, as well as comparing what we see with background information from other people and buildings, can often tell us a lot about a house's age or construction.

BY ALLEN CHARLES HILL, AIA

Timber-Hewing Methods

A while ago we went to a workshop on hewn timber conducted by Tom Paske, an artisan/consultant from western Massachusetts, who shed some useful light on timber shaping. Historically, two primary tools were used to hew timber to size: the broadaxe and the adz. There are different working methods for each tool, and, not surprisingly, they were used for different purposes.

The broadaxe was used to hew big timbers. It was a large tool and worked fast, but left a rough surface. To hew a timber, first the axeman struck guidelines the length of the rough log, then he cut guide wedges between the lines down to the intended face of the finished timber. Next he positioned the log so that the face to be cut was vertical. Standing beside the timber, the axeman then used his broadaxe to hew off the unwanted material. A broadaxed member is typically rough and ragged. The bottoms of the guide wedges are visible as V-shaped cuts running across the grain.

An ancient tool, sometimes called the shaft-hole axe, the adz was used to hew smaller timbers and also to smooth the finish of larger broadaxed members. When worked with an adz, the timber was set with the face to be cut oriented upwards. The adze man straddled the piece as he worked and swung the adz between his legs like a sharp croquet mallet. The surface of an adzed member looks as though it has been roughly planed using short strokes.

It's a principle of structural engineering that a wooden beam is strongest for a given amount of material when it is rectangular in cross section and set with the long dimension vertical. Why then is most hewn timber roughly square in cross section? Some scholars (theoretical types) have speculated that early builders had yet to discover this principle. A more convincing

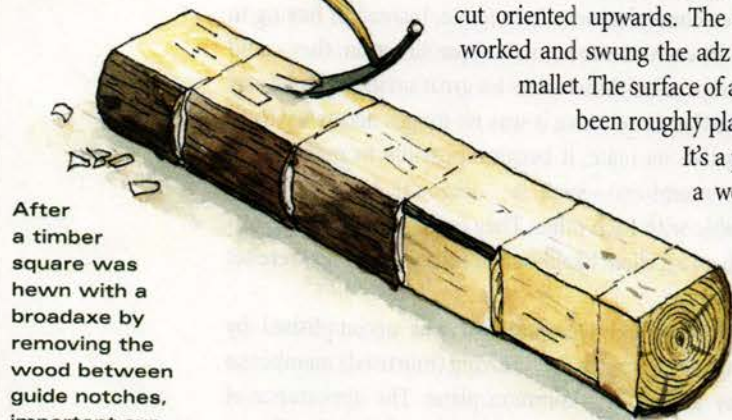
explanation, however, quickly presents itself when you remember that these large timbers were not shaped by machine-powered saws, but rather by human muscle chopping away the unwanted parts of the tree trunk. Therefore a square member yields the most wood for the least amount of hewing.

Most framing members that are not approximately square in cross section have been sawn rather than hewn. Some early buildings, however, do have rectangular hewn beams. Typically, these members were first hewn square then split down the middle to make two more or less equally sized members.



Almost every woodworking trade once had its own adz, like the one this 18th-century wheelwright used to shape the felloes of wheels.

COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS ROB LEANNA



After a timber square was hewn with a broadaxe by removing the wood between guide notches, important surfaces might be worked smooth with an adz.

It's usually easy to tell when a timber has been hewn and split even if you are not skilled in reading cut marks: the member will be roughly twice as tall as it is wide, and the two vertical faces will look different, since different methods were used to form them.

Scribe-Rule and Square-Rule Joints

Equally revealing can be studying the mortise-and-tenon joints of the hewn-timber frames of wooden buildings. From the earliest colonial days until well into the 19th century, these joints were cut according to two very different methods, commonly known as the *scribe rule* and the *square rule*.

For centuries, the joints of building frames were formed by carefully positioning the two members to be joined and scribing (marking) the outline of the edge of the member in which the mortise (slot) was to be cut on the member that was to be tenoned (tabbed) into it. Then, when the tenon was cut, its back was formed to match exactly the contour of the other member.

As can be imagined, this procedure, known as scribe-rule framing, required a great deal of careful positioning and test fitting to produce good joints. Each joint was unique, so every member had to be fitted to its proper place in the frame. The idea of making some pieces separately from the frame and then inserting them when it was erected was inconceivable.

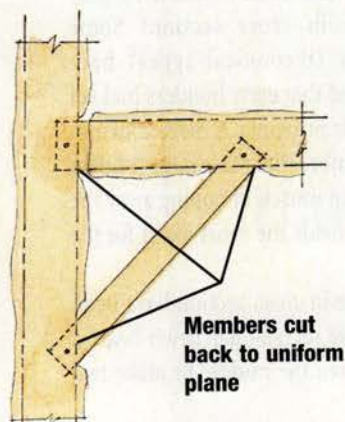
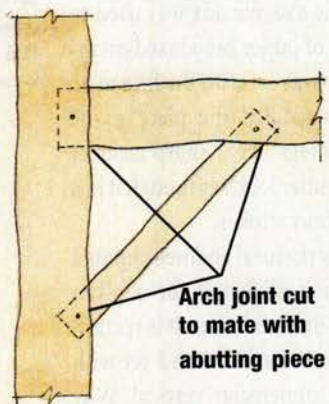
Around the time of the Revolutionary War, a new way of framing was developed: the so-called square rule. Instead of laboriously scribing and cutting each piece to its mate, square-rule framing allowed all joints to be cut to a constant plane as though the member were uniform in size, regardless of its actual shape.

The economies were immediate. Instead of having to cut and fit each member to a unique situation, they could be cut to specified dimensions for great savings in time and labor. Furthermore, since it was no longer necessary to fit each part to its mate, it became possible to make many smaller members—such as diagonal braces—interchangeable with each other. They could even be made off-site with an excellent likelihood of fitting once they were set into the frame.

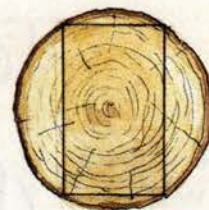
This seemingly magical feat was accomplished by recessing the joints into the receiving (mortised) member so that they all lay on a common plane. The appearance of scribe-rule and square-rule framed joints differs significantly, so it is not difficult to make an educated guess about from which side of the Revolution they date. 🏠

Allen Charles Hill, AIA, a longtime OHJ correspondent who specializes in historic preservation and architecture, is based in New England (Two Lisa Drive, Woburn, MA 01891; home.att.net/~allen.hill.historic.preservation/)

Below: In scribe rule framing, the tenoned member is scribed and custom fit to the mortised member—typically a post. Bottom: In square-rule framing, each joint is cut back to a common plane on an imaginary perfect member (dotted line).



A



B



C



D

Top: A square timber (A) uses more wood, but is less work to hew than a rectangular timber (B). Above: One way to make rectangular timbers is to first hew a log square (C) then split it in two (D).



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A House of Many Stories

BY TIMOTHY MAHER

One day in 1913, a 54-year-old leather dealer named Samuel Colleson took a leap from a second-floor window and landed in what is now our driveway. A Dr. H.P. Makechnie was summoned: He found Colleson beyond medical aid and surmised that the man had suffered from “a sudden attack of melancholia.”

Knowing that this happened doesn't scare us off. In an odd way it makes us appreciate our house even more. My wife and I grew up in suburban subdivisions where our families were the first occupants of their houses, so until now, we had no reason to think about people who had lived there before us. Then, a few years ago, we moved to Somerville just north of Boston and started looking for our own home. We knew anything we bought would be old, since the housing stock here dates from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the search we focused on the numbers—interest rates, asking prices. We focused on architectural charm, or lack thereof: Our eventual find, an 1892 front-gabled Italianate (originally a two-family house but now a single-family), had been stripped of most of its original details, and the clapboards were covered by asbestos-cement shingles. That people had lived here, perhaps many people, wasn't terribly relevant. The only thing that intrigued us about the previous residents was the possibility that they might have old pictures of the house showing what had been lost.

So we started looking. At the library we leafed through old, annual poll-tax directories that practically disintegrated in our hands. They contained a minimum details—names, ages, occupations—but the details told stories. There were lots of anachronistic job titles: brass finishers, tin-smiths, brakemen, framemakers. Judging

by the number of names, the house must have been a rental in its first decade or so, and it must have been crowded. Only men were listed in the poll-tax directories until 1920, when women earned the vote, but those men must have had wives, and probably children. There could have been a dozen people in the house, where now there were only two. When women finally made the directories—in a segregated list in the back of the book—most described themselves as “housewife” or “housekeeper.” One year a woman named Eleanor Colleson listed herself as a “welder.” I flipped the book shut to remind myself what year we were looking at: 1943. Perfect. Rosie the Riveter lived here.

We did a title search at the registry of deeds and began to piece together a story. Samuel Colleson bought the land in 1891, and by 1893, he was living in a house built on the property. In 1910 his adopted son Arthur moved into one of the units with his wife, Blanche. A few years later they had a daughter, Eleanor. In 1939 the family failed to pay the property tax bill, and in 1941 the city seized the property. Arthur died. Blanche and Eleanor must have been desperate. The tax bill had been \$98.02. In 1945 the city auctioned off the property. We've wondered what became of Eleanor. The young woman who'd been a “welder” now called herself a “solderer,” but the war was over, and the men would soon return to the factories. Did she lose her job as well as her home?

Back at the library we tracked down

obituaries. Only one turned up in the index—Samuel Colleson, the original owner, in April 1913. We sifted through the microfilm, assuming it would be one of the little notices in the back of the paper, but when nothing surfaced we went back slowly through the whole day's paper. There it was, a big bold headline: “Samuel A. Colleson Jumps from Window of His Home and Is Killed.” By

1913, he'd moved next door. The window he jumped from faced our house, and the path where he landed was now our driveway. The article described a “highly esteemed citizen” who had jumped out a first-floor window and had “lamed an ankle.” He then went up to

the second floor and jumped again. “For fully six months,” the article read, “Mr. Colleson had been in very poor health, the result of a nervous disease.” He'd been scheduled to leave on a trip to Bermuda with his brother Clarence the day the obituary appeared.

We've tried tracking down previous owners, without luck, and we never did find any old pictures. But it doesn't matter so much. We look at the staircase and wonder how many hands have touched the newel post. We know Samuel, Arthur, Blanche, and Eleanor touched it, probably thousands of times. They weren't just names in an old book but real people, living their lives. We may own it now, but it feels as much like theirs as ours. ■

Timothy Maher is slowly accumulating power tools as he also works on his first novel.



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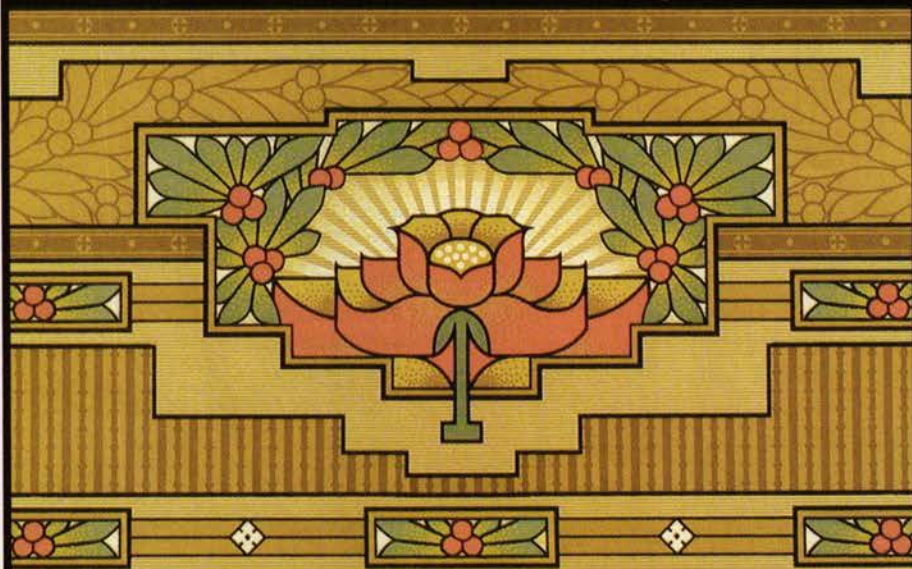
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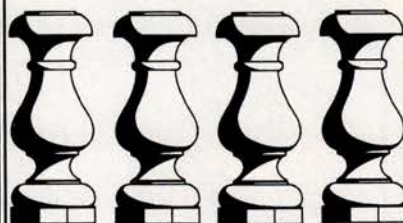
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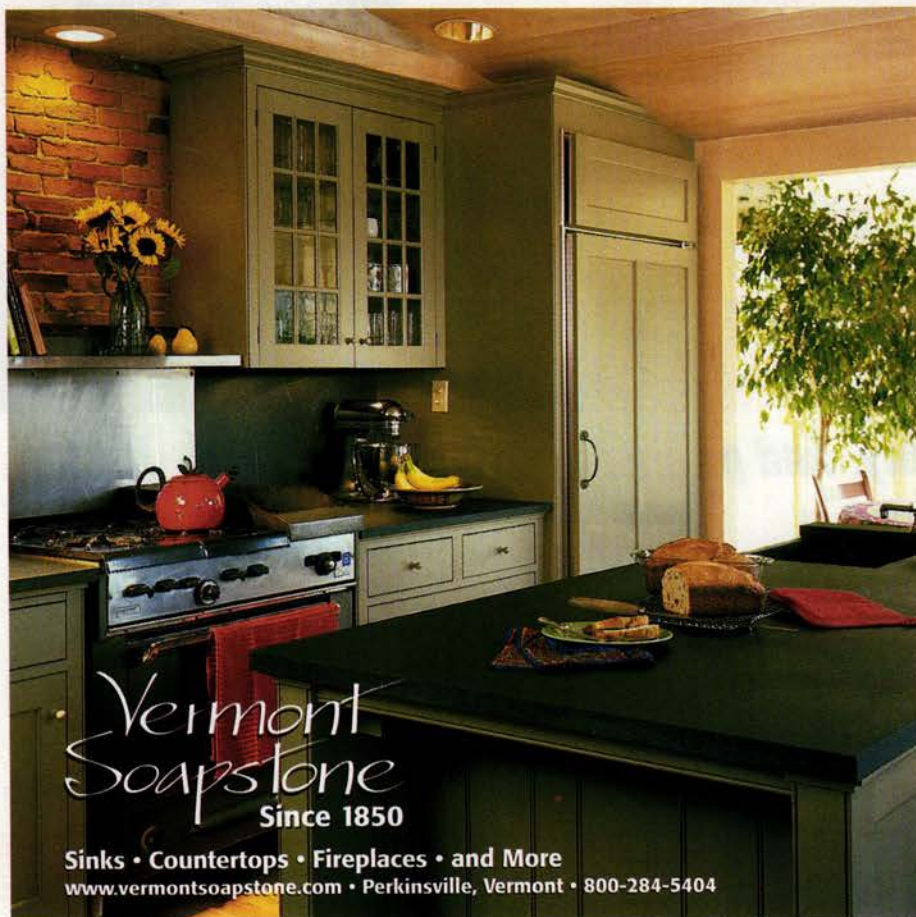


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BY STEVE JORDAN

The VARY

Color cards made from sample paint quarts, and tweaked to their tastes with pigments, became central design tools for Jan Barber and Doug Baker.

Choosing a new exterior paint color scheme can be a challenge. Get it right and you'll grin with pride every time you arrive home. Get it wrong and you'll regret your decisions until they're repainted to your satisfaction. The real problem, of course, is, there's no true right or wrong.

Influenced by centuries of aesthetics and seconds of whim, color choices are subjective. The options get even more intimidating with old houses. Should paint schemes be historically correct? Can you stay within your favorite color palette? Is it worth following a maven's latest predictions? Does the house's style, neighborhood, and region of the country matter? The more you think about exterior color schemes, it's easy to understand why so many houses all around us are painted in a neutral, bland, and safe manner.

If you face painting an old house exterior, there's no reason to settle for a "canned" or "dumbed-down" color combination. With a little thought and homework, there are ways to come up with a paint scheme that satisfies both the architecture of the house and your personal tastes. One approach is to get help from the many tools now available for making these design decisions. Another is to follow

some of the steps Jan Barber and Doug Baker of upstate New York explored when they began thinking about painting their 1885, high-style Queen Anne house.

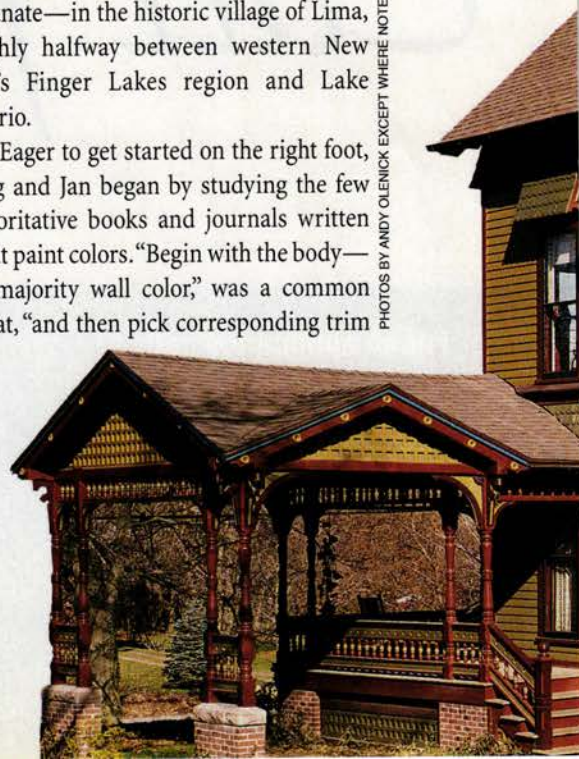
Thinking outside the Color Box

Jan and Doug's home is known as the Vary House because it was built by William L. Vary as a wedding present for his son. The house is one of several architectural gems—in styles from the Federal, Greek Revival, and Gothic Revival to the Italianate—in the historic village of Lima, roughly halfway between western New York's Finger Lakes region and Lake Ontario.

Eager to get started on the right foot, Doug and Jan began by studying the few authoritative books and journals written about paint colors. "Begin with the body—the majority wall color," was a common caveat, "and then pick corresponding trim

PHOTOS BY ANDY OLEWICK EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

One couple's methods for creating a period paint scheme can work for many old houses.



Like many houses of its era, the Vary House wore a nondescript paint scheme well into the 1990s—probably due as much to staying within “safe color” limits as trying to homogenize robust Victorian details under a Colonial Revival coating.



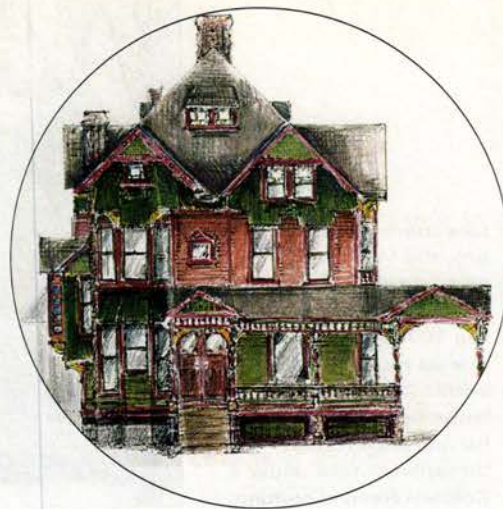
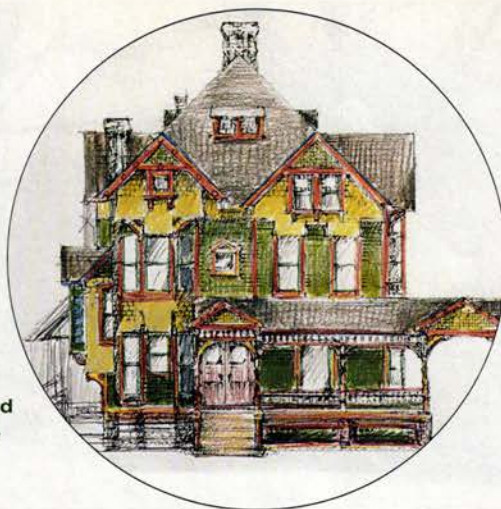
DOUG BAKER

Best COLORS

Today the house sports a polychrome paint scheme that enhances, rather than downplays, the architecture. Though consistent with late 19th-century thinking, the colors and placement are unique and a satisfying expression of the owners' aesthetics.



After studying the few authoritative books about painting old houses, Doug rendered the black and white sketches of the house with accurate interpretations of late 19th-century color combinations. From this point on, he and Jan introduced their personal color preferences and historical biases to evolve the final scheme.



colors.” Good advice, but not quite enough—especially when your house boasts a double oriel, barge boards, sunbursts, spindles, wheel brackets, newels, and cranies. Doug and Jan also skimmed piles of historic paint-color charts and reproduction house-pattern books to learn the theories behind historic color choices for window sash, doors, porch ceilings, and subtle-to-contrasting trim palettes. All were sound points of reference, but they still fell short of the needs of a complex house and owners with informed tastes.

After completing major repairs on the house, while tolerating years of the former owner’s bland creams and whites, they knew it was time to reveal the building’s outstanding architectural character and myriad details with a powerful color scheme. Though they appreciated histori-

cally accurate paint schemes, Doug and Jan weren’t interested in a perfect reproduction of the original colors or a studious interpretation. At the same time they didn’t want a fanciful “painted lady” approach that would highlight details through gaudy colors and striking contrast.

Colorful Help from Some Friends

There are many ways to pick exterior paint colors. The easy route is to stick with one of the many combinations of colors provided in brochures at your local paint store. Used as recommended, or tweaked to make them your own, these are usually safe bets, albeit mundane. For folks with color phobias or mental blocks, it’s easier to hire a color consultant. Most metropolitan areas have consultants and designers that will work with homeowners to pick colors. Nationally, there are also well-known consultants that, when

provided with photographs of your house and your likes and dislikes, will provide color schemes. The latest addition to the arsenal is computer software developed by paint manufacturers. After loading a photograph of your house onto a computer, this software allows colors from the manufacturer’s palette to be pasted onto the various elements of the house, creating a glimpse of the finished product. Check out www.architecture.about.com/cs/paint/tp/paintsoftware.htm for a few of the inexpensive paint-selection software programs.

Jan and Doug began designing their paint scheme with only a vague idea of the original body and trim color and a few basic color preferences. Doug created color samples using his own pigments and tweaking sample quarts to accommodate his taste and the other colors in the palette. Slowly and methodically, he prepared an array of potential colors: stripes spread across pieces of cardboard that could be mixed and shuffled in a search for the perfect hand. Eventually, he and Jan chose a combination of late Victorian and Arts & Crafts colors that was compatible with the house, its time period, and the teak brown roof shingles that had been installed a few years earlier. Both of them preferred an olive green for the body color. The rest of the colors evolved from this choice—mostly subtle gradations of the main



Jan Barber, a passionate preservationist, is a real estate broker in Rochester, New York. Doug Baker is a designer, art director, and former ad agency president.

palette, saving a playful, cobalt blue for the unusual elements. White was totally eliminated from the scheme.

From Paper to Paint to Placement

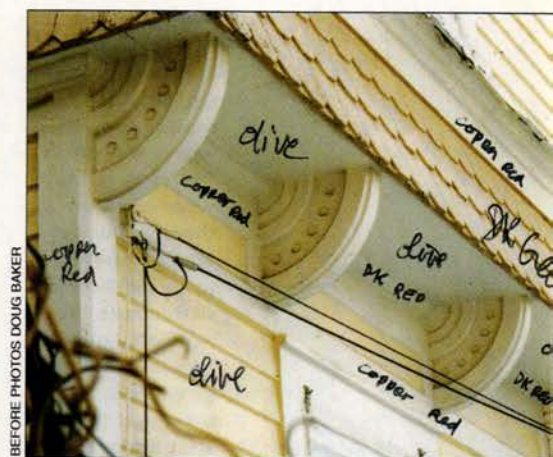
With a basic palette of colors set in place, they photographed all the sides and details of the house to help Doug sketch the building and its parts in black and white. After photocopying these sketches, Doug and Jan used colored pencils in the approximate paint colors to create various color schemes. Trial color combinations and placements were reversed or substituted. For example, terra cotta could replace mustard on the upper body or blue grey could substitute for dark green on the shingles. When the plan began to jell, Doug took the samples to the paint store and had

quarts mixed in each color.

The porches had already been turned into test labs for various color combinations, so the new colors were tried out on other areas of the house. The idea of a two-color, double-body treatment for the first and second storeys came late in this phase. Initially, Doug wanted a bright mustard color on the upper body while Jan favored a subdued ochre. They worked together selecting colors, spending many winter hours observing them in natural light to make sure they understood every nuance as it would appear outside. This process could have lasted indefinitely. However, once the painting contract was signed, Jan and Doug finalized their color selections over a two-month period (along with help from this writer) so the painting could start in the spring.



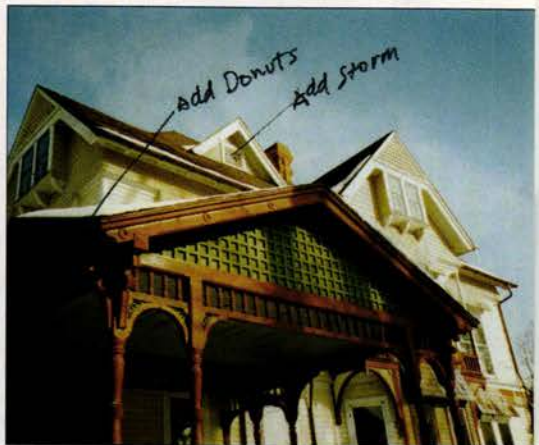
Once Jan and Doug firmed up their basic color palette, they photographed the sides of the house and important details. Doug made black-and-white sketches from these shots, photocopying them into multiple sets. Then he and Jan used colored pencils to approximate various combinations of colors and placements.



Since using nine different colors was uncommon and could be confusing to the painters, Doug simplified the paint names and keyed the photos accordingly.



To make sure each color got in its proper place, Doug also labeled the various architectural elements on photos of the house.



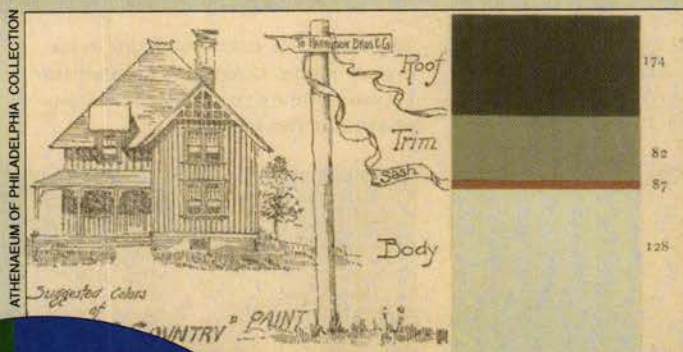
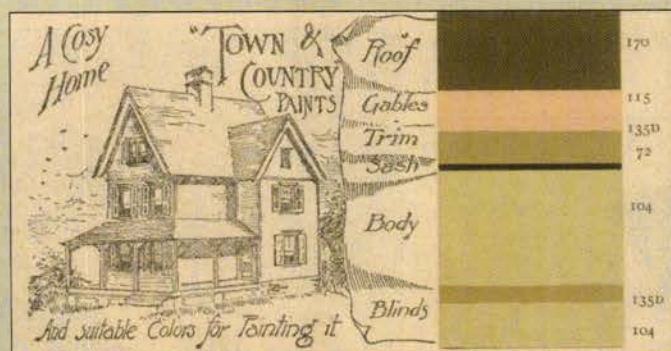
While the pencil-and-paper process was underway, the porches were used as test labs for various color combinations.

Painting the intricate details of a Queen Anne or early Colonial Revival house can be tedious and time-consuming, but the results are well worth the effort. The ornamental woodwork on these buildings was often meant to be picked out with colors that highlight—chamfers and incising, or variations in tone that follow a shift in depth or direction.



STEVE JORDAN

Historic Color Trends



ATHENAEUM OF PHILADELPHIA COLLECTION

Above: Color charts and paint schemes, such as these 1890s cards, date to the advent of standardized paint manufacturing in the 1860s and are widely used for research.

Left: Deeper understanding of the physics of colors and their relationships—as represented in the color wheel—fostered a fashion for multiple color combinations.

About the time the Vary House was built in 1885, exterior paint colors had evolved from the whites of the late Federal period to the drab earth tones espoused in the 1850s by A. J. Downing and his converts to the rich, dark colors so often attributed to late-Victorian architecture. Residential architecture from about 1870 until 1900 abounds with complex combinations of styles, details, and materials—all made practical and affordable by the new woodworking machinery of the Industrial Revolution. It is not uncommon to see at least five different types of siding between foundation and roof on a fancy Queen Anne house. In the same way, the new, manufactured paint-in-a-can in standardized colors, as well as a deeper understanding of the physics behind color, helped foster a fashion for multiple color combinations. Often called polychromy, placement of these colors was used to highlight and diminish building elements and textures. Furthering this concept were colorfully stained wood shingles, painted metal, and polychrome slate roofs. Colored masonry mortars and even bright canvas awnings completed the picture. By modern standards, various Victorian color schemes can be complex and beautiful or just plain gaudy.

The Arts & Crafts Movement began at the tail end of the 19th century as a reaction to the excesses of Victorian architecture. While Victorians reveled in the use of novel materials and gimmicks made possible by the Industrial Revolution, Arts & Crafts devotees stressed the importance of fine craftsmanship—especially handwork—and harmony with the natural environment. The shift in color preferences was not really drastic but rather a lightening of the dark colors that had become unpopular. For example, dark olives were lightened to sage greens; dark ochres evolved into colors resembling Dijon mustard. All things Arts & Crafts are now more popular than they've been since their inception. Paint manufacturers offer Arts & Crafts color brochures and books have been published to help homeowners understand and choose an Arts & Crafts palette.

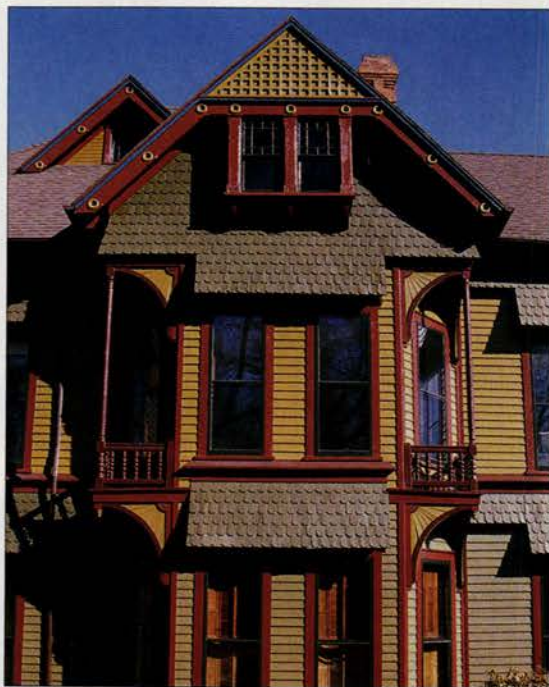
Finally Jan and Doug narrowed their choices to nine colors. Depending on the surface and areas painted, the paint sheens varied from matte to high gloss to create more vitality in the scheme and to highlight certain elements. They also enhanced details through the clever use of subtle color variations, such as the two similar reds on the porch railings, and color opposites, such as the cobalt blue moulding between the brown roof and red fascia.

Though their color choices were ultimately personal, the harmonious scheme behind them has its roots in historic color theory. The ideas of "harmony by analogy" and "harmony by contrast" were proposed in the mid-19th century by David Hay of Edinburgh, Scotland, and taken to heart during the Victorian era. Harmony by analogy might be achieved by using colors close to one another on the color wheel—olive green and ochre, for instance (see sidebar opposite). A good example of harmony by contrast would be the use of red with green.

With nine different colors and many

details to paint, Doug wanted to avoid confusion, so before the painters arrived he renamed all the paint selections and prepared 4"x6" color swatches coded to photos and sketches. He also color-coded paint lids to prevent placement errors.

The painters chose to finish one side of the house at a time. As the work progressed, the Vary House took on a new character, as if a new house had been erected on the site. Assuming that such a well-tailored paint scheme was beyond the work of homeowners, some passersby commented, "Boy, the painters picked great colors, didn't they?" Other neighbors discovered elements they had never seen before, and a few speculated that new ornaments had been added prior to painting. Doug and Jan are very pleased with their "new" house and feel that the reinvented paint scheme rescues the lively character that was hidden by cream and white. Any way you look at it, the Vary House has undergone a startling makeover, and is well on its way to another century of splendor. 🏡



Fancy Queen Annes like the Vary House often change materials several times between foundation and roof. Jan and Doug enhanced some of these details with subtle color gradations, such as the olive green to greenish ochre in the latticed gable panels (top of photo).



The new colors assembled for the 1885 Vary House are representative of deep, dark hues of the late-Victorian era in which it was built. However, they also anticipate the rich drabs (olive-brown colors) that would become associated with the Arts & Crafts Movement some 15 years later.

Project Particulars

Painters	Steve Worboys, assisted by brothers Paul and Stan
Paint	Sherwin Williams and Benjamin Moore
Paint system	Oil primer, 100 percent acrylic top coats
Color-scheme body	Medium Olive and Mustard, low luster
Wood shingles	Dark Olive Green, matte, used in other areas in gloss
Trim	Copper Red and Dark Red (purplish), high gloss
Sash & storms	Black Green, high gloss
Porch ceilings	Blue (darker than sky blue), low luster
Porch floor and steps	Medium Tan, high gloss (polyurethane)
Porch handrails	Dark Red, high gloss
Decorative rod moulding	Cobalt blue, high gloss
Decorative ornaments	Cobalt Blue, Mustard, Copper Red, Dark Red, Medium Olive
Doors	Dark Olive Green, high gloss

For a list of
SUPPLIERS,
see page 84.

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BROWNSTONE

Rides Again

BY REGINA COLE
PHOTOS BY JON CRISPIN

Where the favorite chocolate rock of the 19th century came from and why it's back.





Left: Like candy cut from a pan, multi-ton blocks of rich brownstone are quarried anew in Portland, Connecticut—the original source of thousands of brownstone facades. Below left: The historic quarry today after a storm surge traveled up the Connecticut River.

Some of the tools Mike Meehan, Rick Lane, and Mark Favale use to quarry brownstone in Portland, Connecticut, are pretty high-tech. There's state-of-the-art hydraulic machinery, computer surveying equipment, and even an expanding chemical called Silent Cracking Agent. Sophisticated stuff, indeed, but the task of extracting brownstone from the earth is still a labor-intensive process. Mike, Rick, and Mark split smaller blocks with hammers and wedges, just as quarrymen did a century ago. They wrestle 20-ton stone blocks onto flatbed trucks with a backhoe that, while perhaps easier to drive than teams of oxen, doesn't make moving this much mass any lighter work.

Most remarkable, however, is the fact that they're quarrying brownstone at all. Until 1993, when Mike leased an upper shelf at the historic Portland Brownstone Quarries and commenced operations,



Romantic in color and readily carved, brownstone was the fad facing for Italianate-style row houses of the late 19th century—especially in New York City, where the ubiquitous buildings are known as brownstones. By 1900, however, the stone was decidedly passé.

JAMES C. MASSEY



The scourge of brownstone buildings is flaking of the stone along the sedimentary layers (in circle), a failure usually precipitated by face-bedding blocks with their layers vertical. In-kind stone replacement (light stone) is a more satisfying repair.

brownstone was strictly a historic material. Ubiquitous during the building boom of the 1870s and '80s, brownstone became the facing of choice for endless blocks of brick row houses in cities up and down the Eastern seaboard. By 1900, however, Americans were sick of brownstone, so when these row houses became a century old in the 1960s and ready for major repairs, the prime source for replacement stone was decades gone. Here's what this legendary building material is, why it was so coveted, and how it has come back for restoration work of all kinds today.

What Begat Brownstone?

When storm water poured into the Portland Brownstone quarries in 1936, the flood finished off a business whose market had been drying up for a generation. It was the end of a long era. As early as 1650, local builders were already using the dark brown or reddish brown sandstone for walls, foundations, and chimneys. At first they just collected rocks from cliff bases. About 1725, when the supply of loose stone was exhausted, they started to dig it out of the earth.

This was relatively easy. Brownstone is a soft, sedimentary stone that, here in

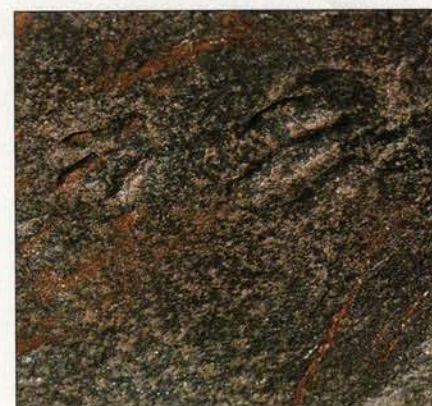
Connecticut's Central Valley, is found in horizontal beds close to the earth's surface. It was deposited about 200 million years ago, when Africa and North America were wrenching away from each other to form the Atlantic Ocean. A series of continental rift basins, known collectively as the Newark Supergroup, formed as long, narrow, sediment-filled valleys stretching from Nova Scotia to South Carolina. One of them, the Hartford Basin, consists of deposits of sand and mud with a high feldspar content. These deposits are cemented with ferric oxides that give the stone its characteristic reddish-brown or chocolate-brown color. The geologic name for this deposit is the Portland Formation. The sandstone found in the Portland quarries belongs to the youngest and uppermost strata of those ancient layers. Many are infused with dinosaur footprints and the remains of ancient trees.

Connecticut doesn't have the only American brownstone. During the 19th century it was also quarried in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, in eastern New Jersey, in Pennsylvania, and in the Apostle Islands off the Wisconsin shore of Lake Superior. However, these are limited deposits that are steeply angled and difficult to quarry, with stone that varies in

quality and appearance. In contrast, the planar beds of the Portland Formation, individually 2' to 18' thick, add up to more than 3,000' in thickness. Not only is Portland brownstone plentiful, easily quarried, and of a uniform red-brown color, but it is also conveniently close to that great presteam engine superhighway, the Connecticut River. Between 1890 and 1896 Portland's three main quarrying companies owned 50 schooners and one steamboat to transport the stone down the river and out into the wide world. The 1880 federal census reports that 78.6 percent of New York City buildings employing stone were all or part brownstone, most of which came from Portland.

Beautiful as it is, brownstone's sedimentary composition brings its own inherent limitation as a building material. When face-bedded—that is, applied vertically so that its layers are exposed to the elements—brownstone literally flakes off as the moisture that gets between the layers freezes and expands. Historic records show that brownstone sometimes began this characteristic flaking, known as spalling, as soon as 10 or 20 years after construction.

Mike theorizes that some of the spalling that contributed to our early 20th-century disenchantment with brownstone was the result of hasty, inferior construction. When brownstone is quarried from deep below the water table, as it was during Portland's boom decades, water is trapped between the layers. Historic quarrying annals refer to "seasoning," which means allowing the stone to dry out, but seasoning takes time—and that's some-



Dinosaur tracks, ranging from silver-dollar-sized to 15" long, regularly pop up in the Jurassic-era stone.



Owner Mike Meehan inspects newly finished corner blocks ordered to repair the water table on a historic church. Stone fabrication is an increasing part of the business.



Mark Favale watches while Rick Lane dresses stone. While much heavy quarrying and stone shaping is mechanized, detailing is still a traditional, hand process.



Making the rock face that decorates most ashlar (rectangular) brownstone begins by establishing the edge.



Also called pitching, the rock face rises beyond the exposed plane of the block in what Mike likens to a pillow.



Controlled spalling of the stone edge with a hammer and chisel creates this traditional detailing.

thing no contractor wants to hear when there's a huge demand for new housing. Face-bedded stone, still full of water, was routinely applied to many of the 50,000 row houses built during the late 1800s "Brown Decades." If it was done late in the season, just as freezing set in, the stone's

disintegration was assured.

Naturally bedded stone, applied in the same direction as the stone's layers occur in nature, is resistant to weathering, but it does not present the pretty, uniform color seen in face-bedded brownstone. It is also a little harder to cut and, therefore, more expensive.

Stoned Again

Americans may have lost the taste for brownstone by 1900, but our cities remain full of it, and with time we have come to love its attributes all over again. When the 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed much of San Francisco, the James Flood Mansion

Silent Cracking Agent is a modern tool that, when packed into a series of holes and moistened, expands and breaks off blocks of stone. The quarry also uses bags they inflate with water to move stone away from a cliff.



Above: Toothed finish is another traditional detail the quarry adds to replacement stones. Often appearing on accent pieces, such as lintels and corners blocks, it provides an attractive contrast to the rock face while helping to direct water off the stone. **Right:** When wetted, Portland brownstone shows off the rich, uniform character that made it famous.

—a brownstone building—was a notable survivor. Still standing atop Nob Hill, it is now the Pacific Union Club. In 1737, John Hancock's prosperous uncle built a brownstone house in Boston. When it was demolished in the 1920s, public outrage helped grow the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. By the time a historic preservation movement took hold of the American imagination, brownstone was, like much of Victoriana, a sentimental favorite. After all, no other stone looks like chocolate. In fact, it was the brownstones of Brooklyn, New York, that gave birth in 1973 to a new publication called *OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL*.

Nonetheless, there are still no satis-

factory ways to address that troublesome spalling. Early attempts to disguise (if not repair) the problem focused on applying layers of paint. The Back Bay area of Boston, for instance, was built primarily of brownstone-faced brick row houses between 1845 and 1880, but little of the dark stone is visible today because early owners painted most of those buildings. Later techniques involved encasing the ailing stone in aluminum or vinyl siding and faux brick. Paint and siding actually accelerate spalling because they trap moisture. Cement patches look terrible; the only way to hide them is to paint the brownstone.

Faced with miles of moldering brownstone, preservation-minded homeowners

began to look for more appropriate repair options—especially given the emphasis the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines places on in-kind material replacement for restoration work. The problem was, the only brownstone available after the 1930s was salvaged from demolished buildings. Before today's thriving architectural salvage industry existed, it was hard to find brownstone that matched your building. If you did, you then had to find someone who could cut it to size. The best alternative was to patch with a mixture of pulverized brownstone, portland cement, sand, and dry mortar colors. The results were far from perfect, but they beat vinyl siding.

Reinventing a Building-Block Business

When Mike, a geologist by trade, started quarrying brownstone 10 years ago, he did it with an eye toward the replacement market. The first brownstone quarried in nearly 70 years left Mike's Portland Brownstone Quarry yard on a flatbed truck in 1994, headed for Barre, Vermont, where the 20-ton blocks were sawn into veneer panels to



Enormous blocks are sawn out by a computer-aided machine and a diamond-studded wire that's threaded through 37'-long holes drilled vertically and horizontally into the cliff face.

replace disintegrated stone on the chapel of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Today's finely calibrated cutting tools can produce sheets far thinner than the traditional 4" thickness, but Mike counsels caution. Since there's no historic precedent or modern track record for very thin brownstone, he recommends that veneers be at least 4" inches thick.

Much of the stone Mike and his associates produce today becomes replacement lintels, stair treads, sills, and ashlar (squared) blocks. New uses include pavers, like the stack of 2"-thick slabs

growing in the yard, ordered by a client who prefers brownstone to the more commonly used bluestone for his patio. A big new wood-frame house in an affluent suburb will rest on a brownstone water table. Another features the traditional combination of brick exterior walls with brownstone sills, steps, and lintels. Initially, Mike did not expect to do any fabrication in Portland; he saw his role strictly as quarrying. The growing demand for the stone, however, and the expense of shipping it to fabricators as far away as Vermont, often leads to Mike, Rick, and Mark wielding carbide tools under a makeshift canopy, where they face ashlar blocks with characteristic rock face and comb the top edges with vertical lines that help shed water.

The fudge-colored stone finds interior uses as well. Some, such as fireplace mantels, are historic, but one recent order comes directly from a designer's imagination. In Manhattan's posh new Mandarin Hotel there's a room-divider screen made of carved brownstone. If it's a sign the rich-looking rock is poised for another swing on the fashion pendulum, the Portland Brownstone Quarry will be ready for the ride. 🏠

Regina Cole is a regular OHJ contributor and the author of The New Flooring Idea Book (Rockport Publishers).

Special thanks to the folks at Portland Brownstone Quarries, 311 Brownstone Ave., Portland, CT 06480; (860) 342-2920; www.brownstonequarry.com.

Brownstone Care & Feeding

If you're lucky enough to own a brownstone building, or a house with brownstone lintels, steps, quoins, or sills, then you already know that water is the enemy of this porous stone.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy, though, notes that too-hard mortars are also a major culprit. Mortars with high portland cement content are far less elastic than the high lime content mortars used before 1900, so as the stone expands and contracts, they cause the stone to crack. Crushed brownstone (found at salvage yards) is a desirable component for a patching mix used on a Portland brownstone building because other aggregates lack mica particles and look flat in contrast. The mix should contain 1 part portland cement, 1 part lime, 6 parts sand, crushed brownstone, dry mortar colors, and water. The amounts of mortar color and water vary, depending on the right color and consistency. Experiment first with the dry masonry colors, then introduce the cement and brownstone. Since preventive maintenance is always less expensive than major repairs, stay on top of these building-care points as well:

- Make sure the mortar joints in your brownstone masonry are properly pointed, and keep an eye out for areas that remain moist after rain or snow.
- Keep your roof in good shape so that the building stays dry; make sure gutters and downspouts stay clear so that they move water away from the house.
- Prune vegetation away from brownstone walls.
- Don't sandblast brownstone walls or clean them with high-pressure sprays or harsh chemicals. Avoid waterproofing chemicals; they can trap moisture. If your brownstone needs cleaning, seek professional advice.
- Caulk horizontal wash joints in projections, such as lintels or parapet walls.
- Do not use deicers to melt snow and ice on brownstone steps.
- Do not paint brownstone; it traps moisture behind the coating.
- Remember that brownstone is not appropriate for any use below grade because it wicks moisture.

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Blue Ridge



Rotten sills had caused the house, unoccupied for two decades, to sink toward its center.



Rescue

By DEBORAH HUSO

Seeing promise beyond the grime and a sinking foundation, Arthur and Zee Campbell restored color and craftsmanship to an 1820s North Carolina farmhouse.

It was a relative who introduced Arthur Campbell and his wife Zee to the Albertus Ledbetter House near Marion, North Carolina. The house—built around 1826 and unoccupied for at least two decades—was sunken and filthy, with blown-out windows and junk crammed into all the rooms, and seemed best suited for a training run by the local fire department. But Arthur's sister Kathy McCullough, who lived just down the road, had found some unusual hand-painted, moulded paneling under the home's grimy exterior, sparking her interest in resurrecting the place before it caved in completely. When Kathy heard that the owner had advised his grandchildren to start tearing it down for firewood, she called Arthur and Zee.

Arthur, a former airline pilot, and Zee had long been itching to get away from "the high stress lifestyle of south Florida," as they put it, and find some rural property where they could open a bed and breakfast. So they flew up to North Carolina to check out the Ledbetter House and its surrounding 92 acres of lush mountain woodland. The setting at least, they decided quickly, seemed like paradise.

"Our son Caillein thought we were absolutely crazy," says Zee with a laugh. "He said, 'Who in the world wants to live in this old house?'" Caillein, then 14, wasn't the only doubter. The Campbells' new neighbors also did a lot of head scratching. When Arthur approached local third-generation



PHOTOS BY STEWART O'SHIELDS

Appalachian chairmaker Max Bailey about heading up restoration, Bailey wasn't convinced it could be done.

Built as a log house in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the 1820s, and then significantly expanded in 1836, the Ledbetter House is a rare surviving example of transitional Federal/Greek Revival architecture of post-and-beam construction. The house was built by Jonathan Ledbetter, a prosperous farmer whose father had fought in the Revolutionary War. Eventually, he passed it on to his son

Teenage son Caillein, thought Zee and Arthur were "absolutely crazy" for wanting to live in the then-derelict old place.

Left: Two years after restoration began, the house was listed on the National Register. Below left: The discovery of hand-painted paneling, highly unusual in a frontier house, may have saved the structure from being chopped up for firewood.

Reviving the Faux Woodwork

The unique feature that lured the Campbells to the Ledbetter House is its delicate hand-painted moulded paneling in bright hues of red, cornflower blue, white, and faded gold. Gracing the wainscoting on the front porch, the doors, and stairway, this decorative art would have been an immediate signal to 19th-century visitors that the Ledbetters were a prosperous family.



Arthur's sister, who discovered the hand-painted wainscoting, sought some expert advice before leading its careful restoration.

Arthur Campbell's sister Kathy McCullough and her husband William are both artists, and Kathy is a native of Charleston, South Carolina, where craftsmen in furniture and related arts are legendary. "Charleston architecture and faux painting are well known," she says, "but we'd never seen anything like that outside of Charleston."

Kathy had owned a faux painting business while living in Charleston, and when the Campbells told her they were ready to restore some of their home's paneling, she in turn called on Mark Bennett, who had done faux painting at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina. Bennett analyzed the handiwork on the Ledbetter House and determined that it was done by 19th-century artist Charles Dunkin, who had signed one of the doors, in a style similar to faux bois or "fake wood."

So Kathy, with some help from Zee, began working to restore the wainscoting on the front of the house. They first coated the original wood with reversible clear finish to preserve it and to ensure that their painting could be removed by a future owner to reveal Dunkin's faded handiwork. Then they covered the wood with flat latex and applied a tinted oil glaze over it, through which they pulled brushes to create the fake wood grain. To create the other marks, suggestive of the edge of wood paneling, Kathy dragged a pencil eraser through the glaze.

Kathy says she couldn't have done the restorative work without advice from Bennett. "It was a wonderful experience," she says, "to work on that house. I felt like I was walking in the footsteps of the itinerant painters who originally worked on it."

Albertus, after whom the home is named.

That makes the Campbells only the third family to own the house in the last two centuries. They immediately determined that they would be the stewards of the hand-painted paneling that Arthur's sister discovered throughout the first floor of the home as well as along the wainscoting on the front porch.

Restoration began in January 1999, under Bailey's direction. "He comes from a long line of mountain craftsmen," says Arthur Campbell of Bailey. "He possesses raw talent combined with many years experience. He's a true artist."

Bailey says his biggest challenge was replacing the rotted oak sills that formed the structure's foundation. With help from his construction crew and Arthur Campbell, he lifted the house with jacks and replaced the rotted sills with new ones made from local locust trees.

Once that was done, Bailey says, the whole house seemed to straighten and come back together like a jigsaw puzzle with its last piece in place. "It was so well built," he says. "The original builder was obviously a very educated craftsman."

To keep the house eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, they were careful to preserve original features and to restore others that had been lost, such as a wood shingle roof that had been replaced with tin in 1916. The Campbells used pressure-treated pine shakes, recommended by the National Park Service for restoration of Appalachian homes.

When removing the house's tin roof, the Campbells found the original nail holes from the wood shingles and later even found one of the original oak shingles, used to patch a hole in an adjacent spring house. Since the tin was still in decent shape, the Campbells used it to roof a gazebo by the pond in front of their home.

That's been the philosophy: When material had to go, it was often replaced with old material recycled from neighboring structures. "We put back everything we possibly could to keep the house as original as possible," Bailey says. To replace floors and siding, the Campbells used wood from a nearby rundown slave cabin and schoolhouse. What was completely new was elec-

Max Bailey, a local chairmaker, built custom beds for each of the property's five guest cabins with wood left over from the house restoration.





There are two large rooms downstairs, flanked by two fireplaces of original brick and stone. Wood for the "new" floors and siding came from a neighboring slave cabin and schoolhouse that were collapsing.

tricity and plumbing—the house's first ever.

The restoration was complete in six months. A year and a half later, the home was listed on the National Register.

The interior looks much as it might have 160 years ago with two large rooms downstairs, flanked by the two fireplaces, and two bedrooms upstairs. "The only additions we have made," says Zee, "are a bathroom upstairs and a bathroom downstairs."

Once the house was restored, the Campbells followed up on their plans to run a business on the property and began

building guest cottages out of local timber.

Even the spring house, where they found that original shingle, got a taste of their creative juices. They replaced its ceiling and floor using salvaged wood. Then to show off the sluice that runs through the house, they created an illuminated viewing area out of Plexiglass. A 300-watt halogen light underneath the glass illuminates the sluice and its rock wall. Over the sluice they used old heart pine to build a 300-bottle wine rack—enough for any number of guests.

The Campbells opened the first cot-

tage in summer 2000. Today they have five, all secluded among the rhododendron, hickories, and poplars on what they have named Spring House Farm. They bill it as North Carolina's first eco-retreat, where they're not only preserving local history, but giving others a taste of the combined culture and nature that led the Ledbetters and now the Campbells to pioneer here. 🏠

Deborah Huso writes from Warm Springs, Virginia, about southeastern Appalachian history, culture, and environment.

The Color of Money

BY ALEXANDRIA M. MASON

Researching early paint colors and schemes at a landmark house.

Having escaped the off-white paint scheme of the 1910s, the backboards and beautifully carved scallop inside the shell closet still showed an earlier finish that had aged to a dark algae color—a promising place to start research.

How many old-house owners have glanced around their rooms and sighed, “If only walls could talk?”

What, for example, could they tell us about the richest colors from the earliest days of colonial America, when paint was hand-ground, expensive, and often flaunted as a status symbol by those who could afford the very best? As curator of the House of the Seven Gables, the 17th-century mansion made famous by Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel, I am especially curious to know, as accurately as possible, the intent of early designers and craftspeople,

so our curatorial staff can re-create these finishes for today’s public. Just like many of OHJ’s owner-restorers, I pace the rooms and also mutter, “If only the walls could talk!” Happily, with patience, trained conservators, and proper equipment, we’ve learned the ways that walls can talk, and they are very eloquent, indeed. To explain what I mean, I’ll describe a little about why we undertook a paint analysis project at the House of the Seven Gables, and what we learned about the specific paints used in the early 18th century. More important for folks living in historic houses of later eras, our experience will illustrate some of the logic and techniques that can allow homeowners to become their own forensic scientists and track down elusive clues for re-creating the original decorative look of their interiors.

A Deeper Look at an Early Mansion

Over the last few years our curatorial staff has been moving toward a more accurate historical interpretation of the House of the Seven Gables—one based on primary-source documentation and analysis of the actual materials in the building. The house, built in 1668, has been open for tours for 93

ALL PHOTOS JON CRISPIN EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

Above: Re-creating the parlor’s vibrant verdigris glaze was the ultimate payoff of the paint research. It also solved mysteries about the ceiling beams and the age of the little door cut out of the Georgian paneling (left side of mantel).



ALEXANDRIA M. MASON



To simulate the 18th-century glaze, verdigris pigment was mixed in glazing liquid for decorative painting.

years, but the interpretation of the paint through the decades has been more Colonial Revival style than truly colonial. For example, all the rooms were painted in an off-white color that, while conforming to an early 20th-century palette, was neither readily available nor popular for 18th-century homeowners. Since the Georgian paneling added around 1710 was the most drastic change to the building, my goal is to restore some of the rooms to that period based on primary documentation and physical evidence. An inventory of our house from 1742 refers to our parlor as the "Best Room," so this seemed an excellent place to begin the process.

Because early preservationists made many changes to the house during the Colonial Revival restoration of 1910, we approached the room with a lot of questions. First, we was curious about the number of beams on the ceiling 350 years ago—one pair or two? In addition, we wanted to know if the small wood closet to the left of the



Close inspection of the shell cupboard paint showed carving highlights picked out in brown. Under a lens, however, this "paint" proved to be the bonding agent for gold leaf that had long since disappeared.



Noted scholar Abbott Lowell Cummings, author of *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay 1625-1725*, has referred to many of the architectural elements inside the house as the "first and finest" in Essex County.

The Fabled Gables

The House of the Seven Gables is one of America's key cultural resources. Built in 1668 by wealthy mariner and merchant John Turner, the house was a testament to his accomplishments. In some places you can still see the beautiful and expensive post-medieval chamfered posts with lamb's tongue terminals. By the early 1700s, the second John Turner installed Georgian paneling in many of the rooms in an effort to keep up with changing fashions. Surprisingly, this was one of the most dramatic alterations ever wrought on the house.

Later occupants did box in an overhanging jetty and remove, then restore, gables. In 1910 there was a restoration by Caroline O. Emmerton, who purchased the house for the dual purposes of historic tourism and social work. Nonetheless, considering the wealth that has moved through the house, it is amazing that it has never seen major changes. No great palladian window or Queen Anne turret was ever added to stay in step with taste. This disregard for passing fashion left the house a treasure trove of documentation about the earliest decorative treatments in colonial times.



COURTESY OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION NEW ENGLAND ANTIQUITIES

Early photos, such as this 1910 view, show the parlor ceiling as a grid of boxed beams, raising the question of whether they were originals from the 18th century, or embellishments from the 19th century.

hearth dated to the 18th century or the 1910 makeover. Above all, we wanted to understand the original Georgian paint scheme so that we could restore it and present a more historically accurate interpretation of the most formal space in the house.

As the investigation began, we gathered early photographs of the room and

examined the existing space to see if there was any telling evidence of paint scraping or replaced paneling. One circa-1860 photo from SPNEA shows coffering in the parlor before Caroline Emmerton purchased the house in 1908. Another documents the coffering being there after the purchase. The cross-timbering was removed during the 1910 restoration, raising the question of whether it too should be restored. Was the cross-timbering some original finish from the mid-1600s? Paint analysis would help answer this question.

Examining the room closely, we determined that the decorative display closet bore very early paint that was potentially *fugitive* in nature. By fugitive, conservators simply mean that the paint is made with highly unstable pigments (common before the industrial era) that can interact with ultraviolet light and change drastically over time. Many fugitive pigments, such as Prussian blue or verdigris (a green pigment made from corroded copper), will eventually blacken in linseed oil. Since our closet was painted in a green hue that was

almost black, with some areas articulated in brown, there was a good chance that we were looking at a fugitive pigment.

While other architectural elements in the room were softened by layers and layers of paint, the shell closet near the hearth had crisper features that suggested very little paint build-up. Upon close inspection with a field microscope, we discovered a worn band of gilding at the base of one of the shelves and, over some of the woodwork, details picked out in brown paint. Apparently, this brown "paint" was actually the sizing (bonding agent) for gold leaf that had long since worn away. We took samples of the brown articulation for microscopy analysis and, at 125x, saw that this was indeed gold. Since there was no other treatment beneath it, we assumed we were looking at an original finish. Could it be that the rest of the room once had details picked out in gold? In the excitement of discovery, I imagined the great coffered room, painted with the most expensive paints of the day and dancing with gilded highlights. We hurriedly started the physical analysis.

Scientific Decorative Sleuthing

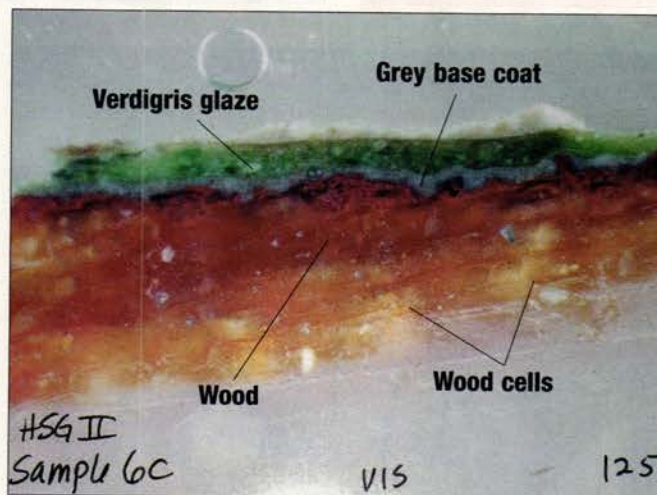
To establish the chronology of changes in the room, and to determine if the pre-1900 coffering needed to be restored, we began our paint analysis with the casings of the summer beams—the main, central beams in the house. First we determined the spots where beams in the mid-1800s photograph would have intersected. Then we postulated that if we found original verdigris finish missing from these points, we would indeed be looking at a decorative treatment from a first-period house—that is, one from the mid- to late 17th century. No one would have painted under the crossbeams before they were added to create the boxes of the coffering.

The actual investigation to test our hypothesis was very simple, requiring only a scalpel and 20x loupe for magnified viewing. First we carefully excavated several craters or "bulls'-eyes" in the paint at strategic places along the beams, opening



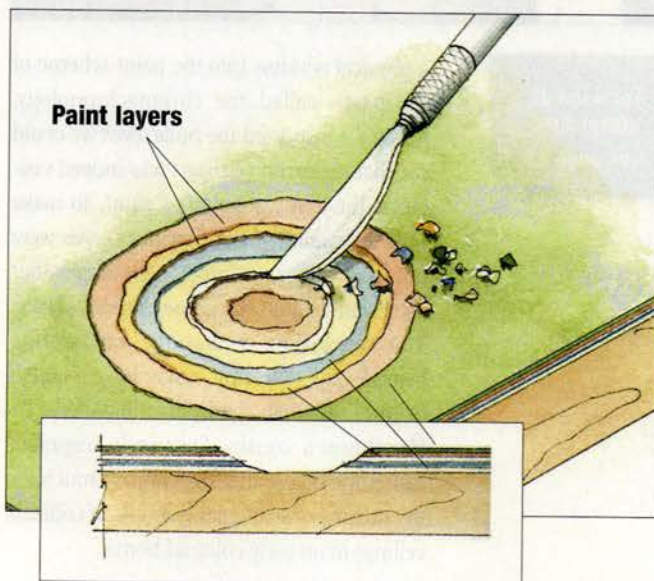
ALEXANDRIA M. MASON

Working with a scalpel, curatorial staffer Erica Sanchez carefully exposes a strip of paint across all features of the cupboard door to look for more evidence of verdigris—especially with gilding.



ALEXANDRIA M. MASON

Micrographs (microscopic cross-sections) of paint chips clearly show the different layers of early paint applied over 300 years ago. Note the pigment grains suspended in the glaze coat.



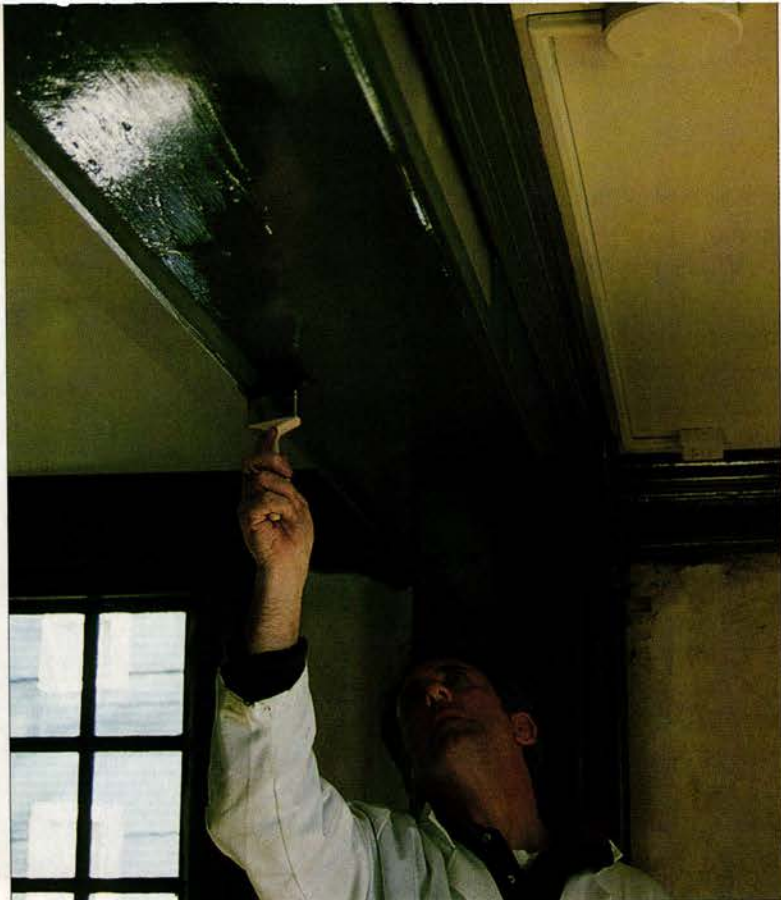
ILLUSTRATIONS ROB LEANNA

To make paint craters or "bulls'-eyes", conservators rotate a sharp knife on the paint to excavate a shallow depression down to the substrate. Polishing with wet/dry sandpaper helps reveal paint layers.

Right: As in the 18th century, decorative painter Nigel Grace applies the verdigris glaze following the wood grain, changing direction where mouldings are mitered. This practice, along with the traditional nature of the materials, helps re-create the "ropy" texture characteristic of early paint.



ALEXANDRIA M. MASON



Above: Protected by layers of later paint for three centuries, the verdigris shows a warm yellow-green after being uncovered by meticulous test scrapings. Right: Nigel Grace reviews paint sample boards with curator Alexandria Mason.



For a list of
SUPPLIERS,
see page 84.

a physical window into the paint scheme of the past—called the chromachronology. When we inspected the bulls'-eyes we could see that the green verdigris was indeed visible as the first campaign of paint. To make sure the results of our first bulls'-eyes were not aberrations, we inspected three other places and found the same glaze evidence. The conclusion is that the intersecting beams and coffering must have been a Gothic Revival addition installed by Hawthorne's cousin, Susannah Ingersoll, sometime before the Civil War. So much for my dreams of a singular example of coffered ceilings in an early colonial home.

Another Revealing Test

Next on our list of questions to be probed was the history of the small door covering the wood closet next to the firebox. This closet is a wonderful window into the remains of the monumental 1680s hearth box that still retains a blackened band at the base of the plaster. Since there is a strangely configured "hidden stair" in the house that was designed and built in 1910, I worried that the closet was a similar 1910 concoction. By excavating some quick bulls'-eyes on the front and edge of the door, we learned the answer. We found the verdigris finish on the front, finished face of the door, pretty much as expected. However, when the bulls'-eyes on the edges also revealed the decorative verdigris treatment, they ruled out the possibility that Emmerton had cut the door out of the existing Georgian paneling. If she had cut the door out of the existing paneling, the edges would have shown only 1910 and later paint colors. This meant that the little closet was truly finished in verdigris during the Georgian period when the huge, post-medieval hearths typical of first-period houses were commonly boxed in to create a sleek paneled fireplace. The additional room left over from the old hearth

served as a perfect storage area.

After solving this mystery, our challenge was to search for any gilding on the paneling. We proceeded by very carefully removing layers of paint in channels, using scalpels and magnifying loupes, so as to expose a section across the entire architectural element. This is a delicate and time-consuming process, since a heavy or unsteady hand can destroy the very evidence one seeks. Since our work revealed only verdigris, it proved that gilding had been confined to the cupboard.

Next we opened up a large window of the painted paneling to rule out the presence of any decorative painting, such as marbleizing, and to see the texture of the paint. Had it been stippled? Was it highly striated? We could clearly see thick brush strokes in the finish. Then, when we chose a small section to scrape, in the hopes of clearing away the top layer that had oxidized to black, we found a brilliant grass green was still there.

Re-creating the Verdigris Finish

To confirm our research, our conservator, Christine Thomson from Robert Mussey Associates, took samples of all layers of these first-campaign paints—a grey base coat topped with verdigris glaze—and sent them to a lab. When the reports returned from the lab at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, chemical analysis (including gas chromatography and mass spectrometry) showed that our samples were indeed an oil paint ground covered with a glaze of verdigris boiled in oil. The latter was important new information because boiling the verdigris in oil produces a yellower, mellower green than simply mixing the pigment in oil. The absence of any hiding pigments, such as white lead, or bulking agents, such as chalk, meant that we were looking at a finish with a high gloss—much glossier than the common paint of the day.

Christine then contacted Susan Buck, a conservator and paint analyst with extensive knowledge of this early decorative treatment. Susan has worked on several historic house museums, such as



Monticello and Mount Vernon, with rooms similarly finished in verdigris paint, and her experience with replication became our guide. Because the historic recipes for verdigris finish vary widely, we had to base the color match solely on our extant samples of unoxidized paint, but Susan's work validated that we were on the right track. We also compared our findings with the verdigris found at the Hunter House at the Preservation Society of Newport County.

After applying a mixture of the traditional materials (verdigris pigment and oil) on a sample board as a standard for what we wanted to re-create, we worked with our decorative painter, Nigel Grace, to mimic the historic effect with modern materials. Because expense and difficulty made using true verdigris out of the question, Nigel matched our sample by first thickening the grey base coat with calcium carbonate so it would simulate the deep, brush-bristle striations we found in the original paint.

Next he formulated the glaze using conservation-grade powdered pigments mixed in oil-based glazing, a liquid used for decorative painting. Nigel applied all coats with the grain of the wood, which

Since lab analysis indicated the verdigris pigment was boiled in linseed oil, it confirmed that the re-created glaze should be yellow-green, rather than the acid green of verdigris simply ground in oil.

meant that he even had to miter the corners as he worked. This was typical practice historically for glaze, and it articulates the architectural elements clearly. After the glaze had dried, Nigel topped the glaze with two coats of oil varnish to approximate the extraordinary high gloss of the finish as well as to protect it. The results are striking and have been greeted with great enthusiasm by the public. In fact, I like it so much, I am thinking about having verdigris glaze in my own home. 🏠

Alexandria M. Mason is the curator at the House of the Seven Gables in Salem, Massachusetts. For more information on the house and tours, visit www.7gables.org.

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Postwar affluence spawned second homes for hiding out and showing off.

Driving north through Wisconsin last summer, I passed six A-frames along the side of the road. One served as the lobby to a rather rundown motel, another was a small suburban church, and the rest stood as dwellings peeking out from the pine forests. All were at least 30 years old. These structures were the enduring evidence of the post-World War II boom in modest and affordable A-frame house construction—a triangular building form so influential that its cultural caché was co-opted for other uses, such as motels and churches. Where did these odd buildings come from and what made them so popular during the 1950s and '60s?

The A-frame was the right shape at the right time. The mid-20th century was the era of the “second everything,” when postwar prosperity made second televisions, second bathrooms, and second cars the just desserts of middle-class American life. Signs at hardware stores and ads in popular magazines took the idea to the next step, declaring, “Every family needs two homes!...one for the work-week, one for pure pleasure.” Increases in disposable income and free time, new cost-saving building materials, cheap credit,

The Mania for A-Frames

BY CHAD GARRETT RANDL

and road construction that turned wilderness into affordable recreation lots were democratizing the vacation home.

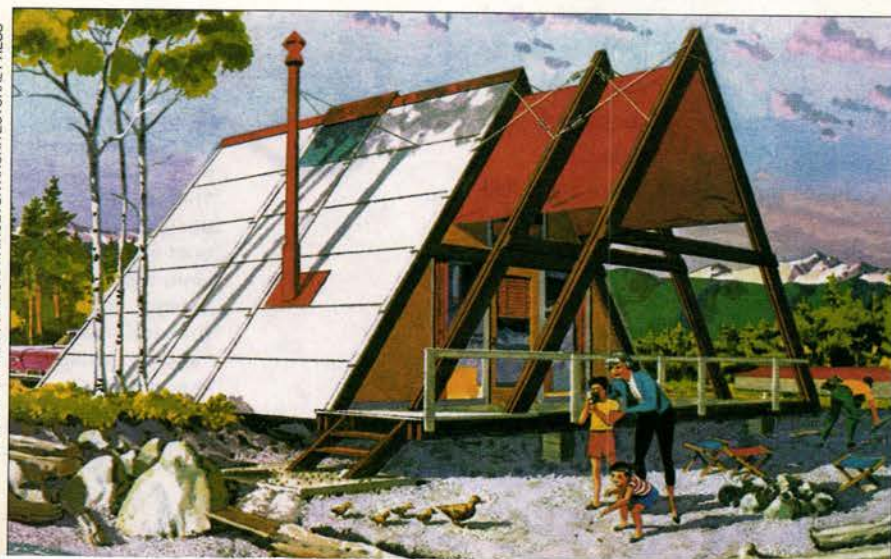
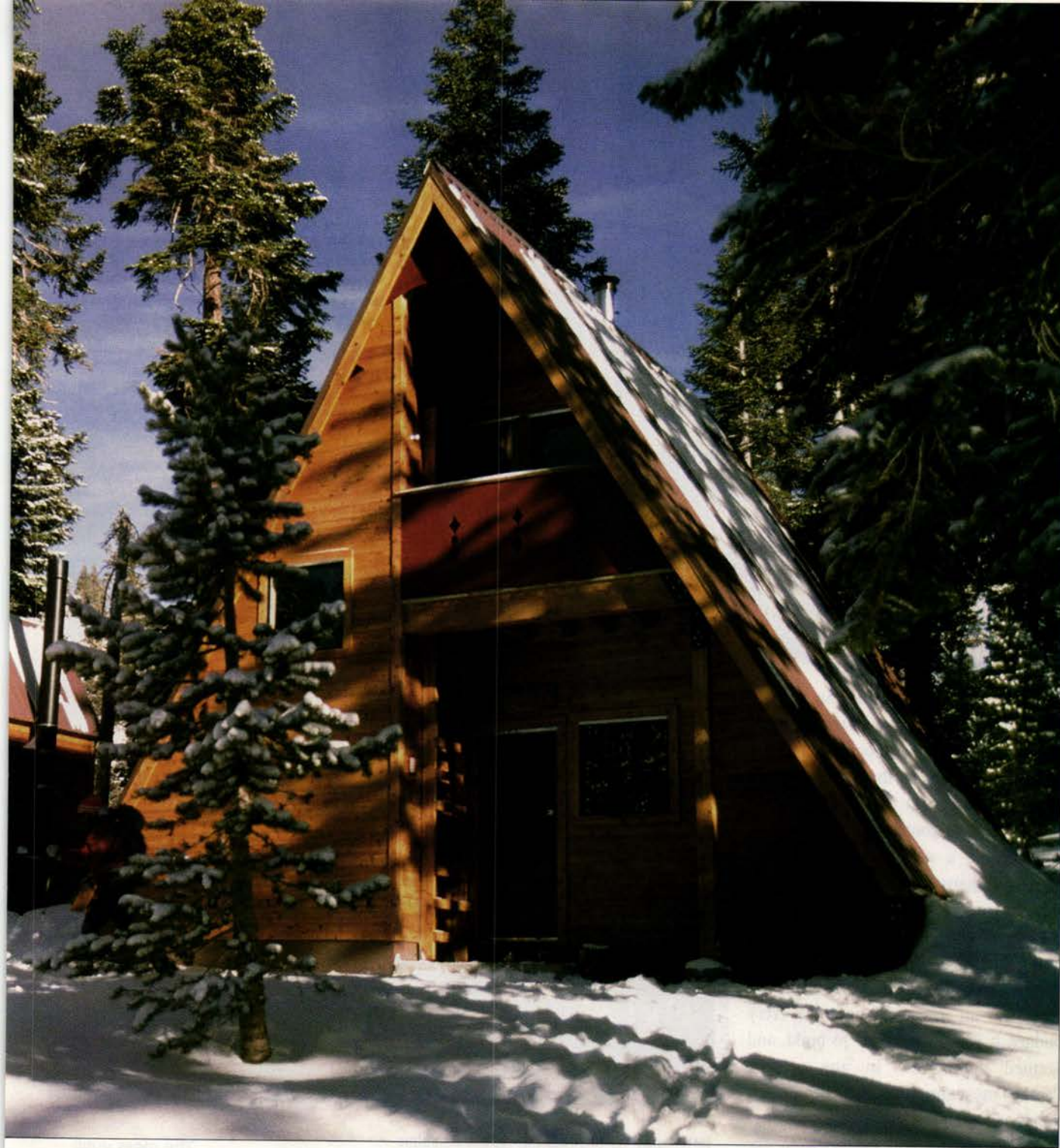
Many of these homes were based upon forms traditional to wilderness settings, from log cabins to clapboarded cottages. At the opposite end of the spectrum were high-concept houses: modernist boxes with flat roofs and glass facades, standing defiant against the landscape. Yet for vacationers who wanted a getaway that was innovative and exciting, modern yet warm, a place wholly suited to the informality of the new leisure lifestyle, a third alternative emerged.

The A-frame—essentially an equilateral triangle in which



DICK SIMPSON/PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

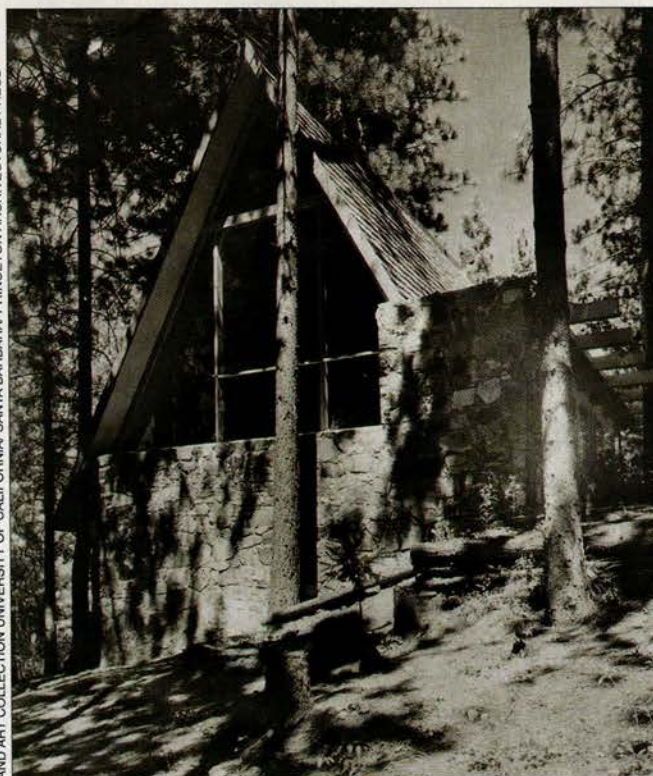
The Sierra Club was an early adopter of the A-frame—a house form that fit snow as well as shore. The Bradley hut, built in memory of past Sierra Club president Josephine Crane Bradley, was dismantled in 1997 and reconstructed four miles from its original site.



In the eyes of 1960s marketers, A-frames fit the bill as affordable—even owner-buildable—vacation homes for all. Plan-book A-frames like the Ranger from the Douglas Fir Plywood Association cannily promoted both a lifestyle and a building material.

Architect
Rudolph
Schindler's 1934
Bennati House, in
Lake Arrowhead,
California, is one
of the first
known all-roof
vacation homes
in the United
States. A series
of 60-degree
triangular truss-
es, tied laterally
by collar beams
and resting on a
masonry base
form the
structural frame.

R. M. SCHINDLER COLLECTION ARCHITECTURE
AND ART COLLECTION UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA / SANTA BARBARA / PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS



Plan books from the 1950s often tout-
ed the A-frame as having an ancient
past. Swedish folklorist Sigurd Erixon
documented many mid-19th-century
structures including this horse stable
he called the "saddle-roof house."



NORDISKA MUSEETS BILDBYRÅ / PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

the roof and walls form one surface
descending to the floor—transcended
geographical, social, economic, and stylis-
tic bounds to become the iconic vacation
home of the postwar era. It could be the
embodiment of contemporary geometric
invention, or a steadfast, timeless form
suggesting nature and rustic survival. It
was a place to hide out or a place to show
off. From Nathaniel Owings's grand design
overlooking Big Sur to the small plywood
shacks advertised in *Field and Stream*,
there was an A-frame for almost every
budget. It was strong, easy to build, and
seemed appropriate in any setting.
Perhaps most appealing, the A-frame was
different with an individuality that sug-
gested relaxation and escape from the
workaday world.

The Inspiration for A-frames

Triangular buildings did not always hold
such playful connotations. So-called "roof
huts" turn up in ancient Japan, Polynesia,
and throughout Europe where they func-
tioned as cooking houses, farm storage
sheds, animal shelters, and peasant cottages.
Some survived into the 20th century, per-
haps to influence several Swiss and German
architects who rediscovered the form in the



HEIDI AND PETER WENGER / PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

1910s and '20s. Imbuing it with a nostalgic
nationalism, designers Albert Reider, Paul
Artaria, and Ernst May proposed the A-
frame as a response to the post-World War I
housing shortage, as well as for early ver-
sions of the weekend mountain hut.

In the United States, the A-frame had
long been used for ice houses, pump hous-
es, field shelters, and chicken coops, but no
one thought to live in them by choice. This
view changed in 1936, when Rudolph
Schindler designed an A-frame home for
Gisela Bennati on the hills above Lake
Arrowhead, California. To meet building

The most publi-
cized European
postwar A-frame
was the Trigon
Chalet, designed
by Swiss archi-
tects Heidi and
Peter Wenger.
The couple
designed this
built-in spherical
sink, stove, and
cabinet unit so
that the space
"should not look
like an attic."

MIT students Henrik Bull brought the form East when he designed this two-storey A-frame in Stowe, Vermont, in 1953—probably the first in the area.



HENRIK BULL / PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

restrictions in the private resort community, the Austrian-born architect passed the house off as “Norman-style.” Though a departure from much of Schindler’s modern work, it did reflect his interest in geometric roof forms and the dynamic interior spaces that resulted from their use. With a glazed gable end oriented toward the view, an open plan, and extensive use of plywood, Schindler’s A-frame was a modest, postwar vacation home built 20 years ahead of its time.

It was not until the prosperous post-World War II era that conditions were right

for the widespread adoption of triangular vacation homes. The first phase in the A-frame boom (between about 1950 and 1957) saw gradual exploration by a succession of aspiring young designers, many based in the creative architectural environment of northern California. Through their work, the A-frame vacation home in all its myriad variations took shape. They developed ways of enclosing or opening the gable ends, laying out the interior, orienting decks and entrances, inserting dormers and combining frames to make cross-gabled or T-shaped variants—com-

mon approaches that would appear again and again when the form began to take off near the end of the decade.

In 1950 Wally Reemelin, an industrial engineer interested in efficient architecture, built a pair of A-frames in the hills above Berkeley, California. Almost concurrently, *Interiors* magazine published an A-frame by San Franciscan John Carden Campbell in a collection of new architecture. Over the next few years George Rockrise developed a cross-gable design in Squaw Valley, California, Henrik Bull built one in Stowe, Vermont, and Andrew Geller



ERNIE BRAUN/ COURTESY OF EICHLER NETWORK ARCHIVES/ PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

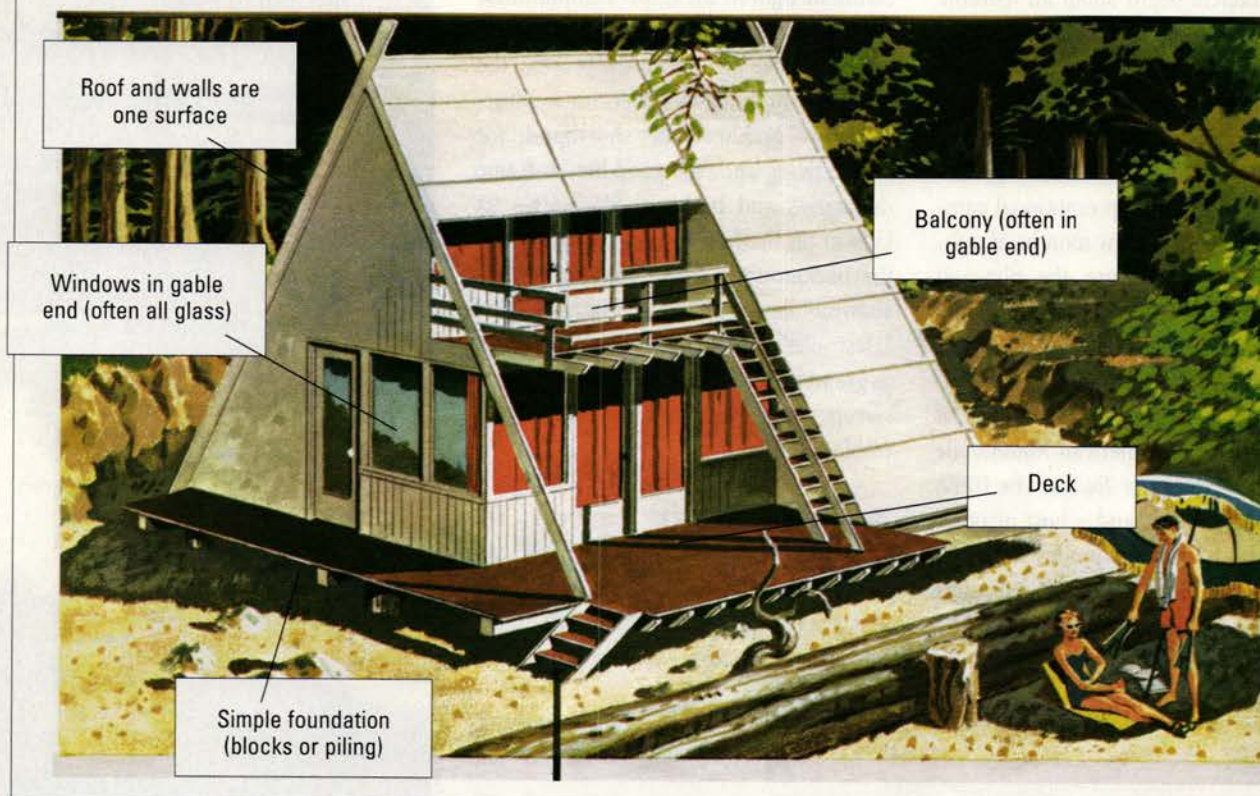
Above: John Campbell's Leisure House, featured at the 1951 San Francisco Arts Festival, was high-art modernist design yet affordable to the masses. Right: This stack-gabled A-frame at Aspen Highlands ski lodge in Aspen, Colorado, has overlapping gables that lend an air of sophistication to the slopes.



PEPI 2 / PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

A-Frame Features

In 1958, David Hellyer's cabin plan incorporated classic A-frame elements.



built another in Amagansett, Long Island. (Both eastern A-frames launched successful vacation-home design careers for their architects.) Yet it was John Campbell's version, called the Leisure House, which first aroused popular interest and hastened the spread of the A-frame nationwide.

With a smooth plywood exterior, stark white interior, tatami mats, and butterfly chairs, Campbell's design reveled in its modernist purity. He was fond of saying that the house enclosed the most space in the most dramatic way for the least amount of money. By fixing its dimensions to a 4' module (the width of a sheet of plywood), he further reduced costs and simplified construction of a design that was already cheap and easy to build. From the beginning Campbell saw his A-frame as a potential do-it-yourself project open even to "novices who are all thumbs."

After exhibiting a full-sized model at the 1951 San Francisco Arts Festival, Campbell received a stream of calls requesting more information about the Leisure House. He began selling plans out

of his office and moved quickly to develop a precut kit that contained everything needed to assemble the house, from timber to nails and hammer. The kit appeared in innumerable articles (most notably in *Look* magazine) and at home shows, sporting good fairs, and department store promotions across the West. In 1952 Campbell built his own Leisure House across the Golden Gate Bridge in Mill Valley. In short order he established a small network of dealers offering precut packages in Los Angeles, Denver, and New York. Photographs of the A-frame hanging out over Mill Valley appeared in franchise brochures, magazine articles, and plan books for the next 20 years.

Leisure Life for the Masses

The Leisure House marked a new phase in A-frame history. It was influential not so much for Campbell's interpretation of the triangular structure, but for the way it was packaged and promoted. Campbell presented the Leisure House as a natural design for

mountain or beach, for summer cottage or winter ski cabin, a fun vacation home form that was contemporary and different yet reassuringly traditional. It was inexpensive enough for young couples to afford, and simple enough for weekend carpenters to assemble. In these ways the Leisure House embodied a new leisure culture.

The spread of the postwar vacation home phenomenon and the excitement stirred by the first generation of custom-designed A-frames did not go unnoticed by the building industry. By the end of the decade, building product manufacturers and trade associations grown rich on the 1950s housing boom and looking for new markets beyond the suburbs, began offering vacation-home plan books that included material lists filled with their products. They teamed up with local builders, lumberyards, and hardware stores to offer precut vacation-home kits and construction services. Instantly recognized and appealing to a wide variety of customers, A-frames were often the centerpieces of these programs.

The Douglas Fir Plywood Association

(DFPA), based in Tacoma, Washington, was one of the first organizations to see the vacation-home boom coming. In 1957 DFPA marketers heard about an A-frame design drawn up by David Hellyer, a local pediatrician and amateur builder. They offered Hellyer free plywood in exchange for the use of his plans, photographed the house as it went up, and featured it prominently in their nascent promotional campaign. Within the first few months of publishing Hellyer's A-frame, the plywood association had filled more than 12,000 orders for complete working drawings. Over the next decade, it appeared in publications as varied as the *Journal of Medical Economics* and the American Automobile Association's *American Tourist*. The DFPA was onto something, and a host of other organizations and companies followed suit, all hoping to cash in on the A-frame's increasing popularity.

During the 1960s, the A-frame zeit-

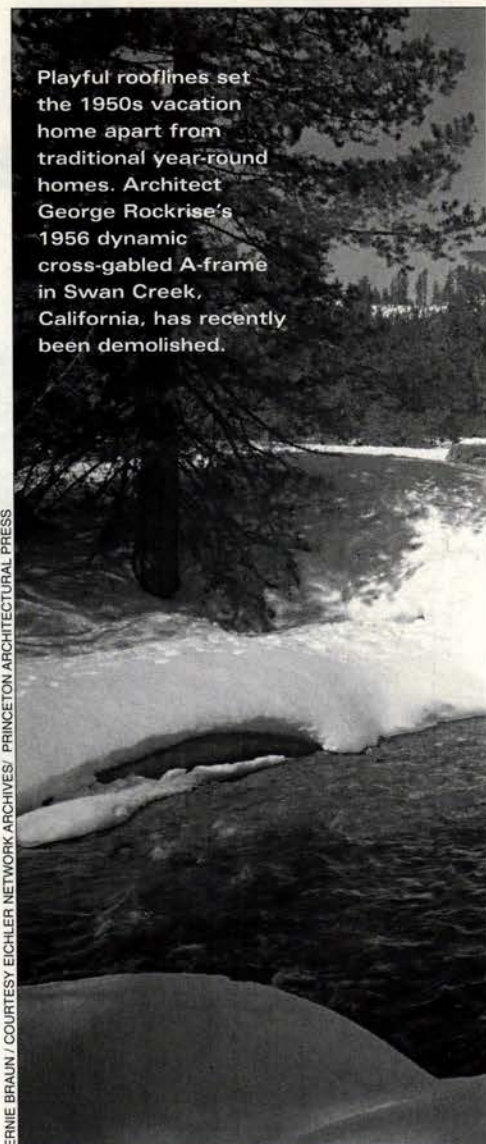
geist became national. A-frames dotted ski slopes from Stowe, Vermont, to Squaw Valley, Idaho, and their variations were a common sight in the resort communities, lake shore areas, forests, and back roads between these meccas. In the process, the triangular building form became a cultural icon—architectural shorthand for leisure living and “the good life.” A-frame dollhouses and backyard playhouses let kids in on the fun. A-frames appeared in the background of ads for motorcycles, snowmobiles, and gas-powered toilets (the “Destroilet”). They were even given away as grand prizes at home shows and mail-in sweepstakes sponsored by frozen vegetable companies.

A Triangular Form in Eclipse

Fun has its fashions, however, and by the first years of the 1970s, the modest A-frame was an anachronism. Vacation homes had

Playful rooflines set the 1950s vacation home apart from traditional year-round homes. Architect George Rockrise's 1956 dynamic cross-gabled A-frame in Swan Creek, California, has recently been demolished.

ERNIE BRAUN / COURTESY EICHLER NETWORK ARCHIVES / PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

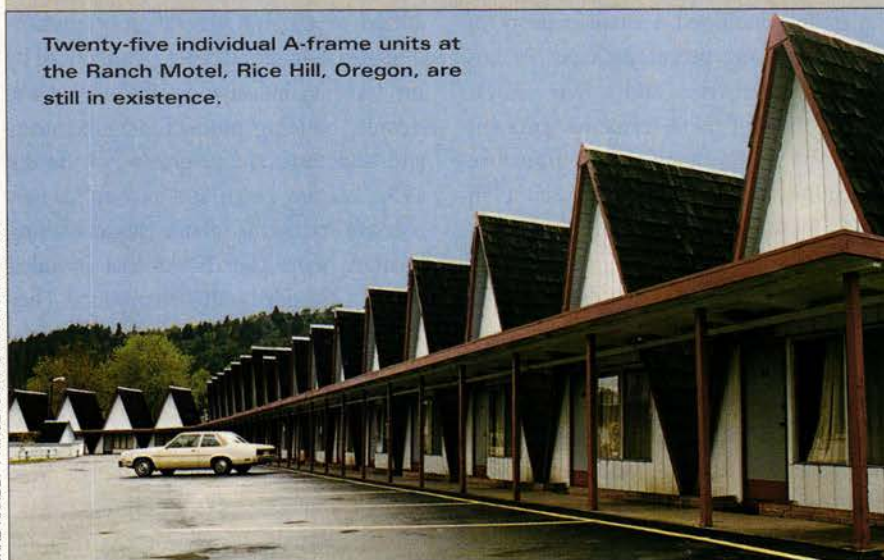


A-FRAMES UNLEASHED

The broad adaptability of the triangular building form, coupled with its striking appearance, soon moved beyond ski chalets. Beginning in the 1950s and reaching a peak the following decade, the A-frame was also adapted for hundreds of new religious structures built on the heels of America's move to the suburbs. Eero Saarinen's 1958 Chapel at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is perhaps the most notable A-frame church. In 1963, Walter Netsch, Jr. exploded the typically flat A-frame roof plane into three dimensions with the Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel in Colorado Springs. A-frames, though, were also used to sell burgers. Roadside businesses like the Wienerschnitzel and Whataburger fast-food chains, mom and pop motels, liquor stores, and car washes co-opted the A-frame shape to attract attention and lure customers into their parking lots and drive-throughs.

Twenty-five individual A-frame units at the Ranch Motel, Rice Hill, Oregon, are still in existence.

CHAD RAND / PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

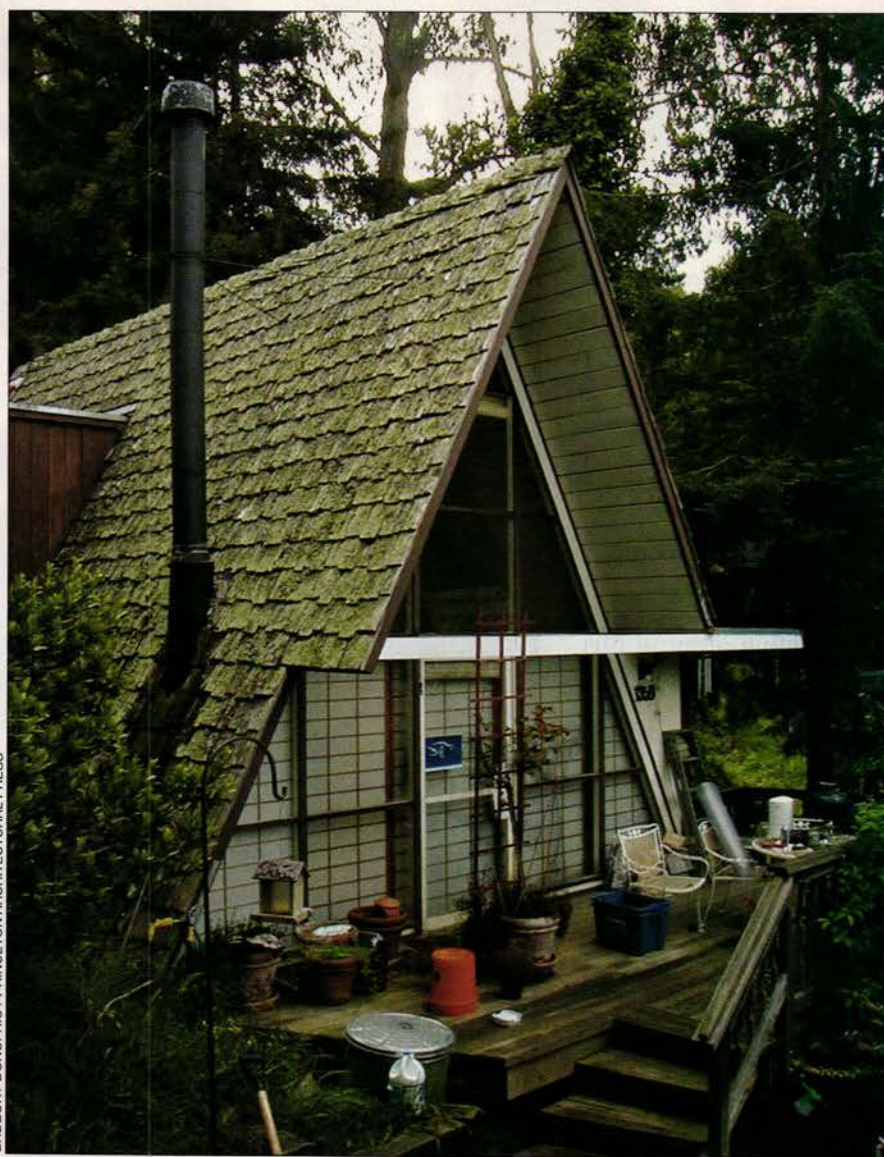


increased in size and retreated from the earlier whimsical tendencies until there was little to distinguish them from permanent houses. Real estate prices rose so high that it made little sense to build a \$10,000 A-frame on an \$80,000 lot. The energy crisis later in the decade further curtailed demand for remotely located, uninsulated, and notoriously difficult-to-heat vacation homes. Condos and time-shares became a preferred option for those who earlier may have selected an A-frame. Yet some elements of A-frame design lived on. Living rooms with vaulted ceilings, loft areas, and large, glazed gable ends—signal features of postwar triangular shelters—became common in permanent homes in the 1970s.

Today, with recreation land in short supply and in great demand, A-frames built in the 1950s and 1960s have fared poorly.



GREGORY DONOFRIO / PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS



Those that aren't promptly demolished to make way for 6,000-square-foot Mc (Vacation) Mansions are turned into the mudrooms or entryways for much larger homes. Just last year, George Rockrise's 1954 cross-gable design, featured in countless magazine articles throughout the period, was torn down by a new owner more interested in the prime Squaw Valley property on which the house sat. Others have hung on, mostly forgotten and often remodeled beyond recognition. Wally Reemelin's Berkeley A-frames survive, as does David Hellyer's DFPA double-decker near Olympia, Washington. In contrast, two floor joists tucked beneath a much expanded structure are all that remain of John Campbell's Mill Valley Leisure House.

Recently, a few aficionados of mid-century modern architecture have bought

A-frames and brought them back to their 1960s appearances. While some are restoring old A-frames, others are building them anew. In 1998 architect Steven Izenour of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates built a distinctive A-frame library and sculpture studio for the Acadia Summer Arts Program in Maine. For folks interested in a typical triangular vacation home, plans are still floating around, most dating from the A-frame's heyday. Recently, I met Larry Stover, an electrician and amateur builder, who used a set he bought on the Internet for his lot on the Green Briar River in West Virginia. It turned out to be a copy of Hellyer's drawings from 1957.

During the early 1960s, 300,000 families a year bought or built a vacation home. Many chose a design that, though rooted in ancient building traditions,

Survivors of the past, such as Wally Reemelin's A-frames, can be found throughout the San Francisco Bay area, a testament to their solid construction and structural shape.

seemed an appropriate backdrop for the pastimes of postwar prosperity. A-frames were in harmony with nature, blurred the distinction between interior and exterior, could be built by those who wanted to do it themselves, and were easily packaged into affordable kits. They brought the dream of a second home within reach of an ever larger number of Americans. 🏠

Chad Garrett Randl, an architectural historian working at the National Park Service, is the author of the book *A-Frame*, published by Princeton Architectural Press (www.aframehistory.com).

Paneling Makes Perfect

Like any other part of a house, walls can suffer from the effects of time and wear and tear. With its sloped ceiling and gable windows, the attic in this project had excellent "bones" for a makeover into a wood-paneled home office.

So the first order of this office's business was to nail up a ceiling's worth of Douglas fir beaded board. Before the tongue-and-groove slats were installed, they were stained with Minwax® Gel Stain Honey Maple and then finished with two coats of Minwax® Wipe-On Poly Satin.

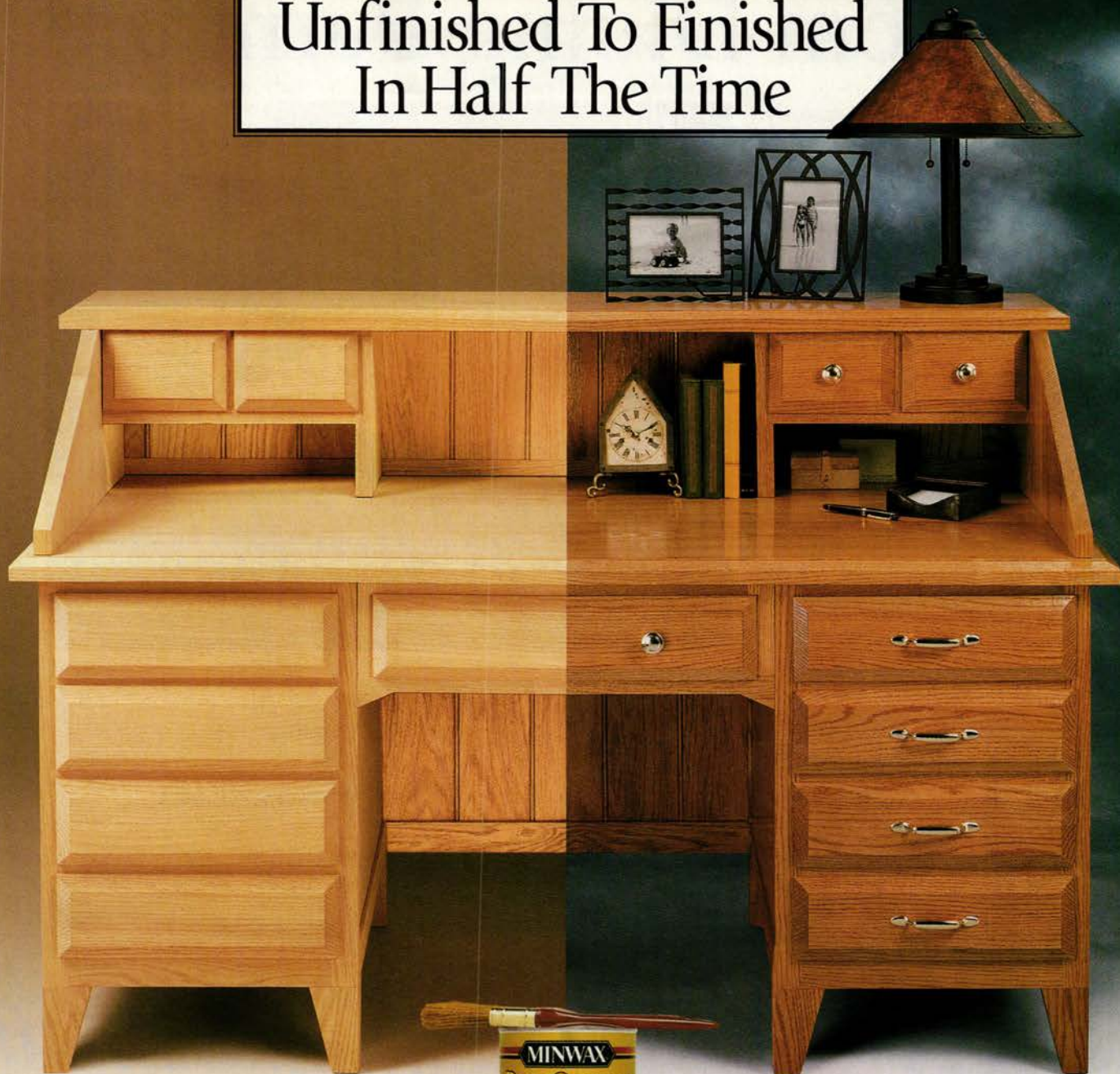
To complete the space, a birch desk from an unfinished furniture store was stained and finished in one step with Minwax® Polyshades® Olde Maple Satin. As always, natural wood makes for a nice look and, here, a nice place to work.



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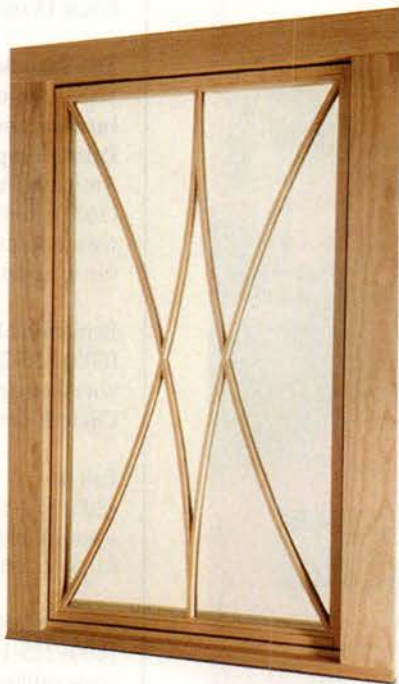


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Metal was a popular roofing choice in the late 19th century and an appropriate material for many old houses today. Centura Plus steel roofing shingles from Georgia-Pacific last twice as long as asphalt and are ideal for coastal areas or where winters are long and harsh (the smooth roofing surface helps shed snow). The shingles are constructed with strong yet lightweight Galvalume steel and coated in Tedlar (polyvinyl fluoride), which provides unique weathering properties that protect the finish from fading and cracking. For more information, visit www.gp.com/build. Circle 9 on the resource card.

Strong Views

When moisture has rotted your old-house windows, you don't have to settle for aluminum or vinyl replacements. Jeld Wen introduces "AuraLast" wood to its line of Pozzi windows. Made from solid western pine, AuraLast windows are pressure treated with water-based, environmentally friendly preservation ingredients that prevent wood decay, water absorption, and termite infestation. The window also has a 20-year warranty. For more information, visit www.jeld-wen.com. Circle 10 on the resource card.



Power Wash

Quite often all an old house needs to make it sparkle is a good wash. Campbell Hausfeld introduces a pressure washer featuring a fingertip adjustable pressure nozzle, a new accessory that allows users to control water pressure at the lance rather than at the pressure washer unit.


Featuring 35' cords and using 80 percent less water than a garden hose, this washer is ideal for cleaning building exteriors and garden patios. Model PW 1580, designed for basic home projects, provides 1.7 gallons per minute at 1,500 pounds per square inch and retails for \$149. For more information, visit www.chpower.com. Circle 11 on the resource card.

Dinky Dowel

The Mini-X from the Miller Dowel Company is a new stepped solid-wood structural fastener developed specifically for small projects that use thinner

solid woods such as repairing cabinet moulding and trim, small fencing, or desk drawer boxes. Available in birch, cherry, red oak, and black walnut, these dowels are an alternative to traditional blind dowels and biscuits. For more information, visit www.millerdowel.com. Circle 12 on the resource card.





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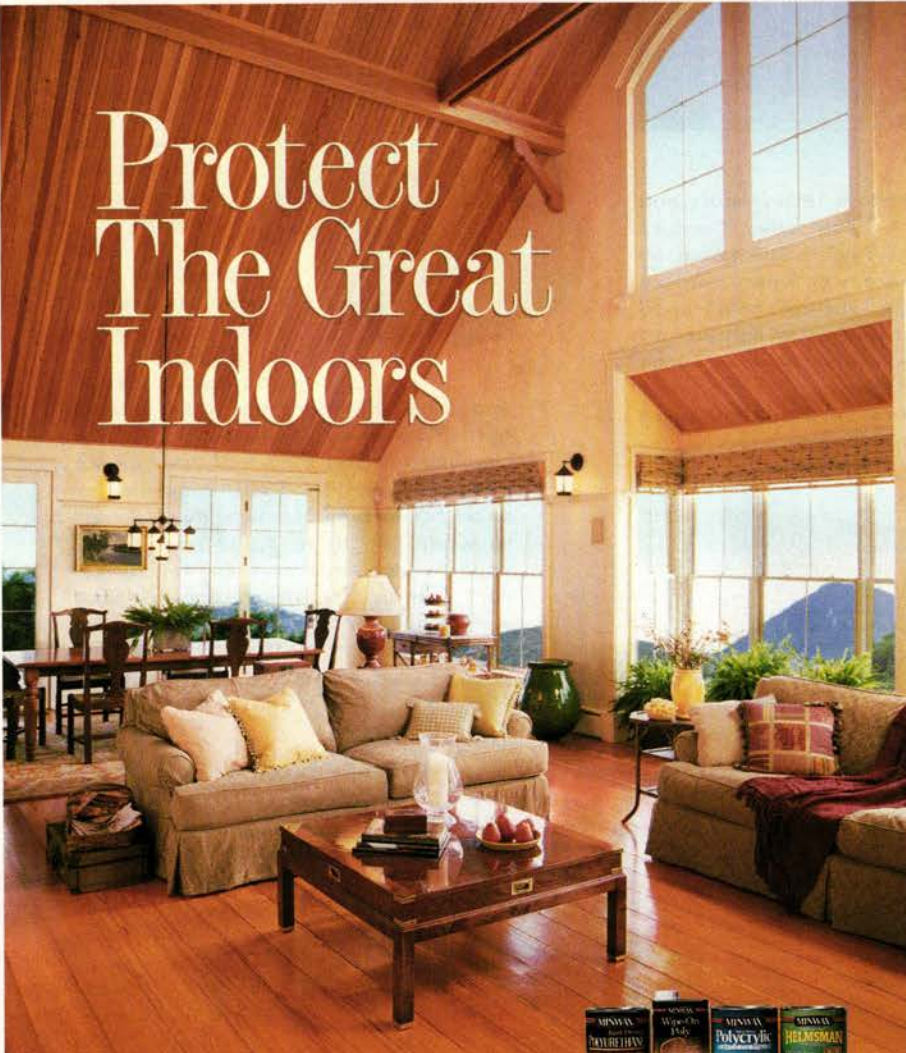
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Suppliers

Listed below are a number of resources and suppliers for the old-house restorer. For an in-depth compilation of companies serving the old-house market, go to the "Restoration Directory" on oldhousejournal.com.

Outside the Old House page 35
Burnt Ridge Nursery
(360)985-2873,
landru.myhome.net/burntridge/
Circle 14 on resource card.

Edible Landscaping Nursery,
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Hidden Springs Nursery
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One Green World
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Raintree Nursery
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www.RaintreeNursery.com
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The Vary Best Colors page 50
The Color of Money page 66
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Paint Companies
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www.antiquity-furniture.com
Circle 19 on resource card.

Benjamin Moore & Co.
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www.benjaminmoore.com
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Cabot
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www.cabotstain.com
Circle 22 on resource card.

California Paints
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www.californiapaints.com
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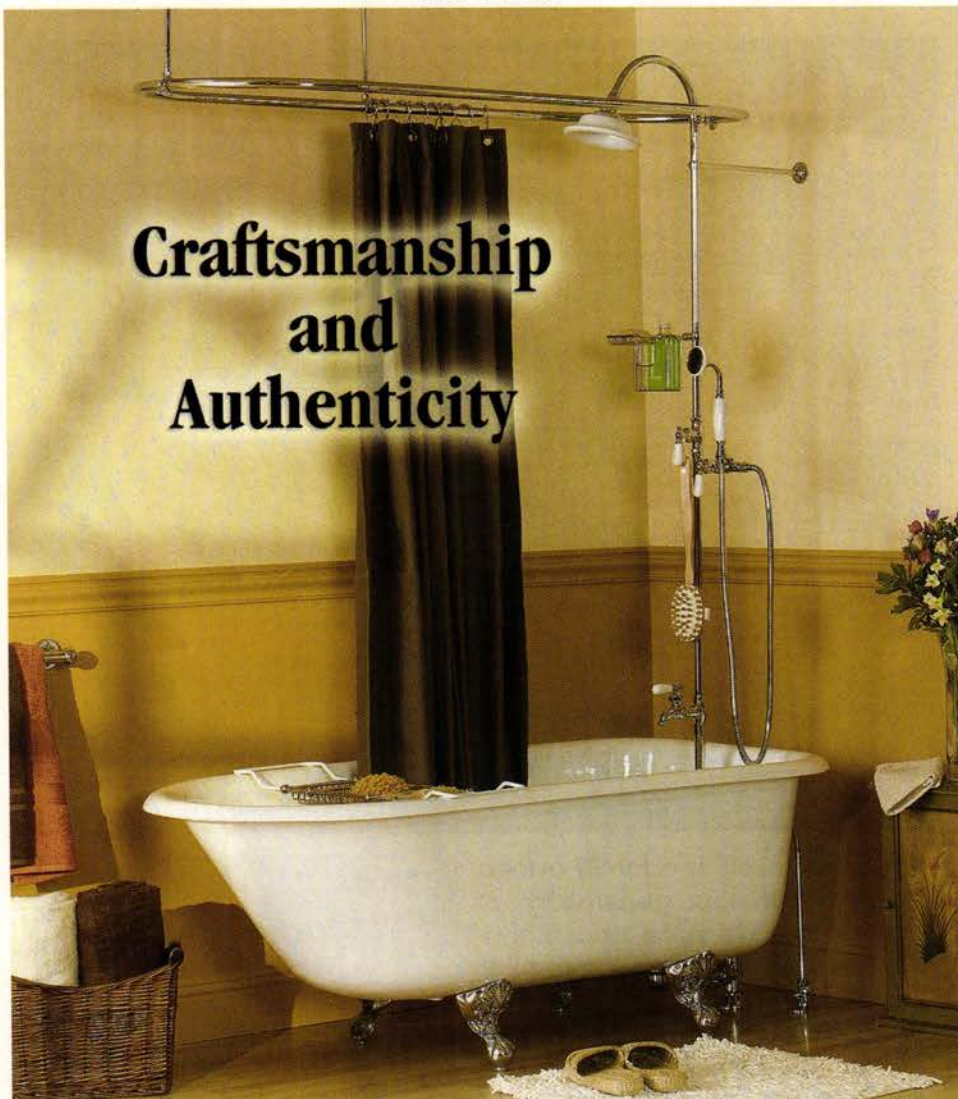
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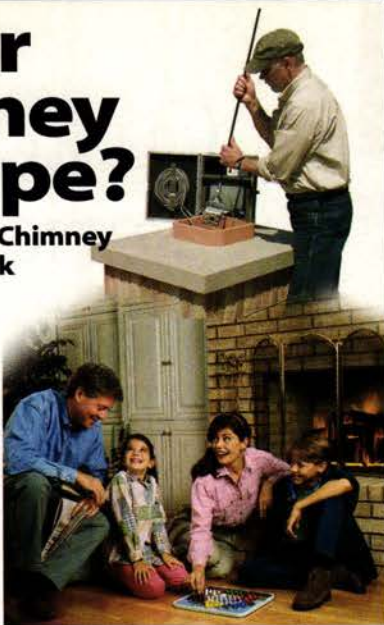
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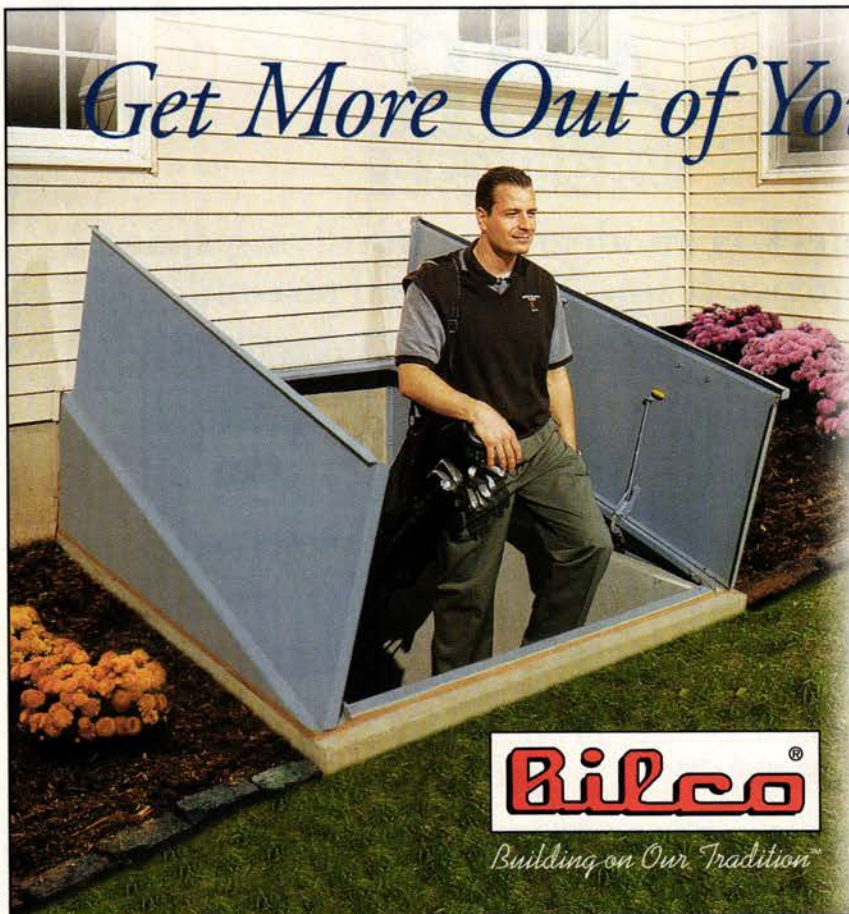
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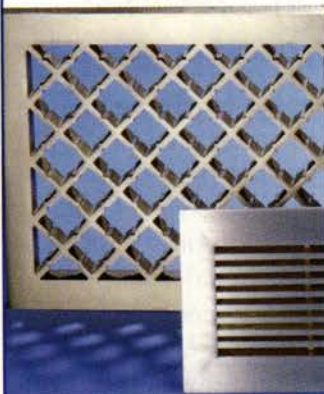
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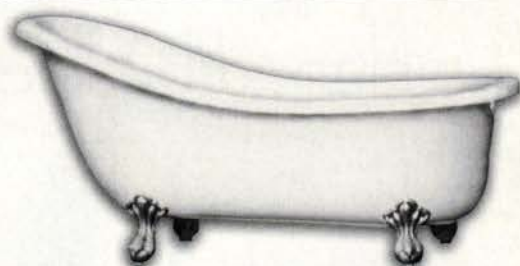
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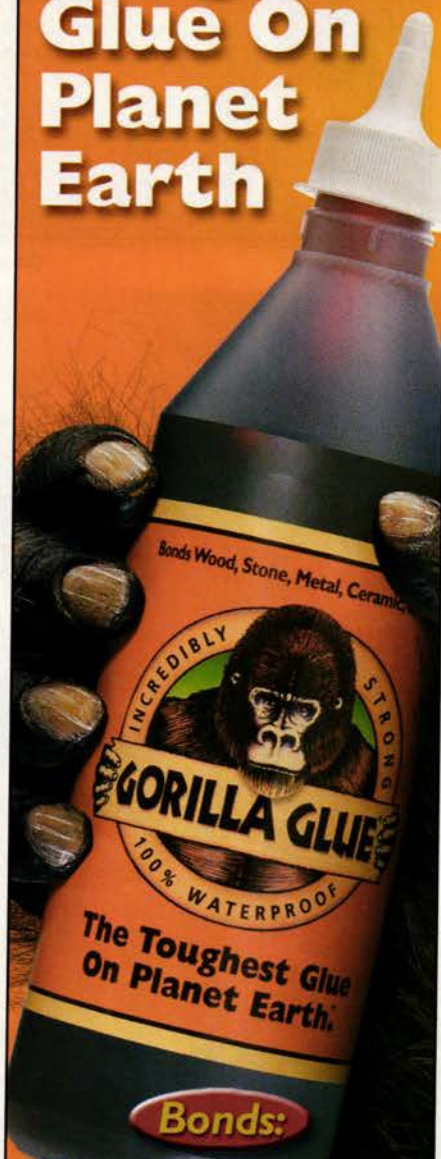
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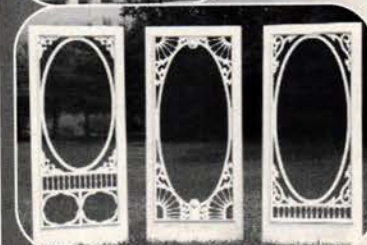
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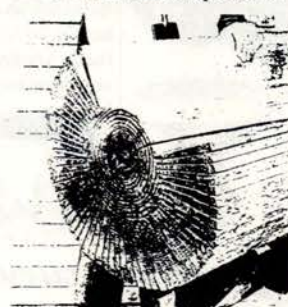
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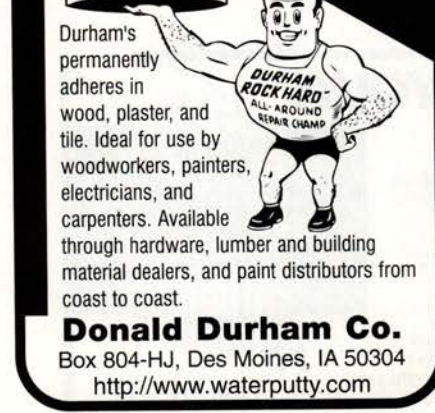
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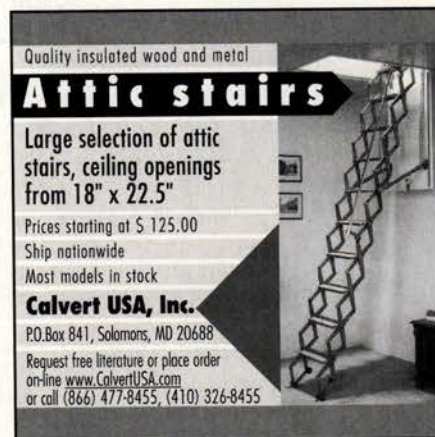
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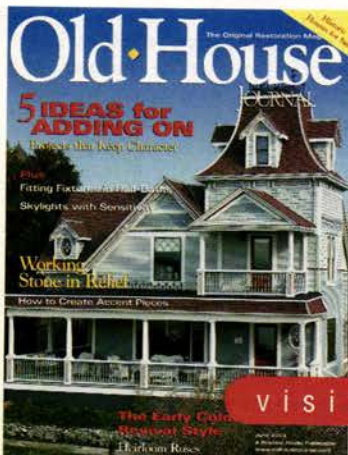


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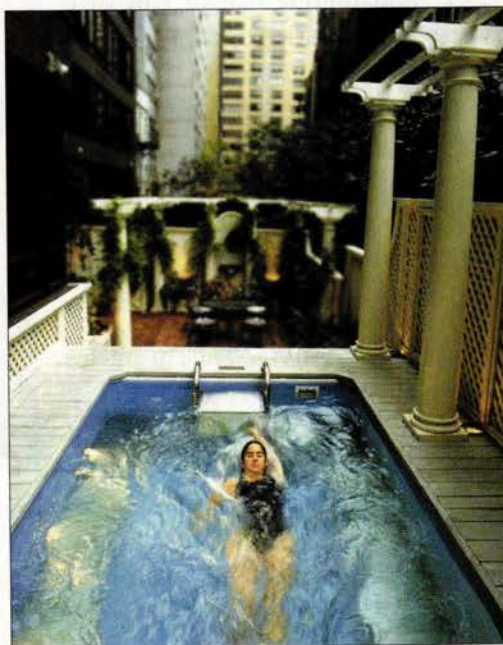
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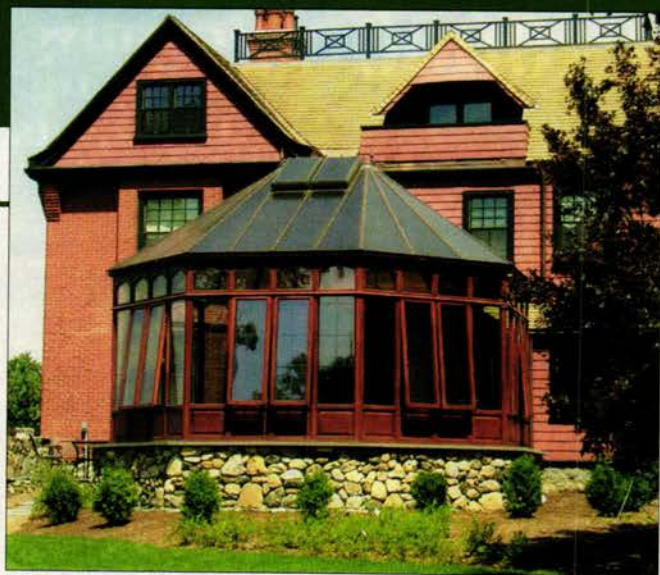
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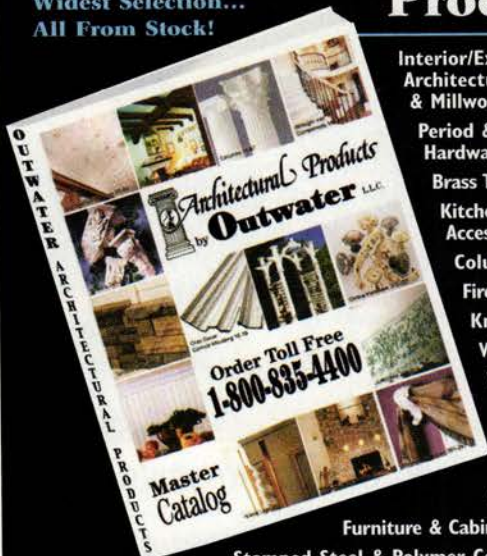


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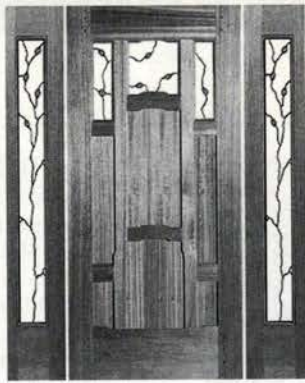
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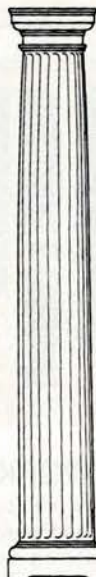
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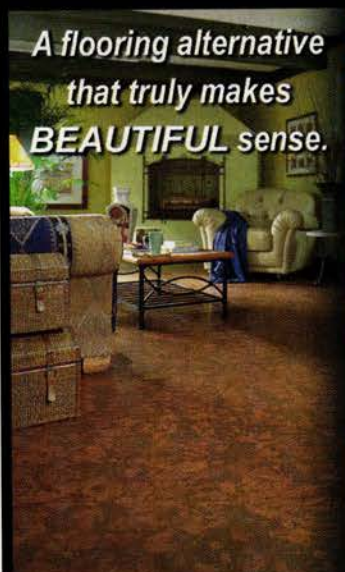
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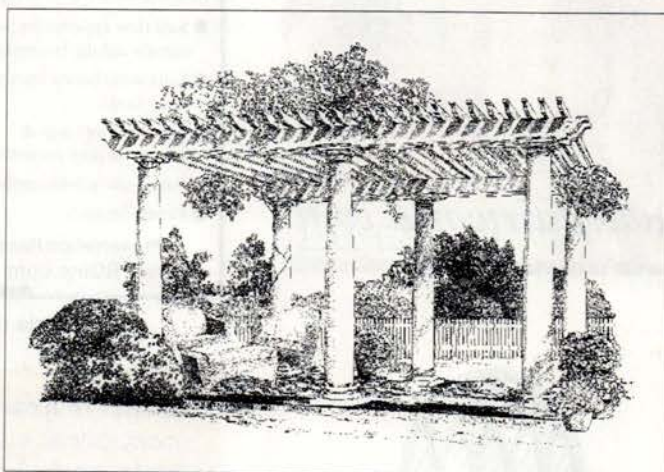
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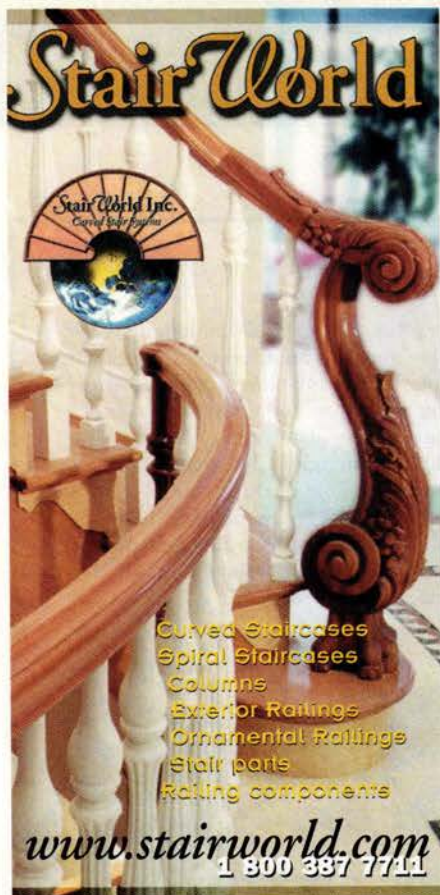
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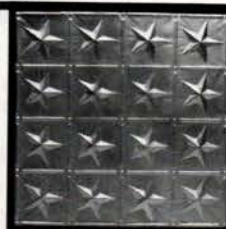
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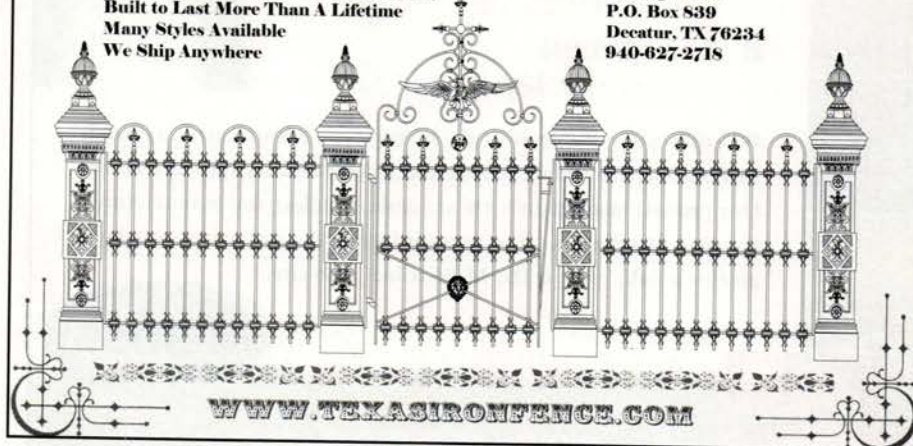
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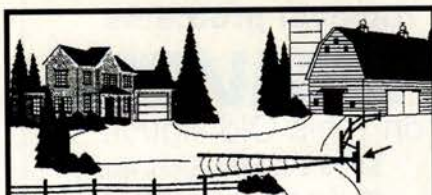
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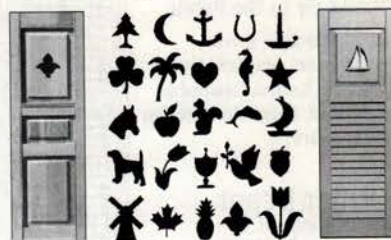
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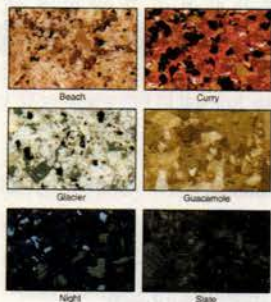
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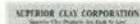
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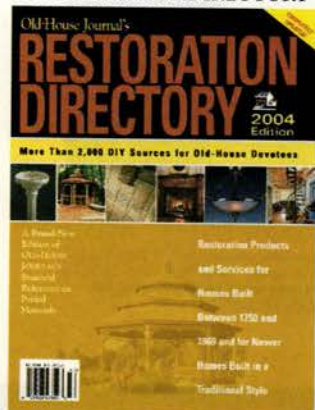


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