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Features

44 Summerhouses

By Susan E. Schnare

Whatever you call them—gazebos, pavilions, and conservatories, too—summerhouses share the same sweet calling: bringing people closer to nature while enhancing the beauty of their surroundings.

52 Exterior Stripper Primer

By Steve Jordan

Sometimes, when an old-house paint job won't stay put, you've got to grit your teeth and take it all off. Here are the basics on what you'll need to know to get the job done.

58 Wood Shingles from the Source

By Elizabeth Holtzman

Wood shingle manufacturing made dramatic progress during the 19th century. Here's how the shift from hand-splitting to machine sawing affects old houses today.

60 Old-House Living: Serial Restorers

By Regina Cole

Think restoring one old house is too much work? Meet a couple who's undertaken six of them, loving (and learning) every minute.

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By Gordon Bock

From humble beginnings to a ubiquitous roofing material—in a kaleidoscope of hues and shapes—we travel the historical road of asphalt shingles.

70 Spot Paint Maintenance

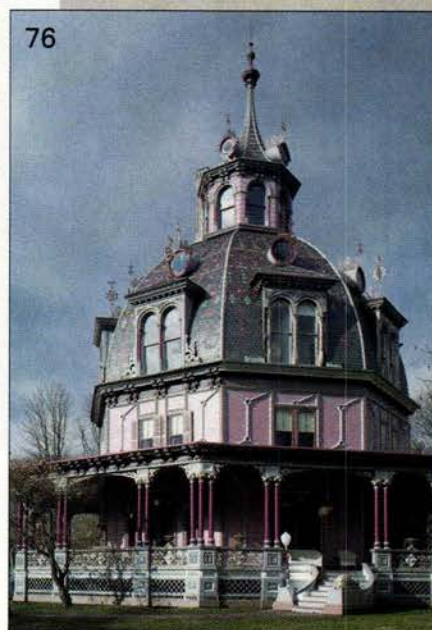
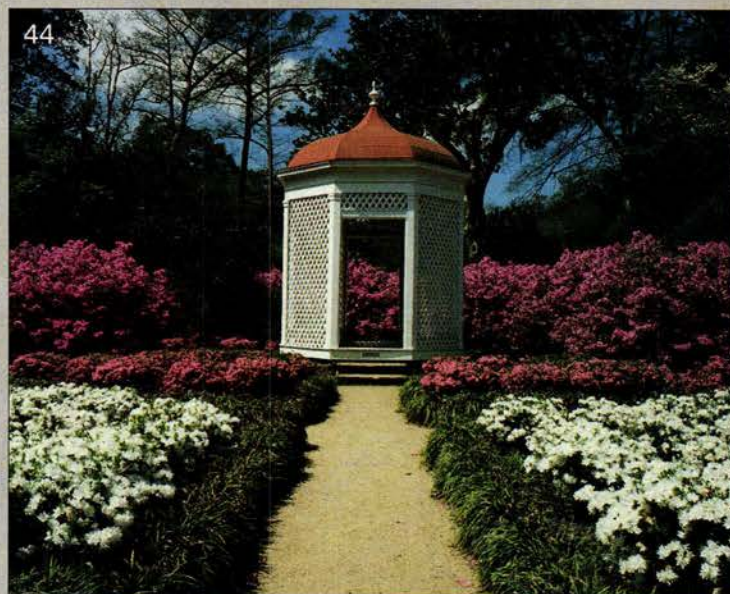
By John Leeke

If the paint on your home's exterior is only ghastly in a few places, spot paint maintenance could be your fix. Here's how to tell if spot repairs will work for you.

76 Style: When Four Walls Won't Do

By James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell

While they may appear frivolous to modern eyes, octagonal houses, popular in the 1850s, were an inspired effort to create perfect dwellings through pure geometry.



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Volume 33 / Number 4

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ON THE COVER:

Seemingly from Middle Earth, the source of this fanciful summerhouse is, in fact, Frederick Law Olmsted, the illustrious landscape architect. Photo by Paul Rocheleau.





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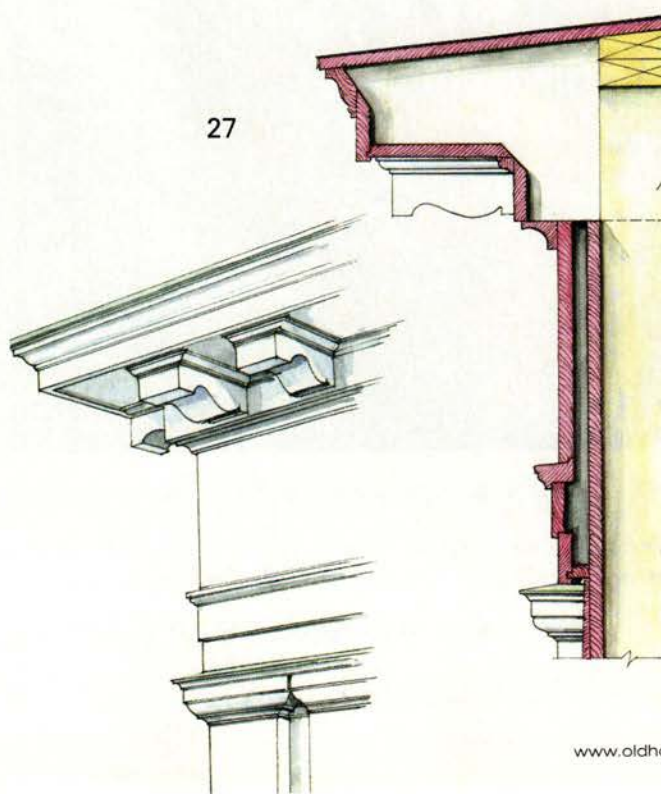
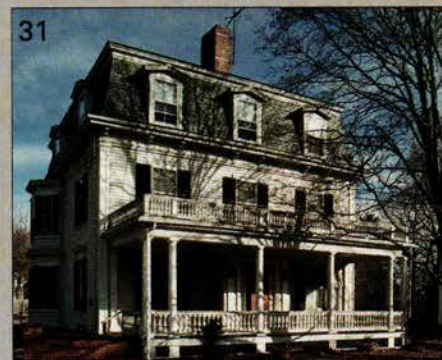
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Gadget Guy

When we bought our old house, the first thing we had to replace was the boiler supplying the 1910s heating system—a unit barely six years old that both the Realtor and inspector assured us was the one feature we didn't have to worry about in the 1880s building. (Therein lies another tale!) Anyway, while the heating contractor was installing the piping, valves, and temperature meters around the spanking new, high-efficiency, computer-controlled boiler, I asked him if he could include a fitting so that later I could add a water temperature gauge. (I had visions of a shiny brass one with a needle, or at least a big, Apollo 7-era digital readout I could mount to a wall.) He politely replied that, besides costing more money, he couldn't guarantee it would be effective. "Besides, you really don't need another meter," he went on to say, then added with knowing emphasis, "unless, of course, you're a *Gadget Guy*."

Truth be told, I am a Gadget Guy. While I may not be the most gadgety gadget guy—say, a nutty professor type who has motorized Venetian blinds or wireless controls on every appliance—I do have a soft spot for better-mousetrap conveniences.



I'm not alone. In fact, we Gadget Guys go way back, to the earliest days of gadgets. When it comes to houses, I have no doubt that Gadget Guys (and Girls) were the first owners of bathrooms with real, hot-water showers, or marvels like automobiles. I suspect that Frederick Robie, who commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design the innovative 1908 house that bears his name, was a Gadget Guy too. The brilliant young architect had a fancy for technical novelties himself, even wiring his own house for electric lighting long before it was available in Oak Park.

Though today the same infatuation extends to the digital world (giving us the more politically correct term *technophile*), the best gadgets are invariably mechanical or electromechanical—labor-saving, of course, but still employing some form of muscle-powered squeezing, grinding, or pumping. The love of gadgets—I call it *philagadgeta*—is not gender-exclusive either. Girls have a soft spot for gadgets too, especially in the realms of food preparation and wardrobe maintenance. Though Americans seem to possess their own gadget genetics in the form of Yankee Ingenuity, *philagadgeta* is truly a global phenomenon. In Germany, for example, there is an entire industry based on kitchen gadgets that supplies stores devoted solely to gizmos for peeling strange vegetables or overcomplicating basic operations like mashing potatoes.

If you're doing a lot of painting on your old house this summer, take a moment to check out this gadget: a brush spinner. Resembling a bicycle pump, but operating more like a salad spinner, this nifty tool (available at good paint stores) does a quicker and better job of cleaning paint brushes than any pair of hands ever could. We have the technology.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gordon H. Bock".

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Letters



Designer Homes

I enjoyed your article in the January/February 2005 issue entitled "Architects and Their Interiors." I did however wish to make a correction to the section dealing with the Bradley House by Louis Sullivan. You state that the Bradley House is the only Sullivan-designed residence still standing. However, there are seven residential projects, dating from the years when Sullivan was a partner in the firm of Adler & Sullivan, which still stand in Chicago and display Sullivan's brilliant use of ornament and design. The most significant of these is the Charnley-Persky House, located on North Astor Street. Although various authors have given Frank Lloyd Wright (Sullivan's assistant at the time) most or all of the credit for the design, recent scholarship has confirmed that Sullivan was responsible for the

majority of the design, with Wright contributing minor details and ornament. This is not surprising, given that Sullivan and James Charnley were close friends and neighbors during the winter months in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The Charnley-Persky House is the only Sullivan residence in the U.S. open to the public. For further information, please visit www.sah.org.

Sincerely,
William Tyre, Manager of Programs
Charnley-Persky House Museum
Chicago, Illinois

Faux Slate Update

The chart in our "Slate Roof Stand-Ins" article listing product information contained an inaccurate piece of data. The weight of GAF Materials Corporation's Camelot Premium shingles is actually 460 pounds per square. The company also offers Grand Slate, which weighs in at 425 pounds per square. GAF can be reached at (800) 223-1948 or www.gaf.com.

—Eds.

Eternal Paint Primer

Spring has sprung here in upstate New York and all the people are itching to get out and paint their houses. We have only a bit left on the driveway side of our Italianate villa and then *we are done!* By virtue of our old-house exterior paint project we now seem to be the paint gurus—or is the plural guri?—of Cooperstown. We wanted to let you know that we constantly refer people to OHJ's

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Madison, Wisconsin

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Letters

"Primer on Paint Prep" by Marylee MacDonald in the March/April 1999 issue. I've made so many copies the staples are wearing out.

We think OHJ ought to republish it as a pamphlet and make it available to paint stores and village planning boards. Sound crazy? It would do a lot of good!

Janet and Bill Rigby

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Kitchen Aid

The same yellow clock with a thermometer appears in the March/April *Old-House Journal* articles "Restoration Recipes" and "Fantastic Plastics". How can I find out more about this clock? Is it available for sale? I would be grateful for the name and address of the manufacturer or outlet. The clock would be terrific for my daughter's home.

Jo Utermoehlen

Mercersburg, Pennsylvania

That funky clock hangs in the kitchen of OHJ photographer Brian Vanden Brink. He tells us it's a reproduction of an early 1950s European design; what looks like a thermometer is actually a sixty-minute mechanical kitchen timer. The battery-operated clock comes in yellow, white, silver, and pale green and is manufactured by RZK Trading Company. You can find it online at www.tabletools.com for \$39.95; or order by phone at (888) 211-6603.

—Eds.



BRIAN VANDEN BRINK



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Calendar

MAY 19-SEPTEMBER 5 MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN **The Arts & Crafts Movement**

A groundbreaking exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Museum examines both European and American influences on the Arts & Crafts movement, and its popularity on both sides of the Atlantic, through hundreds of objects—from ceramics and furniture to metalwork and textiles. Tickets \$12; visit mam.org or call (414) 224-3842 for more information.

SEPTEMBER 10-11 CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

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Remarkable kitchen transformations of mid-century homes are featured, and admissions directly support the work of Meals on Wheels. Advance tickets \$15; call Meals on Wheels to order (434) 293-4364.

AUGUST 13 INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA **Sin and Redemption**

The tour visits three historic downtown churches—including Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church, restored following a devastating fire—before concluding with a stop at the Rathskeller restaurant in the historic Athenaeum for a sampling of German beer. Tickets \$45 (members \$40); for more information visit www.historiclandmarks.org.

Early American Wallpaper Confab

AUGUST 8-10

Folks who love historic wallpaper know that some of the most exciting new information is about the earliest periods, dating from 1700 to 1850. Details on the production and use of papers from these formative years have just come to light in the past decade, and this summer they are the subject of an in-depth conference at the renowned Eastfield Village in upstate New York. The three-day program will encompass over 9 informative talks presented by top researchers in the field, including Richard Nylander



(Senior Curator of Historic New England/SPNEA) on wallpapers in New England; Susan Buck (conservator and paint analyst) who will discuss her work at historic sites

such as Monticello, Mount Vernon, and Colonial Williamsburg; plus experts (and OHJ contributors) Robert M. Kelly and Chris Ohrstrom exploring the methods, materials, colors, and hanging techniques of the era.

An appropriate backdrop for the venue, Eastfield Village is a meticulous assemblage of 20-odd vernacular buildings that date between 1787 and 1840, lovingly rescued and moved by its creator, Donald Carpentier. Eastfield's collection of rare architectural elements—numbering in the thousands—are open to anyone enrolled in its learning workshops. Attendees are invited to stay on-site for free in accommodations with rope beds, and cook in the late-18th century kitchen to enhance their knowledge of pre-industrial living. The conference fee is \$425. Register online at <http://daats.com/gac/workshops/classes.htm> or call (518) 766-2422.



Historic Structures Reports: A Management Tool for Historic Properties

The core of any historic property management program is accurate information about the building. This summer, the National Preservation Institute (NPI) will present a seminar exploring the historic structures report—the principal tool used to document a site's history, condition, and maintenance—and emerging technologies, such as computer-aided facilities management programs.

Offered in conjunction with its series on Preservation Maintenance: Understanding and Preserving Historic Buildings, the seminar will take place July 14-16 in cooperation with the Campbell Center for Historic Preservation Studies in Mount Carroll, IL and is geared towards preservation architects, managers of historic properties and facilities, historians, and others planning for or writing HSRs. Cost is \$225. For more information visit www.NPI.org or contact the Campbell Center at (815) 244-1173; www.campbellcenter.org.

Calendar

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Books in Brief

Practically Perfect Publications

Since houses can't fend for themselves, the field of historic building restoration and preservation is really the interaction of people, structures, and knowledge, and the expansion of accurate, effective information over the last three decades has been the true key to its success. One of the many experts who have helped build this body of knowledge through years of extensive writing and hands-

on experience is John Leeke of Portland, Maine, a nationally recognized instructor as well as longtime OHJ contributor. Now John has begun updating and reformatting the most popular of his Practical Restoration Reports with fresh color photos and drawings to keep that body growing.

For those new to John or

Save Your Wood Windows

by John Leeke, Preservation



Wood-Epoxy Repairs

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by John Leeke, Preservation Consultant



his Practical Restoration Reports, these are softbound monographs running some 10 to 60 pages each on topics of wide and intense interest to anyone caring for historic buildings. Titles range from dealing with traditional building parts like *Save Your Wood Windows* and *Exterior Wood Columns*, to the modern concepts of *Managing Maintenance* and *Wood-Epoxy Repairs*. Based on years of extensive research and field application, each is put together with John's trademark hands-on, step-by-step instructions, and famously lucid illustrations. The new color photos in particular are marvels of clarity and veracity when it comes to explaining historic building conditions – a rarity indeed in today's world of computer-generated visuals. Designed to be used as either do-it-yourself guides for contractors or homeowners, or background information for architects' specifications, each report is affordably priced at \$10 to \$15 and available in discounted quantities for conferences and workshops. For more information, contact John Leeke at 26 Higgins St., Portland ME 04103; (207) 773-2306; www.historic-homeworks.com.

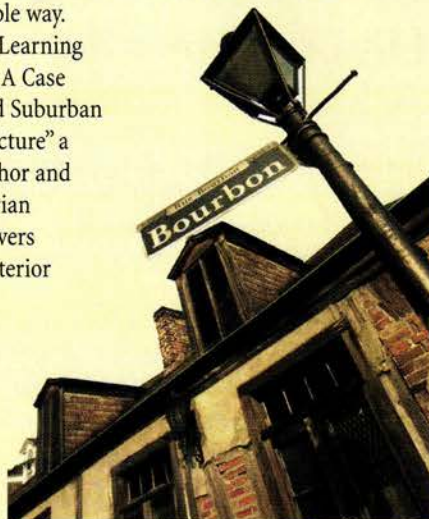
Traditional Building on the Bayou

There's more than Creole cuisine and Dixieland jazz in New Orleans that make it ideal for the fall edition of the Traditional Building Exhibition and Conference; there's the rich architectural resource of the city itself. With stellar examples of building restoration and adaptation, the Crescent City presents conference exhibitors and attendees with a fitting setting for a wide choice of workshops, tours, and seminars, as well as easy access to representatives of hard-to-find services and products.

The Traditional Building Exhibition and Conference is a rare opportunity for historic home owners and building professionals alike to increase

their knowledge about the newest technologies in preservation and traditional construction, with continuing education credits for AIA and Interior Design available for most sessions. Just a taste of the many topics featured is "The Pennywise New Old House: Balancing Character and Budget" with Russell Versaci, who will lead attendees through strategies for building a "new old" house in the thriftiest possible way. Also scheduled is "Learning from New Orleans: A Case Study in Urban and Suburban Traditional Architecture" a slide lecture by author and architectural historian Susan Sully that covers architecture and interior

design from the late-18th to the early-20th centuries, and "Color Selection and Application for Historical Properties" by Sheri Thompson and Bill Rafie of Sherwin-Williams who will offer guidance on selecting paints for preservation projects. For more information, visit www.traditionalbuilding-show.com; call (800) 982-6247, or email info@restoremedia.com.



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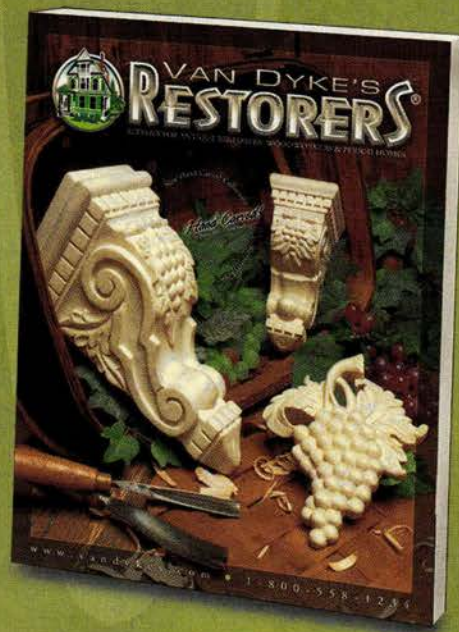
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*Susan M. Keith
Redlands, California.*

No confusion here. Without the slightest hesitation, we'd call your old house a bungalow—and probably an all-original one at that. A bungalow is not a style, but a basic house form that is often defined simply as a one- or one-and-a-half-storey dwelling with a low-pitch roof and bedroom on the first floor. Though the vast majority of bungalows were built with gable roofs, hipped roofs such as yours were also common, and are evocative of the low, veranda-bearing seasonal houses of India. These are the structures that helped inspire the form as well as the

name bungalow (a corruption of the adjective *bangla*). Extending the sweeping roof over the deep porch is another tropical touch designed to keep interiors cool, the same as those windows that reach to the floor.

Though two full storeys generally disqualifies a house as a bungalow, dormers were widely used to gain space on bungalows of all ilks and eras. Given that your dormer appears to deftly match the roof and the

rest of the building, it's a good bet it was part of the original design—possibly from a planbook. Details like the decorative open rafter tails and shingle siding are also classic parts of the bungalow building vocabulary. Of note are the angle cheeks of the dormer that sweep into the roof—a nice treatment that reinforces the ground-hugging feel of these buildings while helping to visually integrate the dormer into the roof.



Porches that bridge indoors and outdoors were a characteristic feature of bungalows of all types, and well-represented in the wrap-around version on this house.

Standing Up to Carpet Stains

The Ranch house we just bought has wall-to-wall carpeting in the dining room that is in excellent shape, except for isolated spots where people have obviously dropped food over the years. What can we do about the stains?

*Rachelle Donato
Setauket, New York*

First, observe some of the general guidelines about stains. If the spill were still fresh, you would be wise to blot up any liquid immediately with white cloth or paper towels (no printing) until dry. Avoiding scrubbing that can distort the fiber in the area. With

dry spills however, you should vacuum up the material, avoiding adding any water that can increase problems. For old stains, try to determine the source of the stain, then test with a likely treatment first before tackling the whole stain, such as the following:

Blood—Apply room-temperature cleaning solution, making sure it is cool to avoid setting the stain.

Chewing Gum—Use an electric hair dryer to heat the gum,—making sure you don't melt the rug fiber—then apply a plastic sandwich bag. When the gum

sticks to the bag, lift the gum from the carpet. Next apply methyl salicylate (such as found in Extra Strength Ben Gay) until the gum is removed completely. Follow up with detergent and warm water.

Catsup—Clean the affected spot with white vinegar.

Chocolate—Start with dry cleaning fluid, then progress in steps to ammonia, white vinegar, and a warm water rinse.

For information on other treatments, check out the resources from the Carpet and Rug Institute at www.carpet-rug.com

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Capital Conundrum

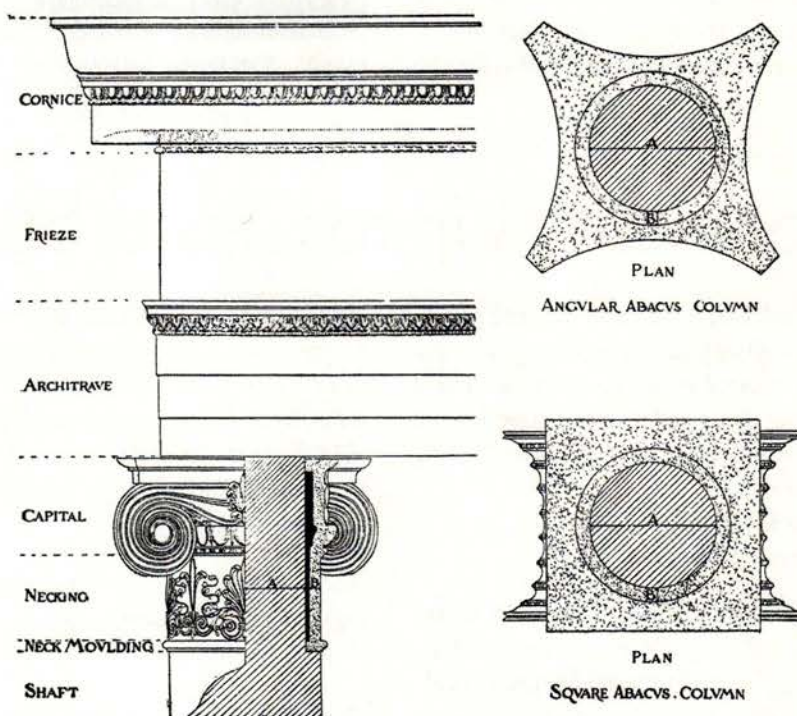
The porch of our 1890s Neoclassical house is supported with columns topped by elaborate Corinthian capitals. Inspecting some peeling paint, I noticed that what I thought were carvings were starting to flake. What's happening?

*Douglas Lake
New Orleans, Louisiana*

Judging by the date and style of your house, it sounds like you may own what are generally called composition capitals. These are prefabricated capitals widely sold in building parts catalogs from the 1890s to the 1910s to meet the flush in popularity of classically styled ornaments. Rather than being carved from wood, or cast

from ceramics like terra cotta, composition capitals were molded from an amalgam of ingredients that allowed the manufacturer to produce the intricate, often highly foliated features in vogue at the time. What exactly is the amalgam? Hard to say, given the variety of now long-gone manufacturers, but other OHJ readers have reported ingredients along the lines of sawdust, wood chips, stone powder, and adhesives. The upshot is, capitals that are intact should be protected from paint stripping chemicals or heat tools that might otherwise be considered for wood carvings, and repairs are worth trying with epoxy adhesives or fillers, especially for reconstructing small parts.

COMPOSITION CAPITALS.



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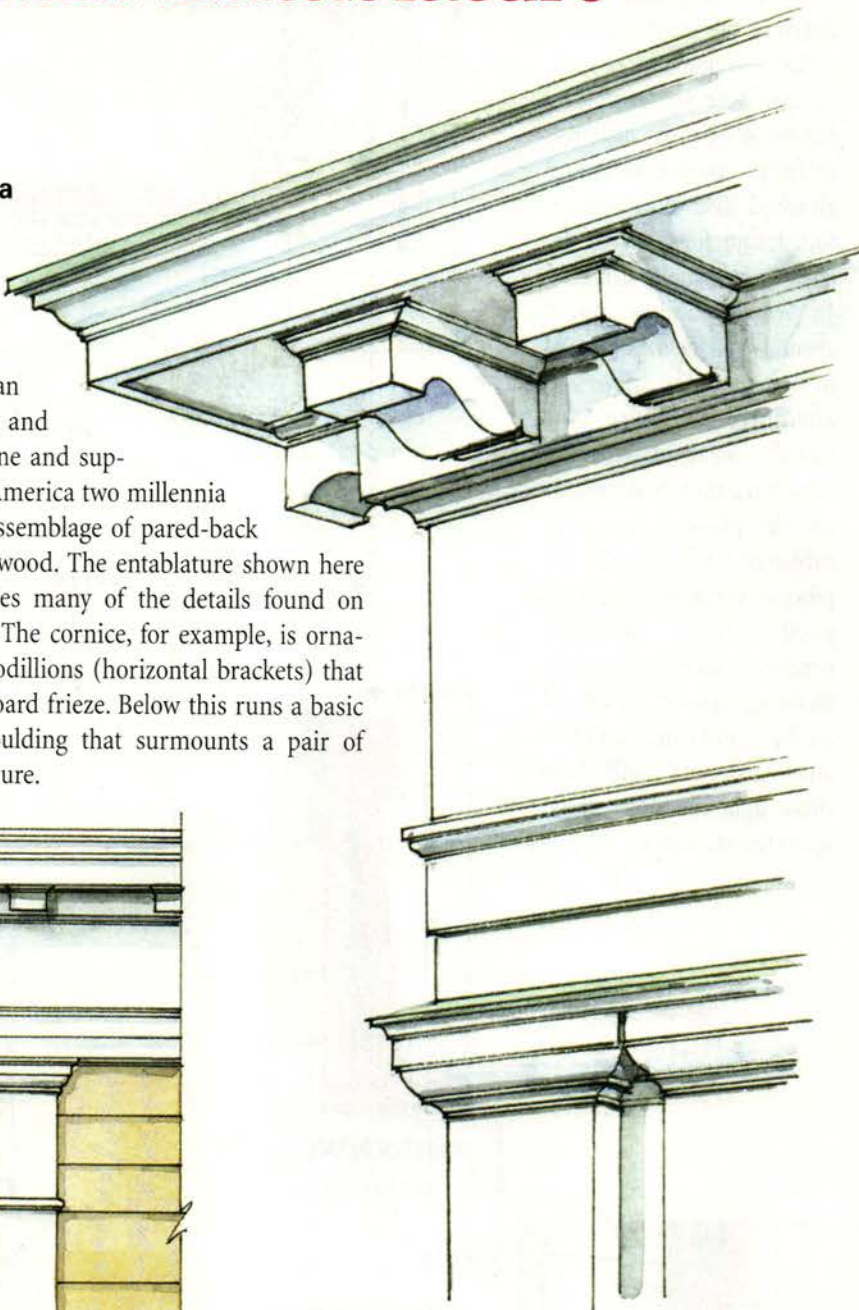
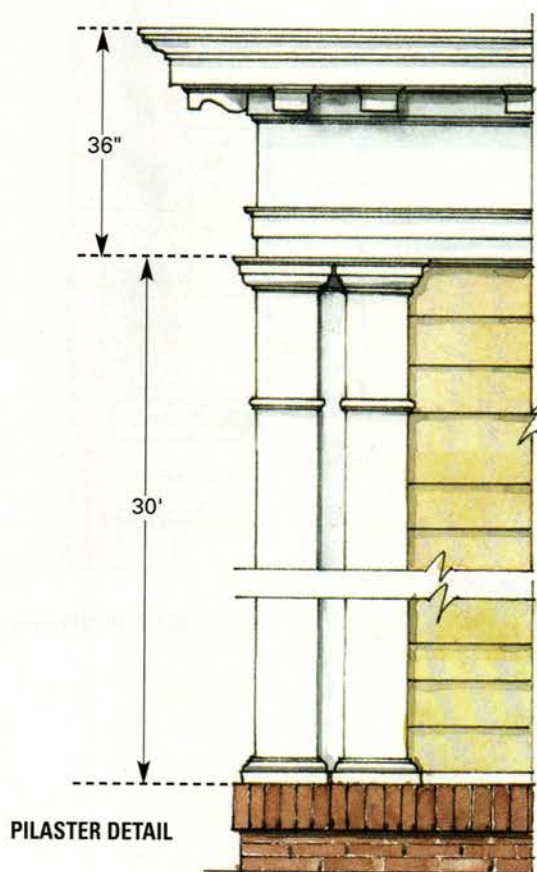
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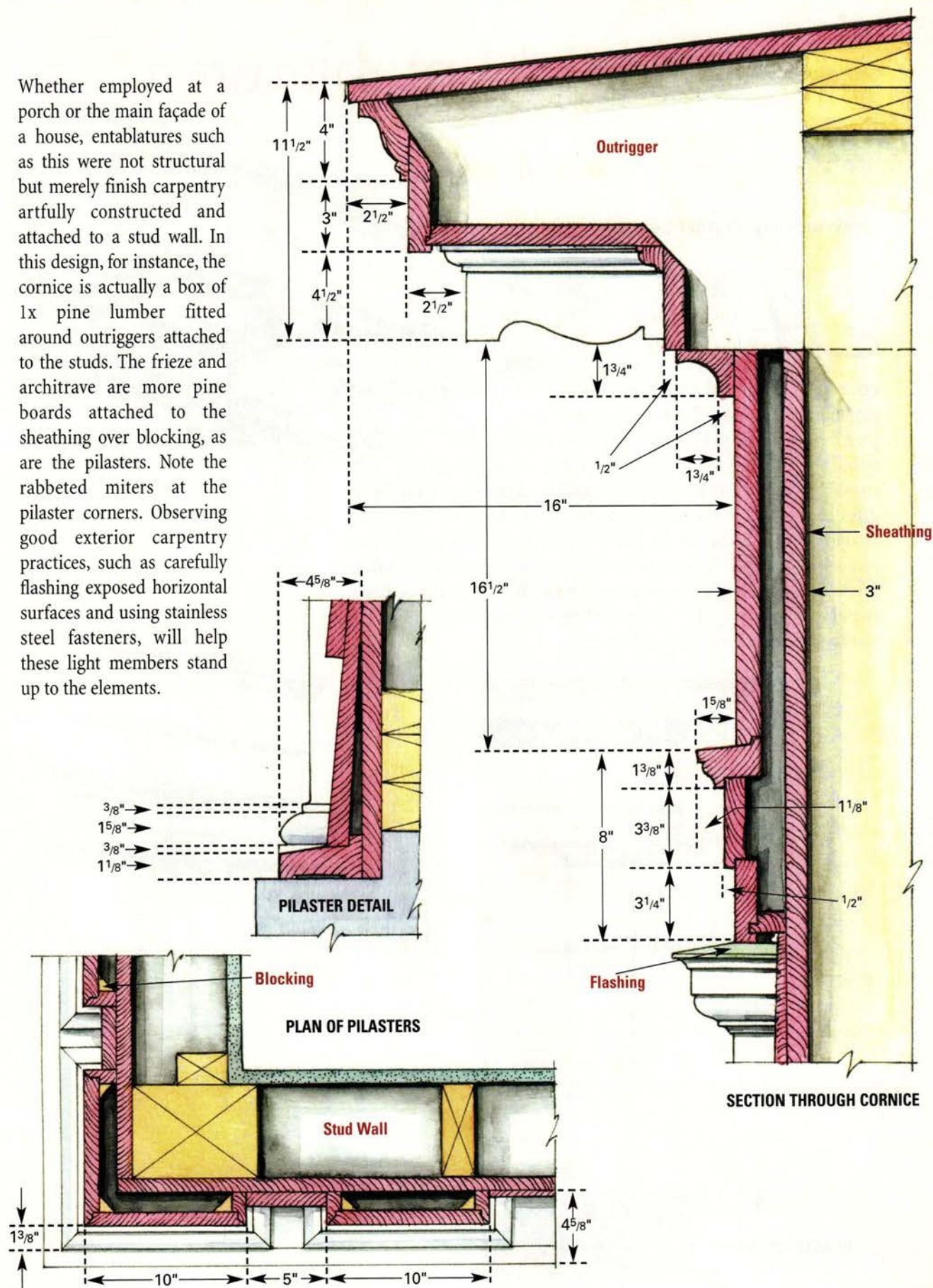
Colonial Entablature

Drawings by Robert Leanna

According to the temple architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, an entablature is an elaborate band and moulding that is erected out of stone and supported by columns. As executed in America two millennia later, an entablature was often an assemblage of pared-back classical elements and built out of wood. The entablature shown here dates to the 1920s and incorporates many of the details found on Colonial Revival houses of the era. The cornice, for example, is ornamented with simple but shapely modillions (horizontal brackets) that overlook an equally austere plain-board frieze. Below this runs a basic architrave defined by an ogee moulding that surmounts a pair of pilasters at the corner of the entablature.



Whether employed at a porch or the main façade of a house, entablatures such as this were not structural but merely finish carpentry artfully constructed and attached to a stud wall. In this design, for instance, the cornice is actually a box of 1x pine lumber fitted around outriggers attached to the studs. The frieze and architrave are more pine boards attached to the sheathing over blocking, as are the pilasters. Note the rabbeted miters at the pilaster corners. Observing good exterior carpentry practices, such as carefully flashing exposed horizontal surfaces and using stainless steel fasteners, will help these light members stand up to the elements.





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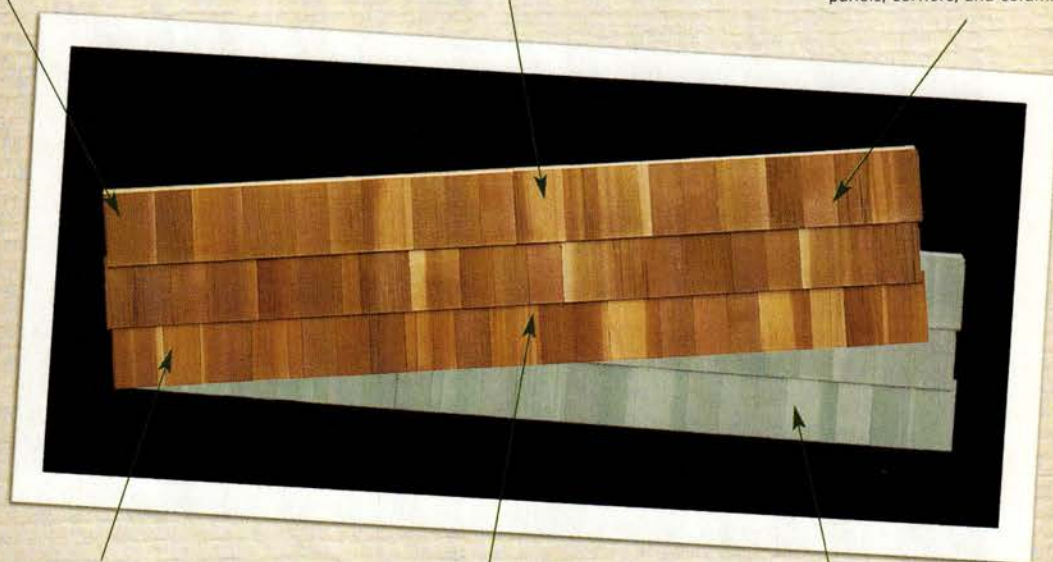
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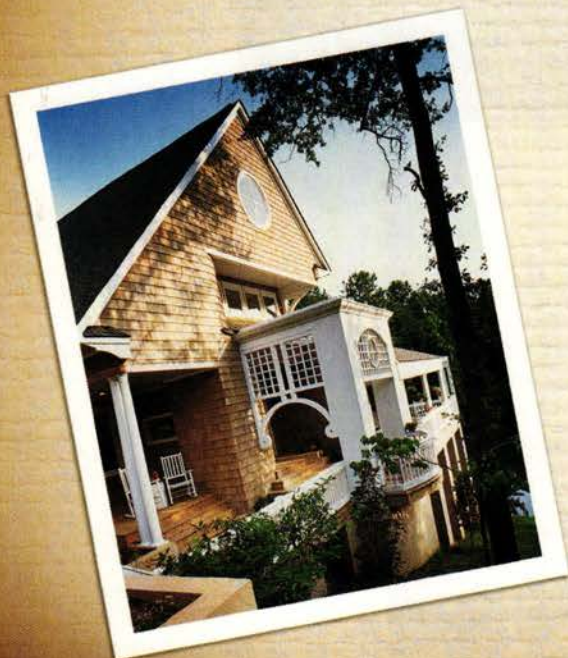
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Inside the Issues of "Frenching-Out"

By J. RANDALL COTTON
PHOTOS BY JAMES C. MASSEY

Q: In my town we have an on-going problem with people who want to "French-out" their houses by adding inauthentic trim and architectural elements. Most are understated, turn-of-the-20th-century builder-style homes, yet people wish they were Victorians. We try to enforce the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Who's right?

**—Diane Fiero,
Des Moines, Iowa**

Hard to say who's "right." Orthodox historic preservationists will argue that the original architectural integrity of even plain Jane vernacular houses should be respected, and not gussied up with inauthentic frou-frous. Many homeowners will counter with the argument that their house is their private property, and they should be able to improve it according to their tastes. After all, the logic goes, homeowners have always been remodeling according to current fashion or their personal preferences.

Both sides of the issues will even cite the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties in their arguments. Rehabilitation Standard #3 clearly discourages the practice of "architectural costuming," noting that "Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken." Restoration Standard #7 further states, "A false sense of history will not be created by adding conjectural features." (The Standards, and associated guidelines, can be found online at <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/secstan2.htm>).

Other camps point to Standard #4 for rehabilitation: "Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved." See, they say, architectural improvements made by past generations are now considered to be historic and even worthy of preservation.

The classic example of this situation is the so-called Wedding-Cake House in Kennebunkport, Maine. This well-known and oft-photographed house began life as a conventional circa 1825 Federal house, but was later transformed by its owner who added a frosting of Gothic ornament. The story goes that owner George Bourne remodeled his house in the 1850s after being inspired by the Gothic during a trip to Italy. Now, most preservationists would agree that the house should be preserved in its remodeled (or is it remuddled?) state. The Standards, it should be noted, are not intended to apply to all older properties, and they distinguish between treatments for preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction.

Playing With the Hands of Time

The principal purpose of a local historic district is to preserve—that is, to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property and historic characteristics of the district. Many local Historical Architectural Review Boards (HARBs) adopt the Standards as guidelines in making their decisions. Generally, homeowners in historic districts will be required to maintain their property's existing appearance or, if they wish, restore their property to a more historically authentic state if that earlier appearance can be documented.

In the 1870s, a mansard roof transformed this 1812 Federal-style house into a then-trendy Second Empire—part of the long American tradition of stylistic upgrades.



Preservation Perspectives



Local historic districts are almost always created via a mechanism of public consensus in which some private rights (for example, the right to demolish or alter your historic house at will) are relinquished for the common good. Thus, in neighborhoods where regulations protect the public's interest in preserving a district's historic characteristics, "fripperization" (the verb form of frippery) should not be allowed, especially if so-called embellishments are conjectural, inauthentic, false, or misleading.

The significance of many local historic districts may, in fact, be their comparatively unassuming vernacular homes—buildings that represent their origins as working-class neighborhoods or express regional building traditions. Dress these homes up inappropriately, and the district as a whole begins to lose its historical meaning.

Then what about older homes that aren't in historic districts? After all, not every old house is historically significant. Not surprisingly, OHJ addressed this issue in its early years. In the July

Even in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, a city strong with preservation ordinances, some simple, 18th century frame houses (top left) wound up morphing into much grander and less original iterations (bottom left) during the course of rehabilitating windows, roofing, and framing.

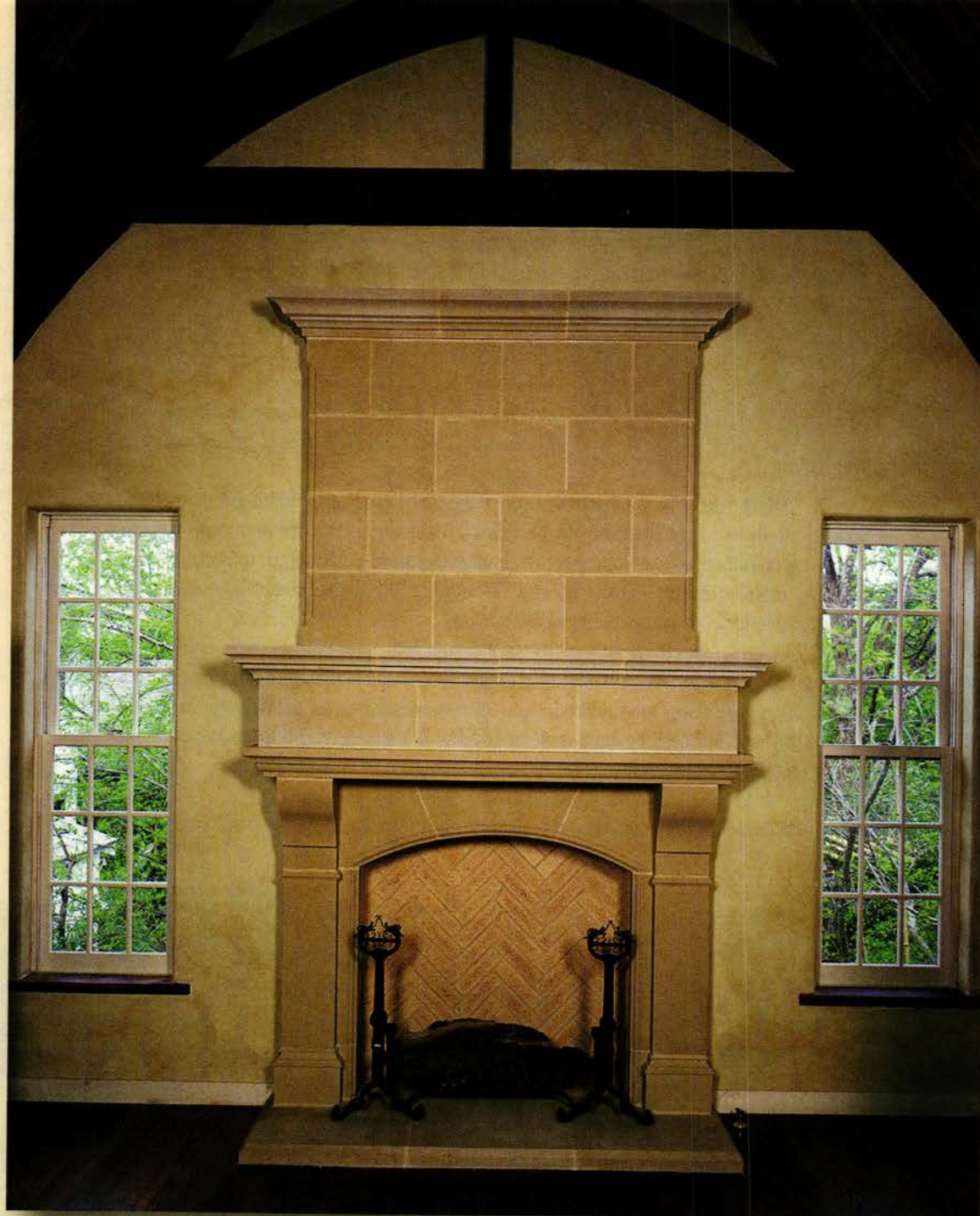
1980 issue, then-editor Clem Labine made a distinction between (1) Historically Significant Houses; (2) Architecturally Distinctive Houses; and (3) Plain Houses, a group which he defined as "essentially unornamented, functional boxes with minimal architectural detail."

He went on to say that houses in categories 1 and 2 deserve to be preserved or restored, but that houses in category 3 present a more complex situation. He suggested that these "can be architecturally enhanced as long as the work is done in good taste and in keeping with the spirit and style of the house." To this he added an important caveat. "This should not be taken as free license to add fripperies to every old house." Twenty-five years later, Clem still holds this position.

Keeping "Enhancements" in Line

Say your older house is not in a local historic district or otherwise officially designated as historic. Should you architecturally "enhance" it? Here are points to consider:

1. Just because your house currently lacks official historic designation doesn't mean it lacks historical or architectural significance. Take time to investigate the home's history, and to understand its architectural traditions. Remember, not all houses are high-style examples (see following point).
2. Over the last 50 years there has been an increasing understanding and appreciation for the vernacular, meaning "architecture exemplifying the commonest techniques, decorative features, and materials of a particular historical period, region, or group of people." Is your house a good example of local vernacular building or cultural traditions? If so, resist adding unnecessary gee-gaws.
3. Should you still wish to architecturally "enhance" your house, do so in a manner that does not destroy original materials. Furthermore, add embellishments in a manner in which they could be removed in the future without destroying the original appearance of the house—that is, ensure that the alterations are reversible in a preservation sense.
4. Do the contemplated embellishments respect the architectural spirit of the house? Is it conceivable that the original owners might, themselves, have made the kind of



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Preservation Perspectives



embellishments you desire? Preservation Brief #17: Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character (available at www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm) can help in this regard.

5. Restraint is better than exaggeration. Embellishments shouldn't overwhelm the underlying scale and form of the house.

6. Do quality work, and use quality materials. Inexpensive, off-the-shelf faux materials rarely look good or age well.

7. Don't deliberately attempt to make the house look like something it isn't, either architecturally or chronologically. In particular, resist these two common temptations: "Earlying-up" a house by stripping off distinctive features in an attempt to make it seem older or more primitive than it is, and "Vic-ing up" by over-embellishing with faux Victorian gee-gaws such as ornamental woodwork.

Finally, remember that many of the good design principles that are the basis for integrating respectful additions (compatible garages, for instance, or new kitchen wings) onto historic houses also apply to undertaking architectural enhancements. Refer to the article "Room to Grow" in the June 2004 issue of *Old-House Journal*, or check out Preservation Brief #14: New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings.

J. Randall Cotton is associate director of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.

Additions to the original portion of this modest bungalow (at right) not only dramatically increase the volume of the house, they also introduce uncharacteristic details, such as the oversize roof brackets and exotic front windows.

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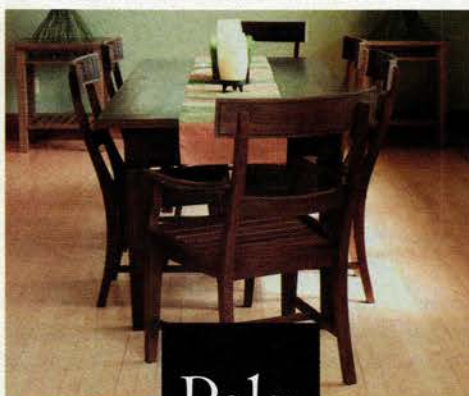
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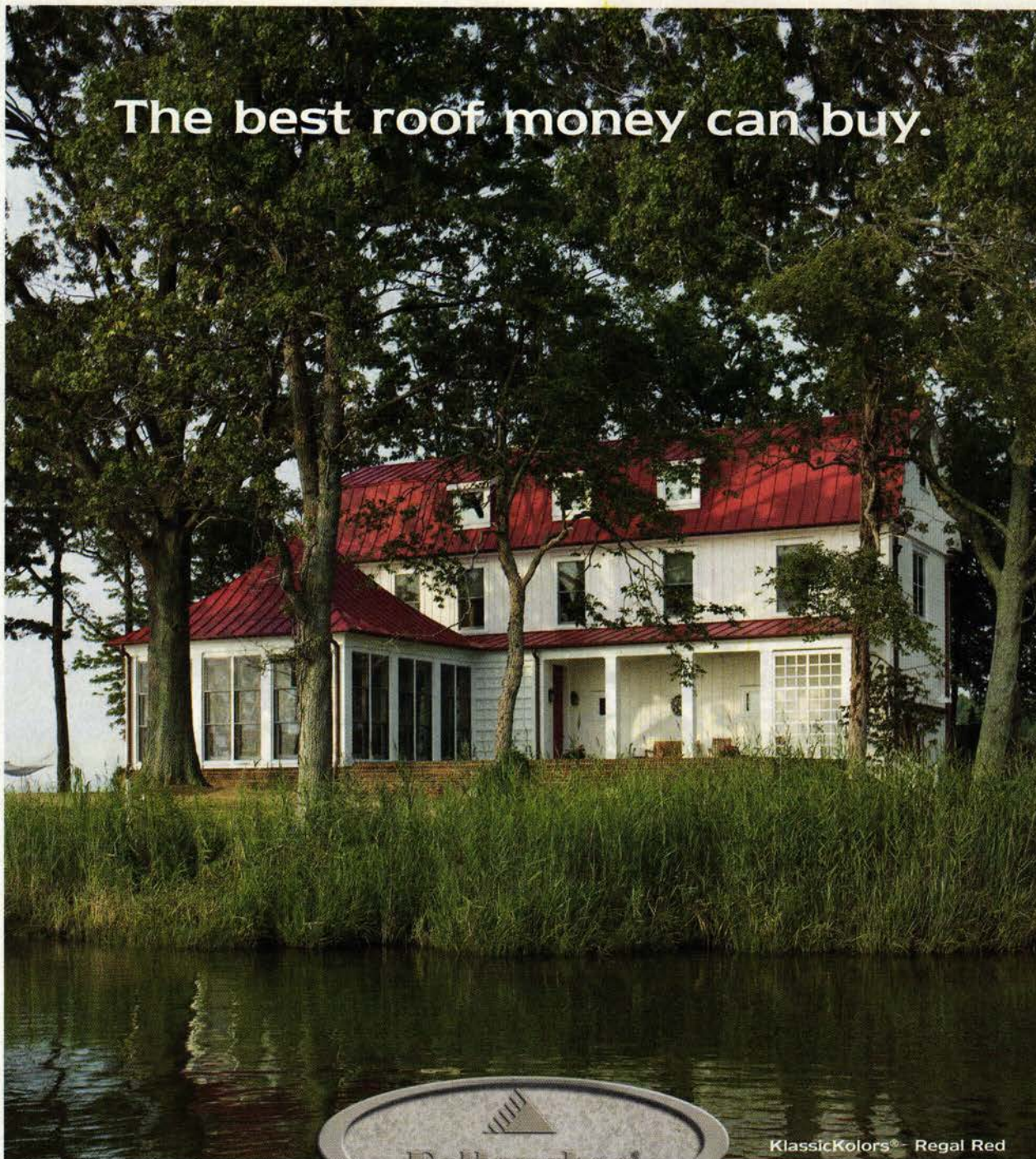
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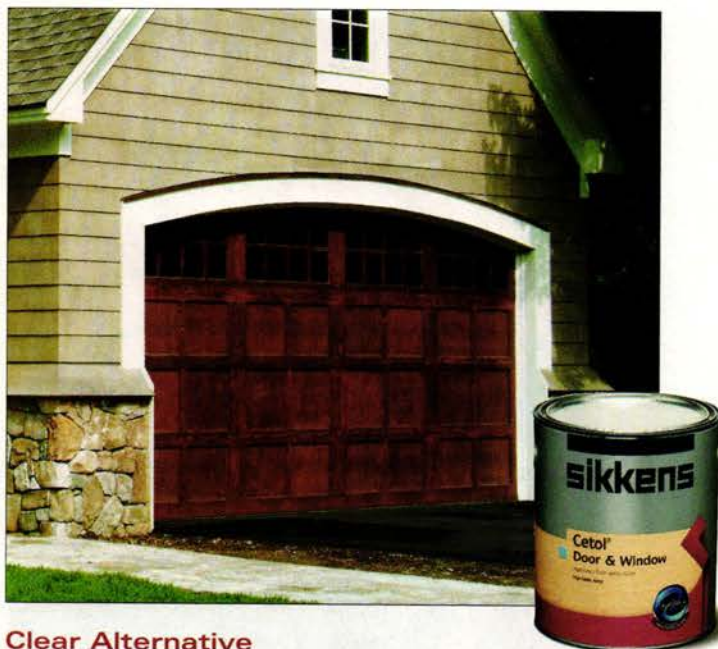
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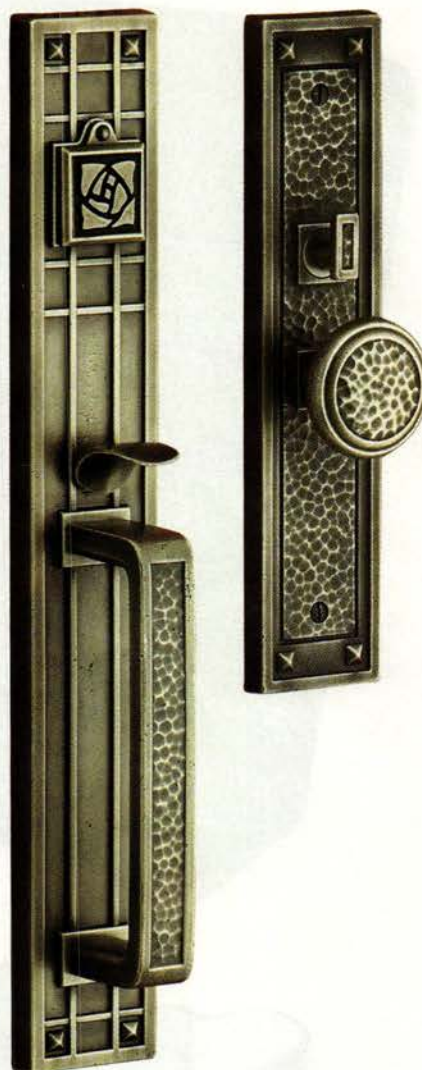


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A Boomerang in Time

Dance across the decades with Formica's Boomerang pattern, newly reissued in four original colors sure to make you want to pull out your bobby socks. Demand from designers of diners and homeowners restoring ranch houses spurred the comeback of the iconic curved amoeba pattern that debuted in the early 1950s as "Skylark"—and quickly appeared in kitchens everywhere. Boomerang is currently available at kitchen and bath dealers nationwide, and costs \$18 to \$25 a linear foot. Circle 2 on the resource card.



Waves of Glass

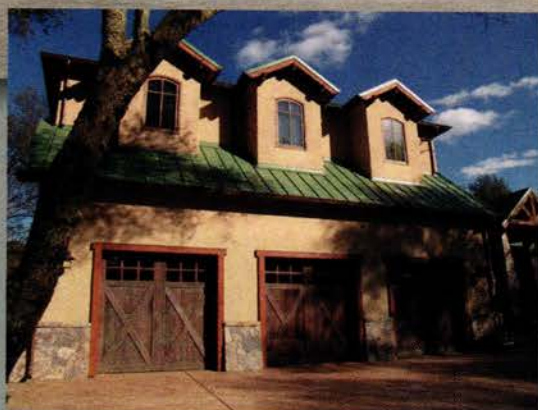
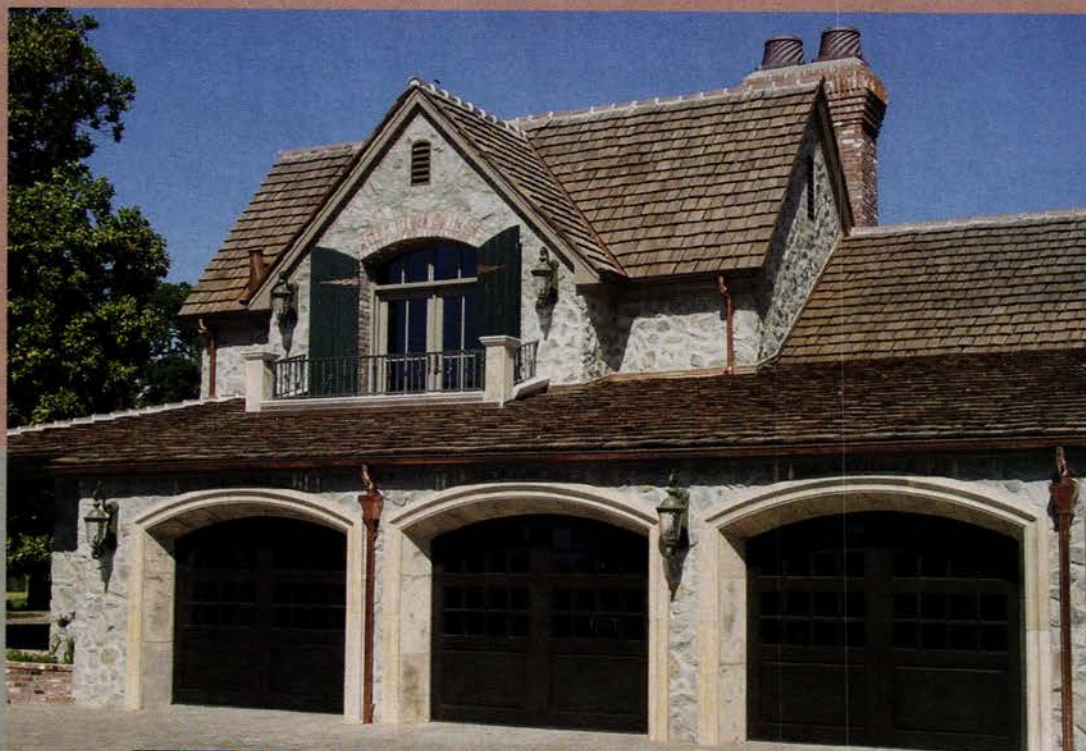
Architect Alvar Aalto's vase of undulating glass looks as fresh and modern today as it did adorning newly-

built split level homes in the 'Fifties. The asymmetrical design, meant to give flowers a more sculptural presentation, is one of the famed Finn's most recognizable works. The American Institute of Architects Bookstore in Washington, DC, stocks several colors and sizes; the green vase pictured is 6 1/4" high and costs \$115.00. The AIA can be reached at (202) 626-7541, or online at www.aia.org/store. Circle 3 on the resource card.



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The Sink Fairy

Opening the photo attachment, I sucked in my breath in anticipation. There it was, staring up at me from the computer screen in all of its jadeite glory: the green sink, the one I'd been looking for everywhere.

How many junk shops and salvage warehouses had I combed? How many search engines and websites had I linked my way through armed only with meager clues, stamped like glyphs inside the tank lid of the toilet in the guest bathroom: Manufactured by Standard; November 26, 1932.

This tank lid was from the same guest bathroom that drew pained yelps from Greg, my husband, and I only a few months earlier. When our Realtor first showed us the stately, clinker-brick Colonial Revival house on the riverfront in Norfolk, Virginia, we simply weren't prepared for the room's startling color scheme: shocking lavender wall tiles pin-striped with glowing green—a shade paler than Kelly, yet bolder than sage, and the same green as the fixtures.

Under the black globs of mildewing caulk and decades of filthy soap scum, we could see that the bathtub and toilet were original. With nary a chip in its porcelain, the stalwart built-in tub was in pretty good condition. And the toilet—well, if ever a toilet could be called beautiful, this one qualified with its elegant Art Deco



JAMES NOEL SMITH

styling and graceful porcelain swan's neck connecting tank to bowl. But then there was the sink; cultured marble (a.k.a. plastic) on a stumpy white melamine vanity, circa 1988. Sigh.

We ended up buying the house. Sure, it needed a lot of work—like a whole new kitchen, a downstairs half-bath, and a front porch for starters—but we weren't new to rehabbing. We couldn't resist the property's charms either: ornate escutcheons behind the crystal door-knobs, working transom windows over the bedroom doors, a hideaway telephone nook at the top of the stairs, rustic heart pine floors in the "maid's quarters." And boy, had we ever succumbed to that glorious water view.

Nonetheless, for weeks we agonized over what to do with the guest bathroom. We were less than thrilled with its ... um ... invigorating palette, but neither of us had the heart to rip out original, perfectly

functional appointments. Only when our four-year-old son requested a bath (actually asked to take a bath!) in "my big green tub" did we decide to make peace with the porcelain. We might not love the purple and green, but our kids sure did.

That settled it, the bionic green toilet and tub would stay. As for the cultured marble sink? Now that was another matter. If we were going green, we were going green all the way. And so my search began, toilet lid in hand.

The word at one salvage yard was disheartening. "Only sink ever come in here that color," announced the owner, "was one of them beauty parlor numbers with the neck dip in it." Others had green sinks galore – but in avocado and forest, emerald, and celery. Searching website after website, looking at vintage plumbing, repro plumbing, and salvage outfits from hither and yon, turned up plenty of green sinks, too—in olive and lime and chartreuse.

One evening at the computer, my eyes bleary with bath fixtures, I stumbled across a promising site. *Write an e-mail describing your need, it said, and it will be delivered to a network of hundreds of salvage dealers across the nation.* Dare I hope? I pecked out my SOS—"sink, Standard '32, funky light green"—sent it off, and called it a night.

In the morning, a reply was waiting. *This may be what you're looking for,* wrote

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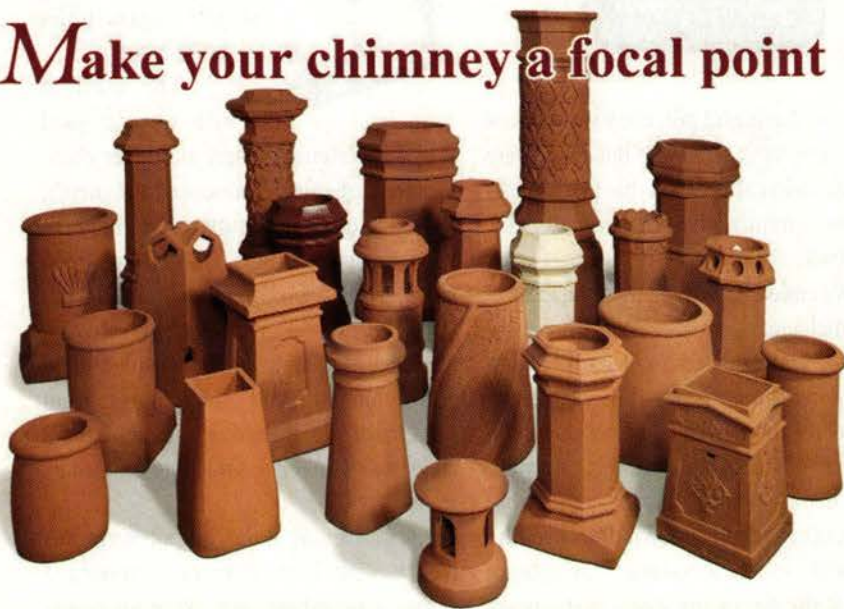
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Essay

Lisa in Baltimore. I opened the photo attachment, and there it was: an elegant pedestal lavatory with the same Deco-ish angled corners as the toilet and original chrome sunburst levers and spout, in the same luminous green.

You'd think I'd won the PowerBall. "I FOUND THE GREEN SINK!!!!" I e-mailed my husband at work, jiggling joyfully across my home office. "IT'S IN BALTIMORE!!!!" A quick four-hour drive north and the guest bath could be restored to its former flamboyant glory.

Then I got to pondering. Our master bath had suffered the same tragic fate; lovely Art Deco white toilet and tub missing their mate, original sink replaced with tacky plastic and particle board. Wouldn't it be fabulous to find a matching sink for the master bath too?

Dare I hope again? "Lisa," I typed, "you wouldn't happen to have another sink just like the green one, only in white?" She replied within minutes. *As a matter of fact, I do. Check out the attached photo.* I opened it and could hardly believe my eyes, the white sink! More jiggling ensued.

I dreamed some more. Greg and I had been talking about enlarging the master bath in the future. Wouldn't it be outstanding to find matching his-and-hers sinks? "Don't want to seem greedy, Lisa," I wrote, "but any possibility you might have another of the sinks, in white?" *Hold on,* wrote Lisa, *let me check.* She got back to us within the hour. It was a miracle; she had another one.

A week later, we unloaded three vintage pedestal sinks—two white, one Ming green—from our vehicle, all lovingly swathed in padded quilts as if they were precious vases. Friends and family—well, those who've never owned an old house—rolled their eyes at us.

Me, I was thinking of Lisa...my Sink Fairy. 🧚

Susan VanHecke is a journalist, author, and owner of a 1932 Colonial Revival house in Norfolk, Virginia.



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Summer

By Susan E. Schnare

Reflections on the Design and History of Outdoor Pleasure Buildings

A summerhouse's appeal is timeless. It is a secret place secluded in a tangle of vines and roses; an observation tower overlooking a torrent cutting through some woodland glen; a quiet outpost where we can meet a lover—or a good friend or two—over a pot of tea; or a private retreat to visit alone with a book or needlework just to think. Summerhouses evoke visions of a simple vine-embowered shelter just large enough to hold a couple of comfortable seats and a small table. The details may be fuzzy but the allure is strong and clear.

Known by many names—from gaze-bos, teahouses, and kiosks, to covered seats and garden houses—summerhouses are roofed shelters from sun and rain that extend the hours we can spend outdoors. They may have three walled sides, or no

walls at all. Roofs however, are what set summerhouses apart from arbors and pergolas, while being freestanding distinguishes them from cloisters and verandas that are attached to a main building, although all serve similar purposes.

Centuries ago, summerhouses provided precious shade and seclusion in the gardens of hot lands like Turkey, India, and the Middle East. The concept, along with other garden treasures, was perhaps brought back to Medieval England during the Crusades to be recreated in a much different climate with local materials. In the 18th century, summerhouses became fixtures in English landscape-style parks where they were incorporated into the design in a variety of forms, from marble temples to rustic hermitages. Protected resting places situated to command the best views and most delightful breezes, they functioned as architectural ornaments and focal points in the scheme.

In true summerhouse tradition, this landmark example in Beverly, Massachusetts, is an eclectic individual creation. Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1880s, it shows late Victorian and Middle Eastern influences.

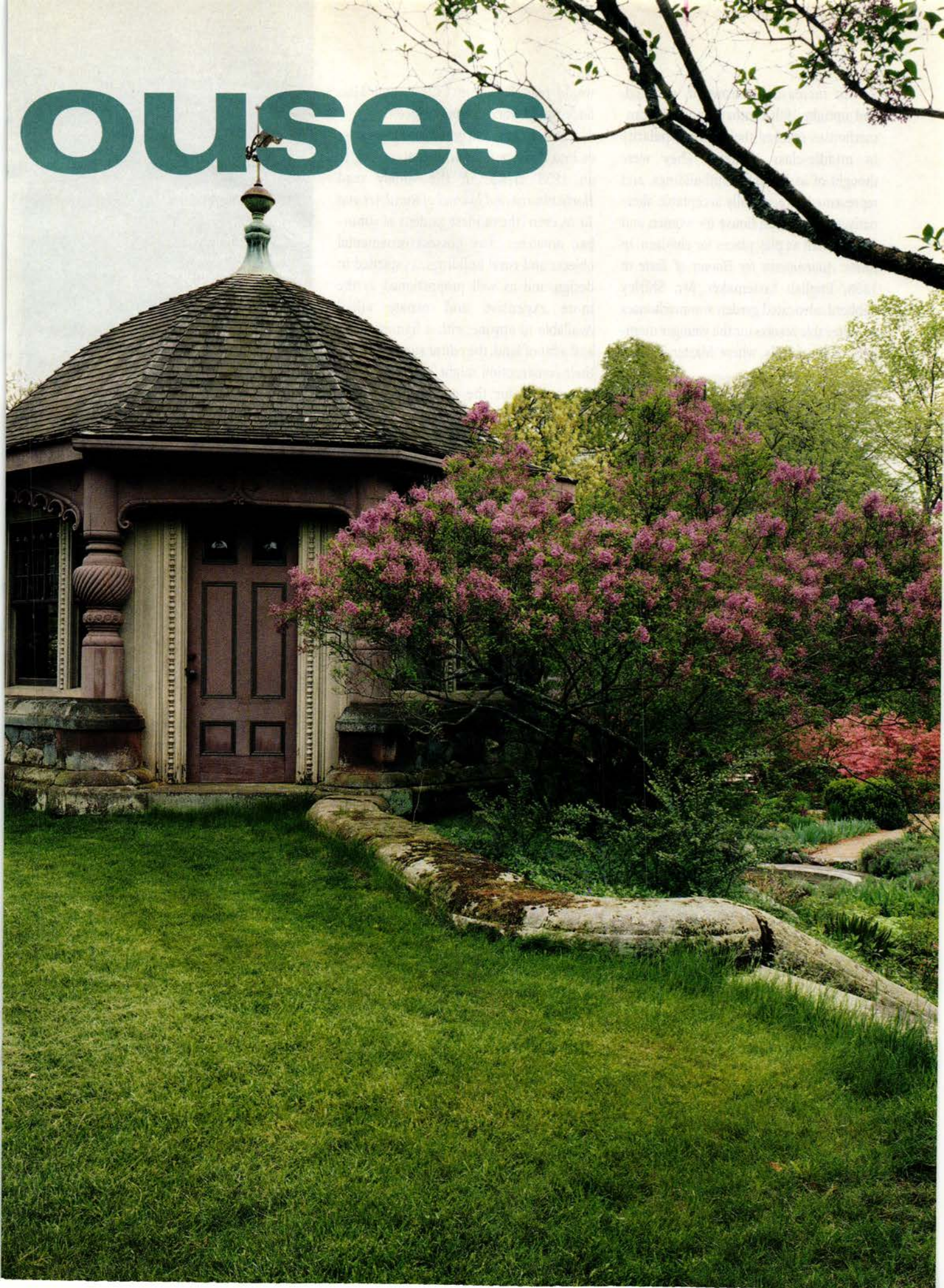
The British love of gardens, especially during the 19th century, produced many models for American summerhouses. This solid stone example is in the Edwardian How Cable Court Gardens, 11 acres with views of the Welsh mountains.



PHOTO BY SUSAN E. SCHNARE

PHOTO BY PAUL ROCHELEAU

ouses



In increasingly crowded, polluted, and uptight 19th-century England, summerhouses reached their peak popularity in middle-class gardens. They were thought of as healthful outbuildings, and represented rare, socially acceptable alternatives to the main house for women and girls, as well as play places for children. In *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste* in 1856, English tastemaker Mr. Shirley Hibberd advocated garden summerhouses as “agreeable resorts for the younger members of the family, where Master Tommy

would read Robinson Crusoe, and Miss Lucy would work in wool or lace.”

Americans welcomed summerhouses into their gardens where, according to an 1855 article in the widely read *Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Taste*, even “the modest gardens of suburban amateurs may possess ornamental objects and rural buildings, as spirited in design and as well proportioned as the more expensive and ornate villa.” Available to anyone with a hammer, saw and a bit of land, the editor suggested that their construction might “serve as winter amusement for the gentleman fond of handling tools.”

Styles and Sites

The question of how to best design a summerhouse for its setting has been actively debated in garden literature since at least the mid-19th century. The issue has two fronts: choosing an architectural form suitable to the surroundings—be it cultivated garden, natural wilderness, or another building—and then a position that becomes a seamless part of the landscape. While most summerhouses are

Unique among American classical types, the Derby Summerhouse at Glen Magna Farm in Danvers, Massachusetts was constructed in 1794. It is the work of legendary Salem woodcarver and architect Samuel McIntire, and sometimes called the McIntire Tea House.



Above: This woodcut of Montgomery Place illustrates a temple-like summerhouse in an idyllic lakeside setting. Right: Falling into the Eastern/Exotic category, the garden seat at Wheelwright House in Newburyport, Massachusetts, has strong Middle Eastern leanings—the door and window shapes appear almost Turkish.



PHOTO BY PAUL ROCHELEAU

individual by nature, they can generally be organized into three types.

Classical: Classically inspired structures like temples and towers were often employed to create a picturesque scene, evoke emotions of reverence and awe, and double as banquet halls, observatories, and summerhouses. With summerhouses, this category may also include derivatives of classical architecture, such as the Adamesque style, and other European architectural modes, such as Gothic. For example, in 1848, Andrew Jackson Downing, then the editor of *The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste*, took his readers on a virtual tour of Montgomery Place, a grand country estate on the Hudson River with extensive pleasure grounds. He described one of the summerhouses along the walk as resembling a temple on the shore of a small lake.

Eastern/exotic: Middle Eastern and Oriental motifs, such as ogee arches and curving roofs, have long been popular for

PHOTO BY DAVID BOHL

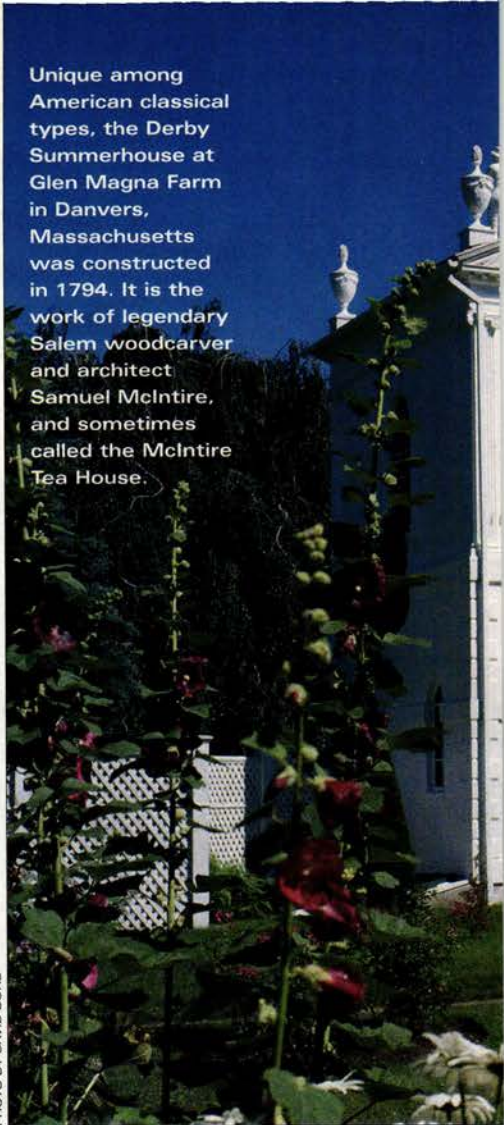
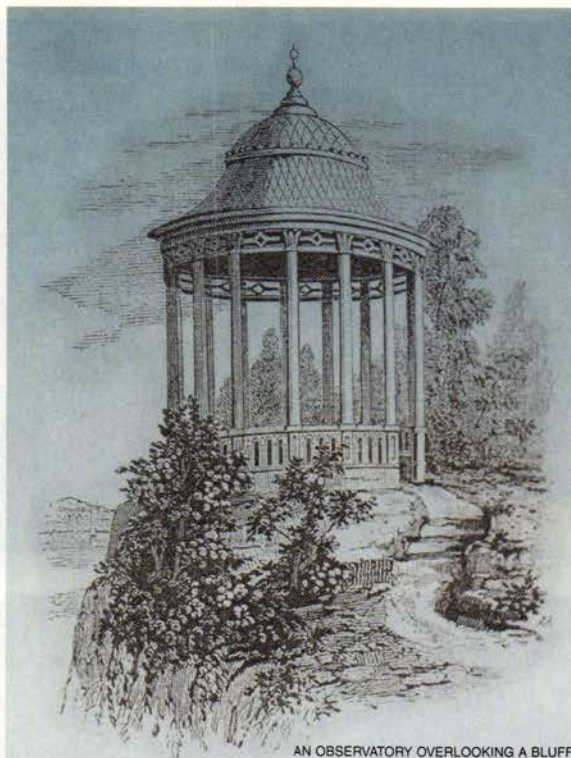




PHOTO BY SUSAN E. SCHNARE

Another British example, the loggia at York Gate Garden in West Yorkshire, shows the use of a summerhouse intimately connected with other architectural features, such as the garden wall, sundial, and seating.



AN OBSERVATORY OVERLOOKING A BLUFF

SUMMERHOUSE SEMANTICS

Kiosk (French kiosque): A small, garden building that originated in ancient Persia, open on some or all sides, and often polygonal or square. They became popular in Europe during the 18th century. Today a kiosk or kiosque may be a small building in a public place, for example, for ticket sales.

Pavilion (French pavillon): A structure, large or small, used for relaxation and pleasure. They were particularly popular as garden structures in the 18th century and often resembled small classical temples and follies.

Gazebo: A structure commonly found in parks, gardens and public areas to provide shade, shelter, and a resting place. Gazebos have a roof, but no walls, and, if large, may serve as a bandstand.

Tea House: In Japan, tea houses are built according to strict guidelines as a place to hold tea ceremonies, while in Europe or America they are usually small, wooden buildings in quiet areas of gardens and landscapes for more casual meetings.

Observatory: A structure used for observing terrestrial and/or celestial events. In the landscape, an observatory was strategically placed to make the most of the dramatic effects of a feature like a cascade, raging river, or distant prospect.



PHOTO BY SUSAN E. SCHNARE



Top: A recreated, observatory-type summer house is the focal point at the 200-year-old William Paca garden in Annapolis, Maryland.

Above: In 1861 *The Horticulturist* presented this design for "An Octagonal Pavilion" displaying an Eastern feel in the sweeping roof and arches, but Gothic-style fretwork.

Right: Also vaguely Middle-Eastern in inspiration is the summerhouse in the gardens of Rosedown in St. Francisville, Louisiana.



PHOTO BY PAUL ROCHELEAU

summer houses, from Turkish tents in the late 18th century to Japanese teahouses in the 20th century. The 1852 volume of *The Horticulturist* opens with plates of two kiosks, explaining that their fancy and tasteful details derive from "the warm climates of the East, [where] the delight of gardens seems to be enjoyed more by looking at them from summer houses, than rambling about in them." Such buildings were "usually of wood, built in light and pleasing forms," and roofed with canvas stretched over a wooden frame, heavily painted with the final coat in "subdued and delicate shades."

Rustic: Victorians loved rustic work—structures built out of tree trunks, branches, and roots—in all its many forms, and its popularity endures today, most notably in the form of bentwood. Downing's literary morning walk at Montgomery Place included "a rustic seat with a thatched canopy, curiously built round an aged pine," and a little rustic pavilion on a point of land that offered a wide river view. According to *The Horticulturist*, "Rustic work of all kinds is extremely pleasing in any situation where there is any thing like a wild or natural character; or even where there is a simple and rustic character. In wooded walk, or secluded spots, rustic work looks well always."



Right in step with the precepts for the classical types, the summerhouse at Gainswood in Demopolis, Alabama, is fittingly designed to match the main house, down to the order of columns and mouldings.



PHOTO BY PAUL ROCHELEAU

Adaptable as it is, rustic work was not considered appropriate within sight of more refined structures or in formal gardens.

The location of a summerhouse has always depended upon its purpose. At least since the 18th century, designers have placed rustic covered seats and observatories along walks and trails where the view was best. Similarly, rustic summerhouses and pavilions were often built on the shores of rivers or lakes so as to enjoy the pleasures of water, and sometimes to act as a dock. An open pavilion was considered well-suited for either a high spot commanding a wide view, or for the edge of a "graceful sweep of lawn" where it meets the woods.

In the early 20th century, Robert Gridland, author of *Practical Landscape Gardening*, advised owners of small gardens to site their summerhouses at the end

of the most dominant axis in the garden or in a corner, and to balance the summerhouse with another feature placed in the diagonally opposite corner. Where space was limited, he suggested that a covered seat might be set into a niche in the outside garden wall or boundary for ease of access and greater privacy. To maximize their suntrap qualities, Gridland recommended facing the open side of summerhouses to the south to create "a delightful retreat in Autumn, where one may be sheltered from the cold winds and enjoy the view under most delightful conditions."

Even with the abundant advice on design and siting, enthusiasm for summerhouses often overwhelmed taste and judgment in the Victorian era. In 1856, Shirley Hibberd compared the majority of summerhouses to tollhouses, beer or candy shops, or "little cabins on fly-boats

on the junction canal," adding that "one always expects a head to pop up above them, take hold of the rudder and steer them into port." The American landscape gardener and town planner Robert Morris Copeland, in his magnum opus *Country Life, A Handbook of Agriculture, Horticulture, and Landscape Gardening* (1859), railed against the common sight of "a little garden, with starveling flowerbeds and a few shrubs, bestridden by an elaborate, expensive edifice, miscalled a summer-house, miscalled an arbor, properly called a nuisance."

Material Decisions

In the 1880s William Robinson, proponent of the natural style garden, dismissed summerhouses as "generally a failure and often a heap of decay." What he was complaining about, though, was their usual state of repair, and his solution was "to build it of stone or some lasting material and cover it with vines or some quick-growing climbers." Robert Gridland also recommended using durable materials, such as flagstone, brick, or tile for the floor, and, like most of the earlier writers, specified the use of unpainted red cedar for rustic work. Summerhouses, he thought, were best left unpainted because vines did not cling as well to painted wood. Also, the color of natural wood was preferable to white, which was cold in winter, and green, which didn't give the right amount of contrast.

Summerhouses have traditionally been at least partially hidden in leafy bowers of vines, and creepers. The plants selected to create this effect should offer light, appealing forms, flowers, and fragrances, flexible stems and vines, interesting textures of stems and leaves, and grow robust and hardy, but not uncontrollable. In the flower garden, vines, such as *Clematis montana* or *paniculata*, wisteria, trumpet vine, and climbing roses (but not where the thorns will catch), may be trained over the structure, which can then be surrounded with tall perennials, like delphinium and hollyhocks, and overhung with flowering shrubs, like viburnums and mockorange, and apple trees. In a woodland setting, Virginia creepers, or other

native vines, could be surrounded by plantings of mosses, ferns, native viburnums, dogwoods, blueberries, and azaleas. The only planting required for a summerhouse on a lawn is a few climbing vines, although if it occupies the boundary between a lawn and woodlot, the wooded part could be softened with ferns and shrubs. Forsythia should be omitted because of its stiff growth habit and tendency to take over, and rhododendrons and other evergreen shrubs are not suitable because they offer little interest, while eating up space, blocking light, and rotting wood.

Summerhouses Today

In 1861 *The Horticulturist* described an open pavilion suitable for “a high, prominent situation, commanding extensive views,” or the edges of a “graceful sweep of lawn.” Octagonal, 20’ feet across, and lined with seats along the interior perimeter, this pavilion had an ogee-shaped roof, but nonetheless was simple enough to “be executed by any ordinary carpenter at a small expense.”

Today, a similar octagonal pavilion (although with a different roof style) is



Above: The archetypal rustic summerhouse: a naturalistic structure blending seamlessly into its preferred, wild, environment. Right: One of Olmsted’s glorious Central Park shelters, which he designed to give people a mental escape from New York’s bustle.



PHOTO BY PAUL ROCHELEAU



This rustic gazebo with rough-hewn wood pillars is one of over a hundred on the scenic grounds of Mohonk Mountain House, a National Historic Landmark near New Paltz, New York, built between 1870 and the early 1900s.

2) Make the center post of red cedar, not less than 9" thick and 12' feet long, set firmly in the ground 3' deep in a bed of concrete.

3) Set the braces the same, as decaying wood is injurious to the vines. The lower braces should be 5" thick oak or hickory; the upper ones 3", and the arms 4" cedar with butts placed to center. The cross pieces may be wild vine, and the finial of roots.

4) The seat should be made of half-rounded twigs, placed a little apart, round side up, to shed water and dust, with angle pieces of root on braces for arms.

5) Train vines up and around the post to the top, so that each sends out a branch along the upper brace (to take its place when removed). From the top, train each down its opposite arm to the end, branching off at pleasure, and interlacing so as to be self-supporting when the frame decays.

In 1860, *The Horticulturist* avowed "there is nothing which serves so well to give an air of finish to a country place-be it large or small-as the introduction here and there, wherever a suitable place offers

itself-either in some sly, out-of-the-way corner, or at the termination of a long foot-path-of cozy, vine-embowered, summer-houses and inviting rustic seats." Though much has changed in the world since then, summer houses remain highly desirable garden structures that can extend our hours outdoors and add peace and privacy to our lives. 🌿

Susan E. Schnare, D. Phil, is Principal of Mountain Brook Consulting, a landscape preservation and design firm, and lives in Andover, NH. www.mtnbrook.com.



called a gazebo and widely available as a kit. Large gazebos are often used as bandstands on village greens, and smaller models are sold for home gardens. While they provide attractive, comfortable spaces, these gazebos have become virtually the only style of summerhouse seen today. Gone is the rich variety of designs and materials of the past, leaving little more than this one-size-fits-all-gardens model.

If your design sense (or your pocket-book) tells you there isn't a ready-made octagonal gazebo in your future, one of the covered seats proposed by the artist F. S. Copley of Tompkinsville, Staten Island in *The Horticulturist* of 1868 might still be adapted to modern materials and conditions:

1) Select six of the best hardy grapevines, or different kinds and colors, and plant them 6' feet apart, and the same from the center post.



IOLANI PALACE / MICHAEL HORIKAWA

Above: An 1868 example of an arbor seat, a refuge among flowering vines. **Left:** The Coronation Pavilion at Iolani Palace in Honolulu, Hawaii, is a great example of an octagonal summerhouse as gazebo. Built for the 1883 coronation of King Kalakaua, it exhibits Victorian flourishes popular at the time.



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Exterior

Like sanding wood floors, paint stripping methods that remove a thin layer of wood can only be employed a few times before the materials are compromised or ruined. If your house is located in a Historic Preservation District, make sure the preservation commission reviews your plans before proceeding with the work.



Ever since wood-sided houses were first painted, the most economical way to prepare an old surface for new paint has been scraping and spot priming. This method worked well on areas exposed to the elements because the binders and pigments in traditional, oil-based paints eroded away under sunlight and rain. However, in areas like porches and siding that are frequently redecorated, or where the surface is protected by an overhang, paint gets thicker and thicker until the film becomes so brittle it no longer moves with the contraction and expansion of the wood. This leads to frequent scraping and painting that results in ugly craters.

On many houses, heavy paint buildup pockmarked by craters is a sign that it's time to strip all the old layers down to bare wood and repaint again from scratch. Stripping exterior paint, though, is a big, expensive project. There is no single, ideal method for removing thick old paint, and all approaches have pros and cons. Putting research into the right method—or combination of methods—for your schedule, and your budget, can help put your old

house on the road to a beautiful finish and future decades of trouble-free paint jobs. Here's a primer on what you'll need to know before hiring help or getting out the tools.

Signs of Stripping Time

Paint can fail for a variety of reasons—most of them, fortunately, NOT indications that all layers must be removed to the substrate. Common paint problem symptoms include peeling between layers (an indication of poor preparation), peeling down to bare wood (often the result of high moisture levels migrating out of the house), peeling from roof and gutter leaks, and peeling at carpentry joints (due to water penetration at open junctions of boards).

Signs that your paint should be stripped to the wood include alligatoring (paint film that breaks into plates resembling reptile skin), checking (multiple, parallel splits), and excessively thick paint. How thick is too thick? It could be the thickness of a dime, a quarter, or even a half dollar. There's no exact dimension, just multiple layers that peel year after year for no obvious reason, while adjacent areas that have been previously scraped and

painted remain sound. If any of these scenarios ring true for your house, consider all aspects of the methods listed below and proceed with caution.

Sanding and Grinding

Since the 1950s, sanding and grinding with rotary sanders was the quickest and least expensive method for removing old paint. This is how I learned to “do a good job.” Unfortunately, rotary grinding or sanding lead-based paint without collecting the residue in an attached vacuum system (or in another appropriate way) is dangerous to workers, homeowners, and their neighbors. In many communities, sanding without protective barriers or vacuum assistance is also illegal. Still, many contractors and homeowners risk health problems and potential legal action by carelessly sanding lead paint. Everyone should be aware of the dangers of lead exposure when hiring a painting contractor or when undertaking a home painting project where lead is present.

As for the impact on the building, the quality of a rotary sanding job is completely subject to the hands of the worker. One person might produce a beautifully

Stripper Primer

**A Guide to Paint Removal Methods from
Mechanical to Chemical** By Steve Jordan

No matter which method you choose, appropriately stripping failing paint and starting with a fresh wood surface can lead to a crisp, beautiful finish. Plus, when stripping is complete, it can break the perpetual scrape-and-paint cycle and free up time for other activities.



smooth surface, while an unskilled or careless individual can ruin thousands of dollars worth of siding in a day with deep, irreparable swirls. Even in the best work, sanding and grinding removes a lot of surface wood to create a smooth, paintable surface. Fortunately, the drawbacks of sanding and grinding are causing this practice to disappear.

Water/Media Blasting

Seeking faster methods to remove old paint from wood siding, many contractors have experimented with various forms of "blasting." The most common system is a high-pressure cleaning rig (the kind available at rental centers for cleaning boats and trailers) that sprays water at between 600psi and 3,000psi from a triggered nozzle. Sometimes recommended for carefully cleaning moss from wood shingles, water blasting is generally a dubious technique for stripping paint. While it will wash away loose paint, attempting to lift more tenacious paint can result in telltale gouges and swirls because the stream is strong enough to blast scars in wood. On top of this, water blasts frequently saturate the wall cavity through open cracks and siding overlaps,

creating problems with the new paint and interior finishes.

Another approach is abrasive blasting where granular media, such as crushed walnut shells, corn husks, or bicarbonate of soda, are shot at the surface with compressed air and sometimes water. Though widely used on metal with appropriate media, abrasive blasting is nonetheless too aggressive for wood and even brick. Over and above its potential for lead-paint health concerns, it produces a severely abraded surface that, even with follow-up sanding, attracts and retains dirt.

Mechanical Removers

As an alternative to sanding, grinding, and blasting, at least two types of mechanical paint removers have come on the market to address the problems of removing thick exterior paint and containing the residue. Basically, each tool is a rotary blade armed with three or four carbide tips under a protective metal shroud that removes paint plus a thin layer of wood, then transfers the debris to an attached vacuum. Each also strips the butt of the surmounting siding board at the same time it strips a face. Later, one of the tools converts to a



Right: Random arcs and depressions are the telltale marks of paint stripping with a rotary grinder (far right). Even the steadiest hands can't avoid some blemishes with this method, or the potential for lead-paint dust.





vacuum-assisted sander to smooth out the surface once the paint is gone. Definitely quicker and more efficient than sanding, these tools still do not eliminate hand work. They leave a rough surface that must be dressed with a pad or random-orbit sander. To prolong the life of the blades, you need to slightly countersink all nail heads before beginning. Like rotary sanders, the tools cannot reach small areas at cornerboards and casings, and these must be stripped by hand.

The actual rate of production depends upon the individual tool, the project, and the user. For example, both tools remove paint from 2" to 3" of siding surface per pass, stripping approximately one square foot in 20 to 30 seconds. Though impressive, neither estimate accounts for setting nails, moving scaffolds and ladders, excessively thick layers of paint, or later sanding that are part of the job. As is prudent before using any new and unfamiliar tool, skilled workmen or do-it-yourselfers should test these machines and perfect their technique in an inconspicuous spot before moving on to primary areas.

Power mechanical strippers are a welcome option, but not panaceas. One tool, while fast, must still be followed by a pad or orbital sander to smooth out the rough surface. Another tool is slower, but leaves a smoother surface and works closer in corners—where clapboards meet cornerboards, for example. Whatever the tool, mechanical strippers are most efficiently operated directly in front of the user, making high ladder work a limited success. Scaffolding that allows moving slowly along the wall is better. In addition, eye, ear, and lung protection gear are a must because paint chips are thrown everywhere.

TIPS ON STRIPPING TACTICS

Obviously, whole-house paint stripping is very expensive. Like a roof tear-off, though, there comes a time to bite the bullet and just do it. Before you dive in, consider these aspects and options.

- One way to lessen the financial blow is to stretch out the work over several years. For example, strip the front of your house first, move on to another side in four or five years, and so on.
- You might also find a contractor that will give you a discount by allowing his men to work on your house during slow periods.
- It pays to test and time one or more removal methods in measured areas to give you an idea which approach will yield the best results or rate of production.
- If you live in a historic preservation district, or are working on a historically significant property, check with your local preservation commission before commencing work to make sure that your chosen methods are appropriate. Also, there's a good chance that the local board will have ideas and suggestions that will save you time, trouble, and money.

Paint Stripping Pathology



Never gentle on wood, sandblasting has eroded away the softest parts of these once-smooth cedar shingles.



High-pressure streams from water blasting will penetrate paint and even eat gullies and holes in wood fiber.



Unsightly craters are the sign of thick paint build-up that has peeled in places, then been scraped and repainted.

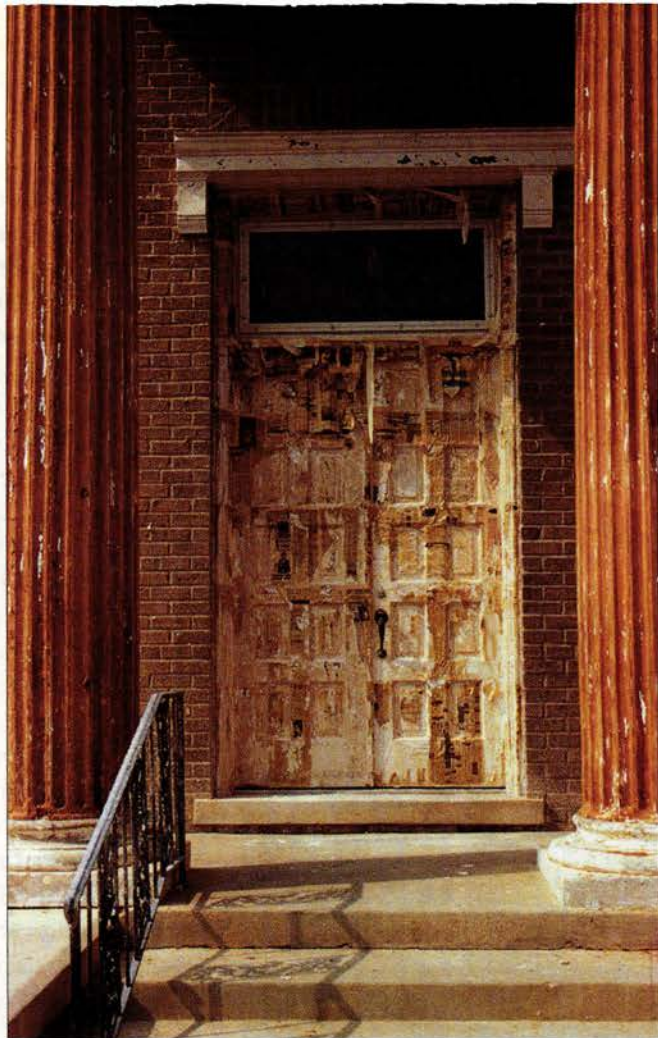


Besides scorching wood, torches are dangerous. Open flames—in fact, any heat source over 450 degrees—has the potential to ignite hidden debris, such as the animal nest that made perfect tinder in this wall cavity.

Chemical Strippers

Until the last decade or so, chemical stripping was left to professional painters and stripping contractors because the caustics they employed were extremely dangerous unless used with care. The following scenario was common. Dressed in heavy, chemical-resistant suits, gloves, and boots, workers would apply a thick remover with rollers, brushes, or sprayers, then leave it to soften the paint. Some products required covering with a membrane to slow down evaporation and contain the old paint; many contractors would drop thin plastic sheets over the chemicals for the same purpose. After the appropriate dwell time had elapsed (6 to 24 hours, depending upon the paint thickness), chemicals and paint were washed off using low- to medium-pressure water (300psi - 900 psi). In some cases the clean wood surface would then be neutralized with a mild acid to balance the pH according to test strips.

If the contractor was not careful, however, the results were often compromised. To soften as much paint as possible, some



contractors would leave the chemicals in place for extended periods, a practice that breaks down wood fibers and leaves a fuzzy surface that must be sanded or is unsalvageable. Other contractors would use high-pressure power washers—tools strong enough to drive strippers into the wood, where they would dry and later ruin new paint. Plus, careless scraping or water blasting could leave scars in wood still tender from saturation by chemicals.

Fortunately, safer (often pH-neutral) chemical strippers are now available that provide a reasonable alternate to their highly caustic cousins. At times marketed as environmentally friendly (because they eschew harmful solvents, such as methylene chloride or VOCs), some of the most recent generation of strippers are based on NMP (n-methyl pyrrolidone) a slowly evaporating solvent that is slower but less toxic. A few are formulated with gels or film-formers that enable the stripper to skin-over (to limit evaporation and aid clean-up), or lead immobilizing ingredients to help render waste paint safer for disposal. Though these

Chemicals potent enough to dissolve paint are both messy and capable of harming wood and user if improperly employed. Careless use of tools to scrape softened paint from tender wood can ruin details like these column flutes.

Using heat guns on isolated building parts, such as railing balusters or removed window sash, greatly reduces the potential for fire in a building, but still requires proper precautions for lead paint safety.

products may take longer to soften paint and might require several coats, the methods are similar and they are effective.

Heat Tools

My grandmother, who was born in the mid-1880s, once told me that a paint job wasn't worth having unless the old paint was first stripped off with torches. These were small but heavy gasoline torches that produced an open flame similar to a modern, portable, bottled-gas torch. Stories of house fires ignited by these torches and their propane offspring are legion and continue today. The descendants of the open-flame torch are electric heat tools in the form of 1) guns that blow a stream of air heated to several hundred degrees by electrical coils, and 2) plates that pass a glowing Calrod element over the paint. When used cautiously, heat guns are generally safer than open flames, but still not without cautions. When held in one spot too long both guns and plates will scorch and blemish the wood. While heat guns do not operate with an open flame, used carelessly the hot-air stream can still ignite tinderlike materials in hidden spaces, such as sawdust and debris accumulated in wall cavities, old newspapers stuffed into walls as improvised insulation, or straw and rags dragged into soffits for animal nests. Any heat source over 800 degrees also has the potential to release lead in lead-based paint and should be used with appropriate personal safety equipment.

The newest weapon in the heat arsenal is infrared paint stripping. This technology is relatively new to North America so, to date, there is only one tool on the market; but according to the manufacturer, the principle has been used successfully in Sweden for many years. Rather than softening the paint binders with hot air or flames as conventional heat tools do, the infrared technology heats the paint, not the air, so it's cooler to use and less apt to burn surfaces. About the size of a large shoe box with an element that resembles a conventional heat plate, the tool's design and technology allows it to soften large areas of paint without burning the wood surface or vaporizing lead paint. Compared to a heat

gun, I estimate that it stripped about four times the area in the same length of time. Since it is a bulky tool, it works best with two people or when attached to a pulley to relieve the weight from the user's arm. Heated paint can be scraped away while the next area is being softened but, like many other methods, it is much less effective on thin layers of paint.

So what's the best exterior stripping method? That depends on you and your house; there's no magic bullet. If there is

lead-based paint, you must keep sanding to a minimum and carefully contain it. Chemicals will work but they are unbelievably messy. Used appropriately, heat guns are great for small areas, and faster mechanical strippers are best used by professionals or tool savvy do-it-yourselfers. Being a middle-aged man with limited patience, for me some of the newest methods are ideal—that is, except in areas where they're impractical and I turn to every one of the other methods. 🛠️

STAYING AHEAD OF LEAD

Lead is toxic, especially to children under the age of six and pregnant women. If your house was built before 1978 (the year lead paint use was banned in residences) you should have the paint tested to see if it contains lead. Whatever method you use to remove old paint, take every precaution to prevent releasing lead debris into the air and exposing yourself and others to the dust. Lead exposure creates serious physiological health hazards that are not easily diagnosed. Furthermore, as a contractor or homeowner, you can be held legally liable for lead residue that spreads around your neighborhood. For more information see "Looking out for Lead" (November/December 2002 OHJ) and "Lead in Your Home: A Parent's Reference Guide" (available online from the EPA at www.epa.gov/lead/leadrev.pdf).



By Elizabeth Holtzman

Wood Shingles

from the Source

Why Splitting is the Difference in Historical Roofing



Though probably machine-sawn, the wood shingles covering the ca. 1750 Marte Jansen Van Alstyne House in Canajoharie, New York, have smooth, regular surfaces evocative of the pre-industrial era.

ALL PHOTOS BY ANDY OLENICK

Wood shingles happen to be among the things that actually do “grow on trees,” but that doesn’t mean all wood shingles are the same. Like nails, window glass, and other centuries-old building materials, they were originally hand-fabricated, but shifted to machine-production during the Industrial Revolution—then evolved again during the building boom of the mid-20th century. Here’s a quick review of what those changes were, and how they impact the look of roofs and siding for anyone working on a wood-shingled old house today.

Before 1800, wood shingles were a local building material—invariably from nearby wood species and often made on the building site. As with many pre-industrial building materials, the process of hand-splitting shingles from trees was as clever as it was labor-intensive. Starting with a bolt, a section of knot-free, straight-grained log cut to the dimensions of the desired shingle length (from 14” to as long as 36” for some vernacular types), the worker would first split the bolt into quarters. Next, taking a wedge-like tool called a froe, he would work shingles out of each quarter by riving, a combination splitting

and prying the bolt with the grain. To produce shingles with taper, he would invert the bolt before starting on the next shingle to allow the froe to follow the grain in the other direction.

The result was a perfectly quarter-sawn shingle, with a slightly irregular surface on each face. To make the faces uniform enough to lay up a weathertight roof, the worker would then smooth each face on a shaving horse by dressing them with a drawknife or drawshave. Softer, less durable sapwood from the outside of the tree was cut off or not used, and butts might be cut into curves or other shapes

for decorative effects. Typical woods ran from old-growth white pine and oak in the Northeast to yellow pine and cypress in the South. Hand splitting was still common in rural or remote locations into the 20th century.

The growing use of steam power after 1830 and the perfection of sawmills with circular blades brought dramatic changes to the production and nature of wood shingles. Mechanized sawing released shingle-making not only from hand labor and unstandardized shapes, but also the necessity of working with the grain of the wood. Power shingle mills could now slice shingles off timber bolts radially, for the best quartersawn product, or flat-saw them like dimensional lumber, to produce shingles of varying grain orientation. Depending upon the mill (which might be stationary or, by the late-19th-century, portable), flat stock might be resawn in a second operation to produce the necessary taper. Whatever the production method, the result was a shingle flat and smooth on both sides except for characteristic saw marks. Local woods were still common, but the penetration of railroads to the great cedar forests of the Northwest by the 1890s opened up access to an ideal shingle wood that has dominated the market ever since.

At the turn of the 20th century, cedar and redwood shingles were nearly ubiquitous roofing materials for the average house, but during the 1920s, they began to be replaced by asphalt and asbestos-cement versions, and were considered all



Clockwise from top left: The deeply corrugated face of a modern shake split with vertical grain (note butt end); a drawknife used to dress the face of a split shingle; machine-sawn shingle with characteristic circular blade marks; modern shake with random grain.

but obsolete for common residential installations by the 1940s. Shortly thereafter, however, the vogue for new outdoor-oriented houses—particularly the California-style ranch house—created a market for new, picturesque, exaggeratedly irregular wood shingles, a product generally called the shake. These products are easily identified by their undressed, corrugated split surface on one face, and machine-sawn smooth surface on the other face. Such shakes are also typically much thicker than either historic machine-sawn or hand-split shingles.

The upshot for old-house restoration today is sometimes counter-intuitive. To the uninformed eye, the most irregular of shingles—the shake—may appear to be the most primitive and fitting type for early houses, but it is actually the most recent creation, and not historically appropriate for houses built before the 1940s. Good quality machine-sawn shingles of today, however, are generally a reliable match with the machine-sawn shingles made throughout the 19th century, and can even be suitable for buildings built before this era. 🏠



At Colonial Williamsburg, a docent starts the free with a mallet.



Working the wedge-like free down the timber bolt splits out a shingle.



Clamped in a shaving horse, shingles are dressed smooth with a drawknife.

Buzz Dodge poses with the pattern he used to reproduce nine pediments on their current house. "Historically, function came first," he notes, "and a major purpose of pediments on a house like this is to shed water away from the soft brick façade."

Serial Restorers

BY REGINA COLE

PHOTOS BY SANDY AGRAFIOTIS

Buzz and Erica Dodge are serial house restorers. So far, they've owned and brought back six old houses in Portsmouth, New Hampshire—the youngest, an 1826 Federal-style brick rowhouse; the oldest a ca. 1695 First Period survivor. In the process, they've learned a lot, including what to fix, what to leave alone, what to do right away, and what to put on the back burner.

When they bought their first old house in 1969, for instance, they knew they had to get windows back into the brick

Federal façade pretty quickly because winter was coming. The anachronistic marble and iron fireplaces they found in their 1826 townhouse, on the other hand, stayed there for almost ten years after they bought the house in 1993. Waiting turned out to be the right move.

"I always intended to replace the fireplaces," says Buzz, "but, for a long time, I didn't want the mess." Last year, when he finally began working on the project, Buzz found that the original shallow cheeks and plain lintels had been fashioned from a particularly pretty shade of pink brown-

stone. "The one in the front room was in great shape, but the one in the dining room was cut up when they installed the Victorian fixtures."

The newly restored parlor and dining room fireplaces exemplify the Dodge approach: a combination of careful research, willingness to get their hands dirty, resourcefulness, and patience. "At first, I didn't even know that it was brownstone," Buzz continues. "We figured it out after looking at lots of pictures of different kinds of stone, but then I had no idea where to find new stone. I went online, I

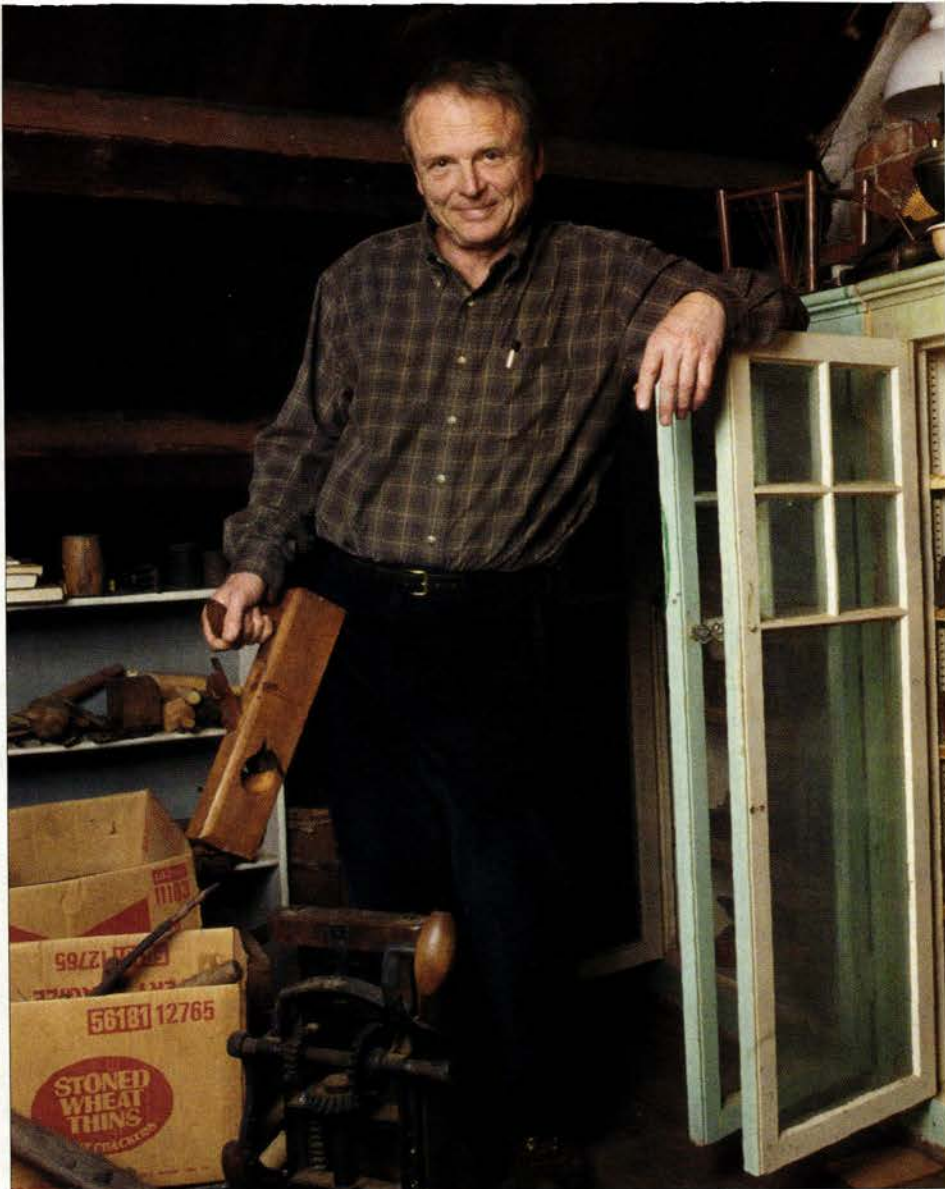


Top: Scrapbook images of an 1812 house the Dodges bought in 1979, restored, and still own. "After investing all the work," says Erica, "sometimes it's hard to let go of a house." Middle: Buzz planes a curved board in his basement workshop for their current project. Above: The Dodges, still restoring after buying their first old house in 1969.

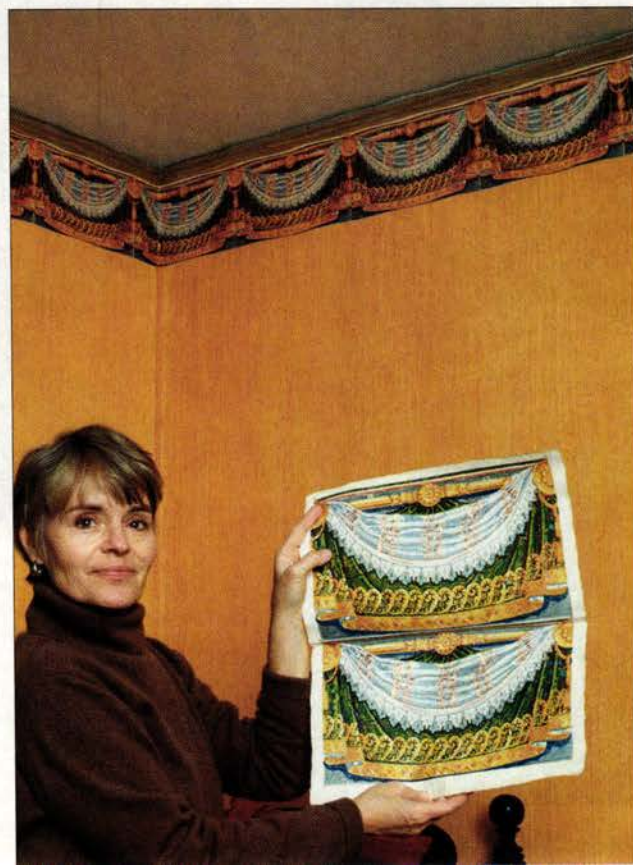
asked around, I looked in books and magazines. Finally, a guy in Indiana suggested that I call the Stone Institute in New York. They led me to the Portland Brownstone Quarries which, it turns out, had recently re-opened AND had supplied the original stone for our house in 1826. A lot of brownstone was shipped from that Connecticut quarry to Portsmouth during the early 19th century."

Each project is a chance to learn a new skill. Along the way, they learn more about their house, its construction, and their town's history. "If you're really interested, you can find out how to do all sorts of things," says Buzz. "I've become a Jack of many trades."

He encourages timid potential house restorers to do their own work. "Don't be afraid to try. Houses of this vintage were built by hand. If you work on them by hand, you can't go too far wrong." Hand work suits the worker, too, he says. "Hand tools don't do serious harm the way machines can. You might cut yourself, but you won't take off a limb. And you learn. When I built my first brick pier, it was the worst looking thing I'd ever seen, but it did the job. Now, I'm proud of my brick-laying skills."



Erica holds the pattern of period-appropriate 1810s wallpaper they used to create an entire frieze with photocopier technology. "First we tested samples in a window to make sure the ink-jet colors wouldn't fade," says Erica.



RESTORATION SERENDIPITY

In addition to perseverance and hard work, the Dodges have also had luck. Their first old house, also a brick Federal, cost \$4,400 in 1969. Buzz had quit his Boston-area chemist job to be near Erica, then a student at the University of New Hampshire. Portsmouth, a now-chic small seacoast city, hadn't yet begun to wake from a 150-year-long sleep of economic stagnation. The town's historic center (John Paul Jones lived there) was full of neglected, three-storey brick Federal houses.

"We were young and foolish," laughs Buzz, "and we both had a bit of Yankee contrariness, but we understood that if you get into financial obligation — a mortgage, a family, and so on — you have to get a job. There are lots of skills you learn when you're trying to avoid that. It was a great adventure!" He ticks off a list of amenities



Since all of his antique hand planes are working tools, Buzz stores them in the attic, a better environment for the wood bodies than the basement. Along with their authentic moulding profiles, Buzz says that, "Hand planes are easier to use for small projects than power tools."

their first house didn't have. "Electricity, plumbing, heating, windows — there was nothing but a toilet in a corner of the basement; so we got the city to connect a water line to it."

Good fortune, and the creativity to take advantage of it, helped make up the difference. "We had a gold mine next to us," adds Erica. "The city was tearing down Portsmouth's North End, part of the urban renewal movement that was sweeping eastern cities at that time. As it turned out, the housing authority granted us salvage rights for the cost of a \$25 permit." That salvage permit bought the Dodges floorboards, doors, mouldings, mantels, bricks, hardware, even a furnace. Every day they explored the condemned Federal houses, carrying back all kinds of house parts. In the process, Erica and Buzz laid the foundation for the knowledge they've built upon ever since.

"It took two years to bring the house back," Buzz says. "By then, we'd put on a new roof, built a new chimney, installed wiring, plumbing and heating, and new windows. The only thing we couldn't find among all those North End houses slated for demolition was window sash. We found storm windows with screens, and for a year and a half, that's all we had."

"We stayed warm with a pot-bellied stove and electric blankets. We had 20 laying hens out back, and we grew vegetables. Our food budget was \$8 per week," Erica says. "Buzz got occasional odd jobs and I waited tables, but mostly we put our efforts into the house. We had no money, but we had energy and youth. The original plan was that we'd fix up the house while I got my degree." She laughs. "We ended up spending our whole lives doing this stuff."

DEJA RESTORE

In 1971, as their brick Federal was nearing completion, an auction sign appeared across the street. "It was a really nice 1790 house, with Georgian double chimneys," Erica recalls. "Built by a skilled woodworker," adds Buzz. "We went to the banker, who said, 'You guys are crazy, but I've seen what you've done.' The other bidders wanted to tear it down. We got it for \$1,800."



An auction yielded this early photo of the Dodge's First Period house, giving them an intriguing look at a long-gone barn, as well as a rare view of a Revolutionary War vet and his family.

They restored the house, again doing all the work and using salvaged materials, and eventually sold it to the tenants. By then they'd found their vocation. "By the mid-1970s we knew that this would be the way we'd live," Erica says. "We like to keep challenging ourselves, and we found houses interesting. Plus we learned lots of new skills."

In addition to using one's hands, Buzz and Erica tout education of every sort. They love house museums ("You learn that every old house is different"), paintings ("Artists of the late 18th- and early 19th-century painted what they saw"), reading, and talking with other old-house owners. Above all, they counsel taking a slow approach.

"First, you look and look. Take time to study the house; don't rush into anything," they say. "Then read about your project," encourages Erica. "You'll learn as you go."

Research is key for the Dodges. "Whatever building art was practiced in the past is described in print somewhere. Find old technical encyclopedias, out-of-print tradesmen's primers, vocational-school texts. Even if you don't do your own work, it's important to know proper procedures. You don't know whether you're getting a

song and dance until you do your homework.”

Buzz points to another benefit of doing your own work. “These skills bring satisfaction. Never underestimate your capabilities. Plastering, for example, got easier as we went. Working the mortar feels nice; the trowel becomes an extension of your hand.”

What about overcoming the setbacks and unexpected conditions that are inevitable in old-house work? “Don’t get frustrated, there’s usually a reasonable solution,” says Erica. “You need to be patient. With our fireplace, people told us to use different stone or even cement, but we kept looking anyway. There was no reason to tear out what was wrong until we knew how we’d make it right. What we eventually found was perfect: stone from the same quarry as the original,” she adds. “And it was far less expensive than some of those other ‘solutions,’” Buzz says with evident satisfaction.

True to traditional methods as the Dodges are, they’re not averse to using new

materials or technologies. A case in point is the Neoclassical wallpaper frieze that encircles the walls of an upstairs room. Though it appears to be a complete early-19th century border, in fact Buzz and Erica own just one rare piece of the block-printed wallpaper; a color copier made all the rest. The photocopies, printed on high-quality paper, are entirely convincing, and the original is safely stored away.

Years of “always looking,” for the right window sash or fireplace mantel have also taught the Dodges how to be ready for the happy find. Erica and Buzz each carry a card folded into a wallet listing the specifications of building parts or accoutrements for which they’re on the lookout. “That way, I never find myself wondering whether this or that piece will actually fit,” Buzz says. “You shouldn’t be afraid to travel some distance to find what you need. And, it’s a nice feeling when you make connections with people who share your interests.” He pulls out a fat folder full of business cards and tells stories about people they’ve met while searching for windows,

Taking time to research the mysterious material in the fireplace led the Dodges to find not only perfectly matching brownstone, but the same quarry in Portland, Connecticut, that supplied the original pieces.

Typical of the Dodge old-house adventure is the recently discovered midden behind the house. The shards of pre-Revolutionary era pottery they’ve unearthed are from Scotland and Germany, leading experts to rethink the history of trade in the region. “It’s also kindled our latent interest in ceramics,” adds Buzz.





lumber, hardware, and other fittings.

Some of the best prizes though are not on any wish list. "When you're always on the hunt, you find wonderful things." They produce a framed photograph of their First Period house that popped up at an auction. "We lived in this house the longest, and we raised our son there," Erica says. Taken in 1866, the photo includes the shadowy image of a white-bearded man standing by the fence. "He is a local man who served in the Revolutionary War," they say. "This might be the only known photograph of a Revolutionary War veteran."

Is the path the Dodges chose still open to would-be restorers of old houses

who have abundant energy, but little money? "We could do it again today," Erica wagers, "but not here," Buzz adds. "Real estate values in this part of the country have risen too much. But there are still great opportunities out there, in the Rust Belt, in upstate New York, in Richmond, Virginia, or in Pittsburgh – wherever there are unappreciated old houses. If you're patient, willing to work hard, and open to learning new things, you can do what we did. In fact, we're not done yet," they say. "What we do is not impulse buying. We're always searching for more projects that look as though they'll be a challenge to do — and fun." 🏠

SOME SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

The skills and techniques Buzz and Erica have learned in their years of old-house restoration are legion, but they'd like to pass on a few favorite techniques and short cuts. Not surprisingly, many are specific to brick or masonry construction.

- To remove paint from hardware, put the piece in a jar of household ammonia and soak it for a few days. Make sure there is no brass anywhere on the hardware, as ammonia will pit brass.

- For replacement hearth bricks, find soft bricks and sand them to fit. Easy to do with a power sander, it'll also remove the new-looking surface. Make sure you do this outside or in a well-ventilated area.

- To remove graffiti from masonry or cement, spray on oven cleaner, which has a lye-based composition, then hose down with water. Don't scrub with a stiff brush – you'll make an unsightly scrubbed spot on the side of the building.

- To remove tar from bricks, try a non-flammable paint remover. If you have to work indoors, open windows and use a fan.

- To remove old calcimine paint from ceilings, don't even try to scrape while dry – you'll be at it forever. Instead, soak it with a garden sprayer filled with water. Wet down the surface every 20 minutes or so and keep it wet "for hours and hours," says Buzz. When it's been wet for long enough, scrape it off with a razor. "It'll come off in sheets."

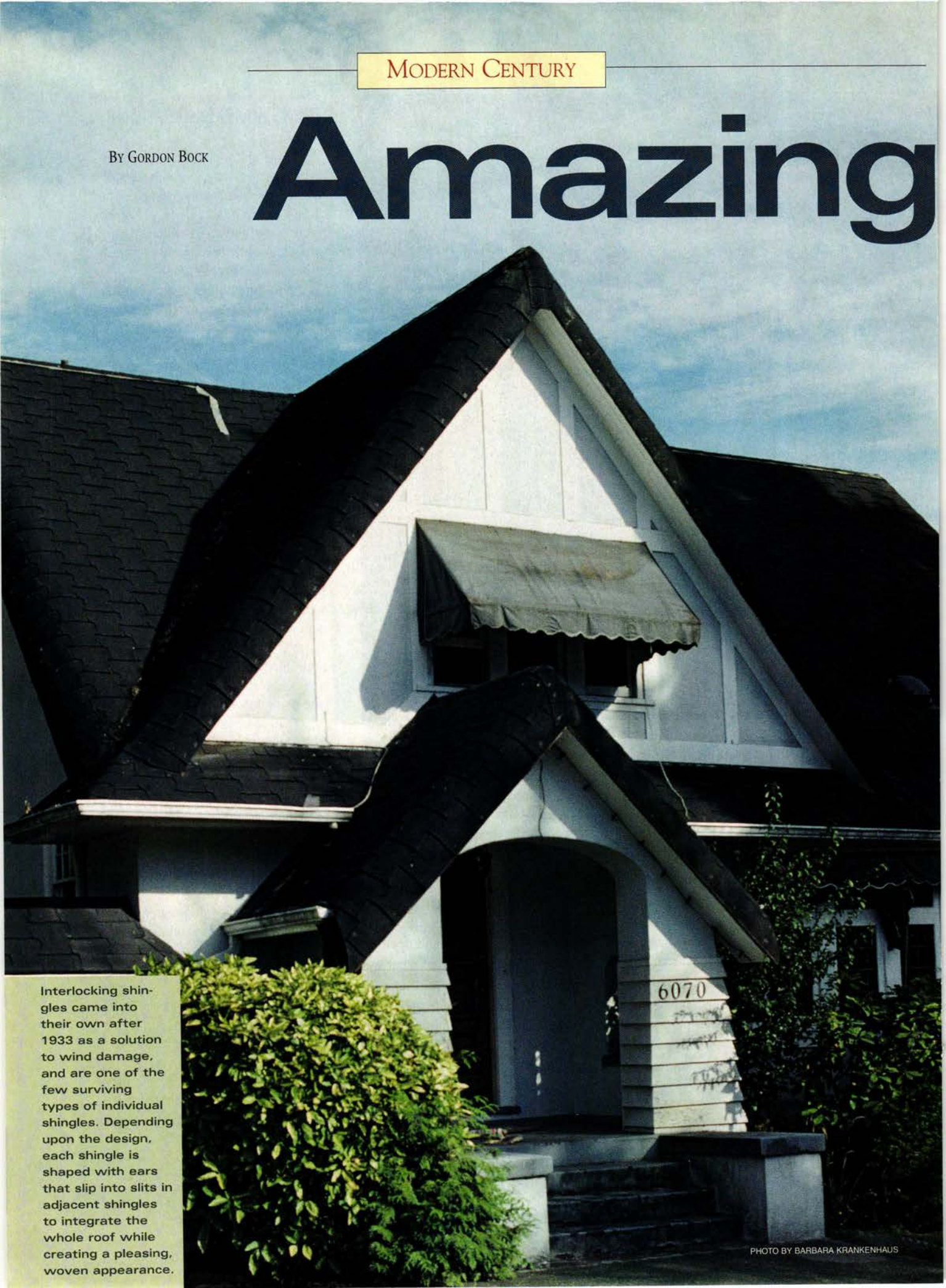
- To remove wallpaper, follow the same procedure as above, but you probably won't have to soak it for as long before the dried paste loosens its hold.

- Buy your lumber directly from a sawmill. Lumberyards and big-box stores don't carry lumber milled to old-house dimensions. If you go directly to the mill, you'll save a bundle and you can have it planed to suit your needs. The quality of the wood will most likely be better, too.

MODERN CENTURY

BY GORDON BOCK

Amazing



Interlocking shingles came into their own after 1933 as a solution to wind damage, and are one of the few surviving types of individual shingles. Depending upon the design, each shingle is shaped with ears that slip into slits in adjacent shingles to integrate the whole roof while creating a pleasing, woven appearance.

PHOTO BY BARBARA KRANKENHAUS

Asphalt

How 1920s Shingle Types and Designs Created the Golden Age of Composition Roofing

At the turn of the 20th century, when man-made building materials really began to take hold, manufacturers combined production innovations and marketing flair to produce a new kind of roofing generally called composition shingles: fibers of some sort saturated or mixed with a binder. Taking off in the building boom of the 1920s, these asphalt shingles were highly popular, not only for their ease of installation, and resistance to fire, but also for their astounding variety of novel shapes and colors—creativity that might cinch the sale of a house in a highly competitive market. Since many of these shingles styles are in limited production today (if made at all), understanding the basic asphalt shingles available in our grandparents' era is the place to begin for anyone who faces a composition shingle restoration project.

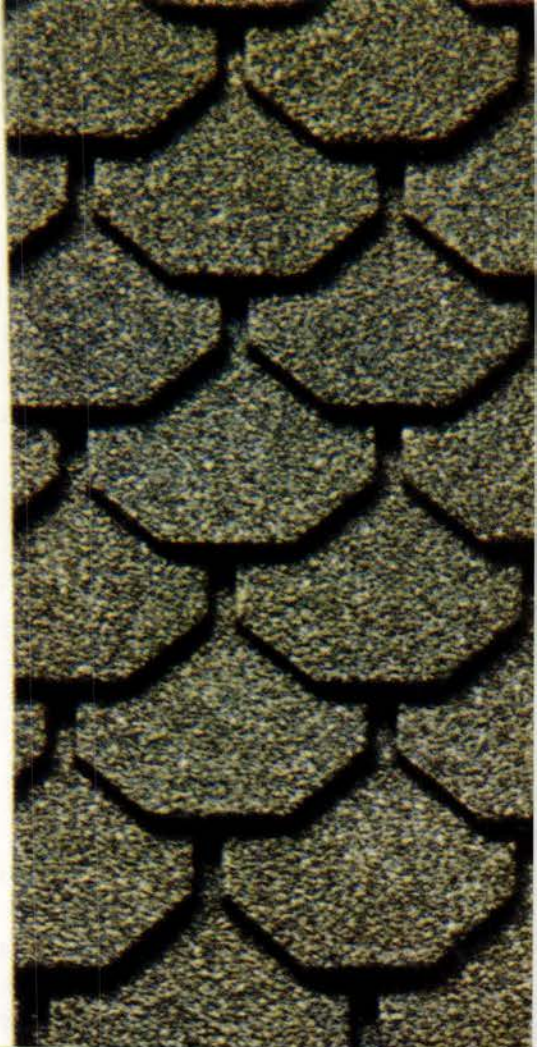
Humble Origins

Before we look at the birth of the asphalt shingle, let's step back to the 19th century to get a handle, if you will, on the pre-history of the composition roof. In the 1840s there was a ripe market for new roofing materials to build the growing towns of the Midwest and West Coast. Corrugated iron was the most promising innovation, however a few experimenters were taking another route by

saturating layers of felt, paper, or flax with fish oil or pine tar, then covering this concoction with sand or ground shells.

Samuel and Cyrus Warren of Cincinnati were two of these pioneers who revolutionized this process in 1847. They found that coal tar—a waste product of the gas lighting industry—made an ideal adhesive for what we now call built-up roofs. Not to be overlooked was the fact that the gas companies would actually pay to have the stuff taken away. The brothers soon had a thriving business manufacturing and installing their roofing in Chicago, St. Louis, and Philadelphia. Other leaders in the industry were Samuel Barrett of Chicago and Michael Ehret of Philadelphia. In 1868, Ehret patented the slag (or cinder) roofing system, which used this material as a top coating.

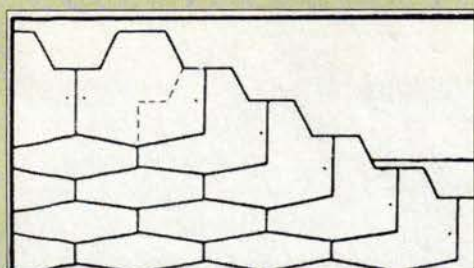
Coal tar was a big boon to composition roofing, but as the gas companies found it had other uses in the nascent chemical industry, they started charging for it. Naturally occurring asphalt, the obvious alternative, had been tried for waterproofing roofs in the early 19th century, and by the 1880s large quantities were being imported from the Pitch Lake in Trinidad. However, it took the first oil well in Pennsylvania in 1859, and the subsequent growth of the petroleum industry, to make asphalt plentiful enough.



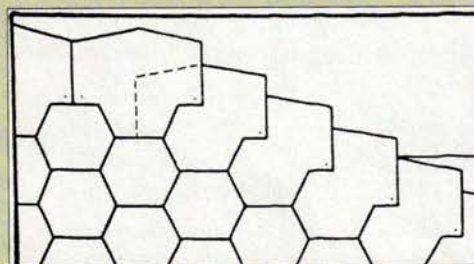
Above: Typical of the variety of novel asphalt shingle shapes common by the 1930s, these octagonal tabs are formed by giant strip shingles once sold by the Carey Corporation in four colors. Below: Michael Ehret, inventor of the slag coating system in 1868, was so effective at producing his prepared roofing he found he could sell surplus as a product—the ancestor of ready-made roll roofing and, subsequently, asphalt shingles.



ALL ARCHIVAL IMAGES COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVE ASSOCIATION



Hexo-Diamond Shingles Laid with Points Down



Hexo-Diamond Shingles Laid with Points Up

A unique twist on giant French Method shingles, the Hexo-Diamond shingles of the Keystone Roofing Manufacturing Co. gave the purchaser two patterns for the price of one: a honeycomb hex when installed "points-up"; a compressed diamond when inverted for a "points-down" installation.

By 1889, composition roofing was a well-established contracting business. After 1900, one could buy essentially the same roofing coated with granulated stone from suppliers as common as Sears, Roebuck and Co.—the ubiquitous roll roofing that protects barns, garages, and industrial buildings.

Shingles Reborn

The idea of shaping asphalt roofing into individual shingles is credited to Henry M. Reynolds of Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1903. A roofing contractor and manufacturer, he started cutting stone-surfaced roofing into 8" x 16" shingles—by hand, with a knife. Adding crushed granules of slate—a 1914 idea from F.C. Overby of the Flintkote Company—helped weight such shingles down to the roof. From here a new industry seems to have sprung. A big help was a push by the National Board of Fire Underwriters to eliminate wood shingle roofs, starting around 1911. World War I was a boost too because asphalt shingles made use of non-strategic materials. It was not until about 1915, however, that manufacturers perfected the machinery for

roller-die cutting thick roofing into irregular shapes on a continuous production line, thereby opening a cornucopia of asphalt shingle products to the market.

INDIVIDUAL SHINGLES By the late 1920s, the bulk of asphalt shingles on the market were not strip types, as they are now, but individual shingles (a regional specialty at best for most of today's manufacturers). Individual shingles were not only the most logical product to make when processing large rolls into smaller forms, they were economical and easy to install. Many types of individual asphalt shingles found a ready market for over-roofing existing roofs, such as wood shingles.

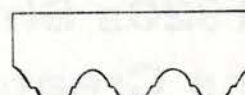
Giant Shingles—Individual rectangular shingles as large as 12" by 16" were often distinguished from standard or unit shingles, though each manufacturer had their own distinctions and terminology—Jumbo or Massive, for example. Produced in a variety of shapes—some designed to speed installation—and colors, such as brown, Spanish red, maroon, green, grey, black, and purple, they could be selected for a monochrome roof or combined for a "blended" effect. Giant shingles were installed in either the American method (where shingles overlap conventionally at their bottoms), or the Dutch lap method (where shingles lap to one side). At least



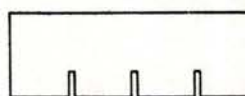
Massive Unit Shingles



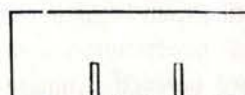
Massive Hex 2-Tab Shingles



3-Tab Giant Artstripe Shingles



Square-Tab Strip Shingles

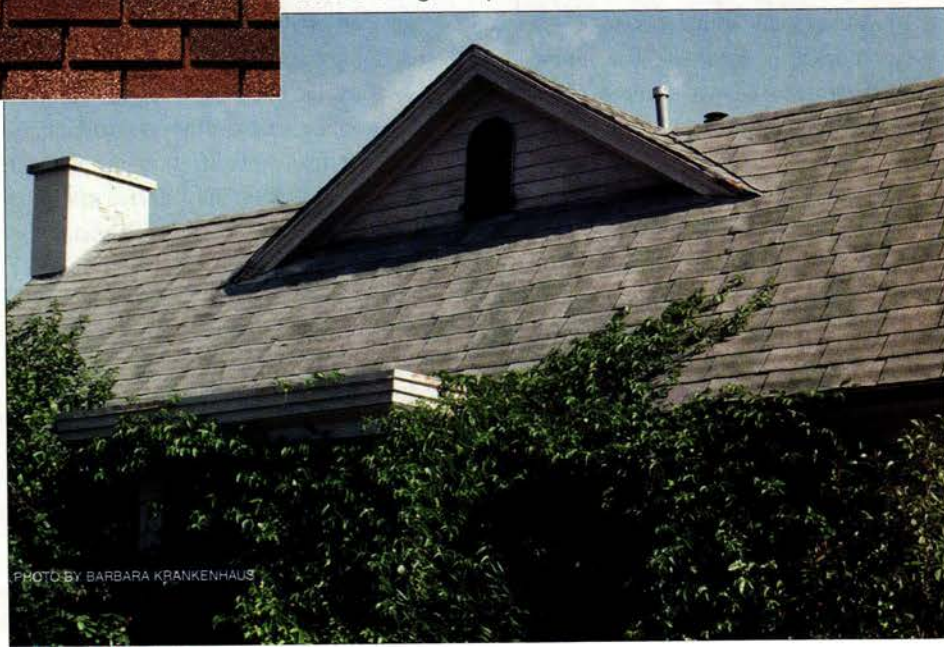


Massive Square-Tab Strip Shingles

In 1929, Continental Roofing Products put the "massive" spin on asphalt shingles, by offering square, hex, and Artstrip strip shingles in oversize patterns, along with conventional giant single shingles.



Left: Basic giant shingles were simply large asphalt rectangles about 12" across at their butts. Nailed up one at a time like slate shingles, they usually followed a similar running-bond pattern. Below: Giant shingles could also be installed with the Dutch lap method, where shingles lap to one side as well as below.



one manufacturer offered them in mixed lengths that created the random exposures evocative of shake or thatch roofs.

French Method Shingles—

Asphalt shingles cut in a diamond or hex pattern, reminiscent of the chateau roofs of the Loire Valley, were often called French Method shingles and very popular. These shingles came in two common sizes—12" x 12" and 16" x 16"—often incorporating tabs or clips at the bottom corner to guard against wind lift. Colors tended to be stone tones of red, blue-black, green, and grey. A few companies tried coloring slate and gravel by 1919, but success was limited and the natural stone proved most durable. Because they only overlapped at shingle perimeters, asphalt French Method shingles provided just a single-coverage roof—that is, only one layer of roof material. This single thickness of asphalt was not always acceptable for new construction, but worked fine for over-roofing. Not content to clone a continental pattern, many manufacturers came up with their own spin on the French Method pattern by clipping the corners into a hex, or deforming the diamond slightly.

Interlocking Shingles

—Practical as they were, the large, exposed edges of individual shingles made of a flexible asphalt-and-felt base made them prone to wind-lift and subsequent breakage in storms or areas of the country with windy climates. Finding inspiration in a potential problem, manufacturers surmounted the wind-lift issue by conniving patterns to completely interlock the shingles.

With tabs and ears that slid into slots created in the previous course, interlocking shingles were mechanically similar to a self-sealing cereal box top. The industry evolved two general designs: long, uncut tabs (sometimes called T-lock, after the appearance of the shingle) and short, slitted ears. Besides creating an integral roof with decorative course lines much like a basket or quilt, interlocking shingles had the advantage of double coverage.

Though evidence of interlocking shingles is murky in the early 1920s, by 1929 these products are common in building product ads. They remain practical and popular to this day in high-wind prone regions of the country. Surprisingly, they also seem to have been well adapted to covering the rolled eaves used to evoke thatched roofs on many cottage-style houses of the 1930s and '40s.

NOVELTY STRIPS Moving beyond true individual shingles, there once was also a whole class of strip shingles that came close to individual shingles in effect. Like decorative ceramic floor tile or paving bricks, their irregular, but mundane-looking, tabs belied clever patterns produced once the shingles overlapped on the roof.

such as the Nelson Master Slab and Continental Artstrip, particularly popular after 1930. Ceramic granules, perfected in the 1930s, increased the color possibilities. By piling multiple colors of mineral on a single strip, manufacturers could produce a "tapestry" effect, more variegated than any natural roofing material could ever be.

As the 1940s dawned, there were even "broad shadow" strip shingles on the market, manufactured with early versions of the rhombus-shaped dragons' tooth tab so ubiquitous today for textured architectural asphalt roofing products. Some shingles were even developed with specific house styles in mind. Whatever their purpose, their contribution to the architecture and historic character of a building is no less significant than the



Most popular were hex shapes, especially in two-tab strips. Appropriate for both new construction and reroofing, these strips were common in two sizes: Standard and Giant—the latter with a 13 1/2" tab.

Modified octagons in four strips were also marketed. Besides the interesting roof pattern, octagons could create a fiesta look by laying alternate strips in different colors. Octagonal strips were also appealing due to their small butts, which worked well around dormers and other angled areas.

The novelty strip concept could even be stretched to include Arabesque patterns,

By the 1940s, color was as important as shape in marketing asphalt shingles.

Regional manufacturers might come up with signature designs, such as this Arabesque pattern (inset left). The rhomboid tab, often called dragons' tooth today, dates to at least 1945 (inset right) and lent itself well to multicolor effects (top).

siding design or paint color. Though many of these products fell out of favor through the 1950s and 1960s, their delightful variety is starting to bring eye-appeal back again to asphalt roof shingles of the 21st century. 🏠

Spot

By John Leeke

Paint Maintenance

How to Keep Up With Problem Areas So "A Little Dab 'll Do Ya"

What do you do when the exterior of your old house shows signs of paint failure here and there, but the rest of the building is in great shape—and there's little time or money for major repainting anyway? Why, consider painting only those areas that need it! Spot paint maintenance is a low-cost and highly effective alternative to painting a whole house that improves shabby, peeling paint, while protecting the wood and extending the service life of the last full paint job. Old timers knew this. "Knock off what's loose and peeling," was their time-honored approach, "then give 'er a lick of paint and get on with what's important in life."

Trouble is, these days everyone wants the brand-new look for their house, and we're often willing to wait until we can afford a complete, full-coat paint job to get that appearance. Sometimes we wait too long, so the paint peels and the wood begins to rot. The solution is spot maintenance. The following step-by-step procedure—a spot paint maintenance schedule—is based on the methods and materials used at the Victoria Mansion, an 1850s Italian Villa in Portland Maine. Though the procedures presented here were perfected over three decades and have proven to work well in a harsh,

northern marine climate, they include comments to help you interpret the steps and determine what will work best for your own building and region.

Step #1. Assessment

Treatment

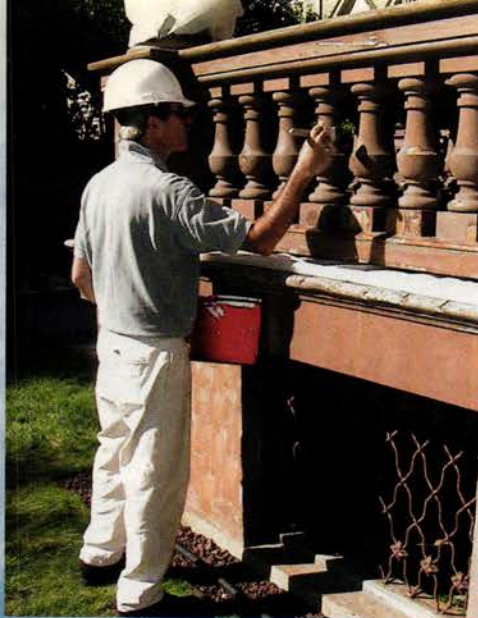
- Assess conditions
- Determine areas for treatment
- Mark out spots
- Identify and note any areas that need repairs, such as decayed wood, loose parts, or deteriorated flashing.

Materials & Tools

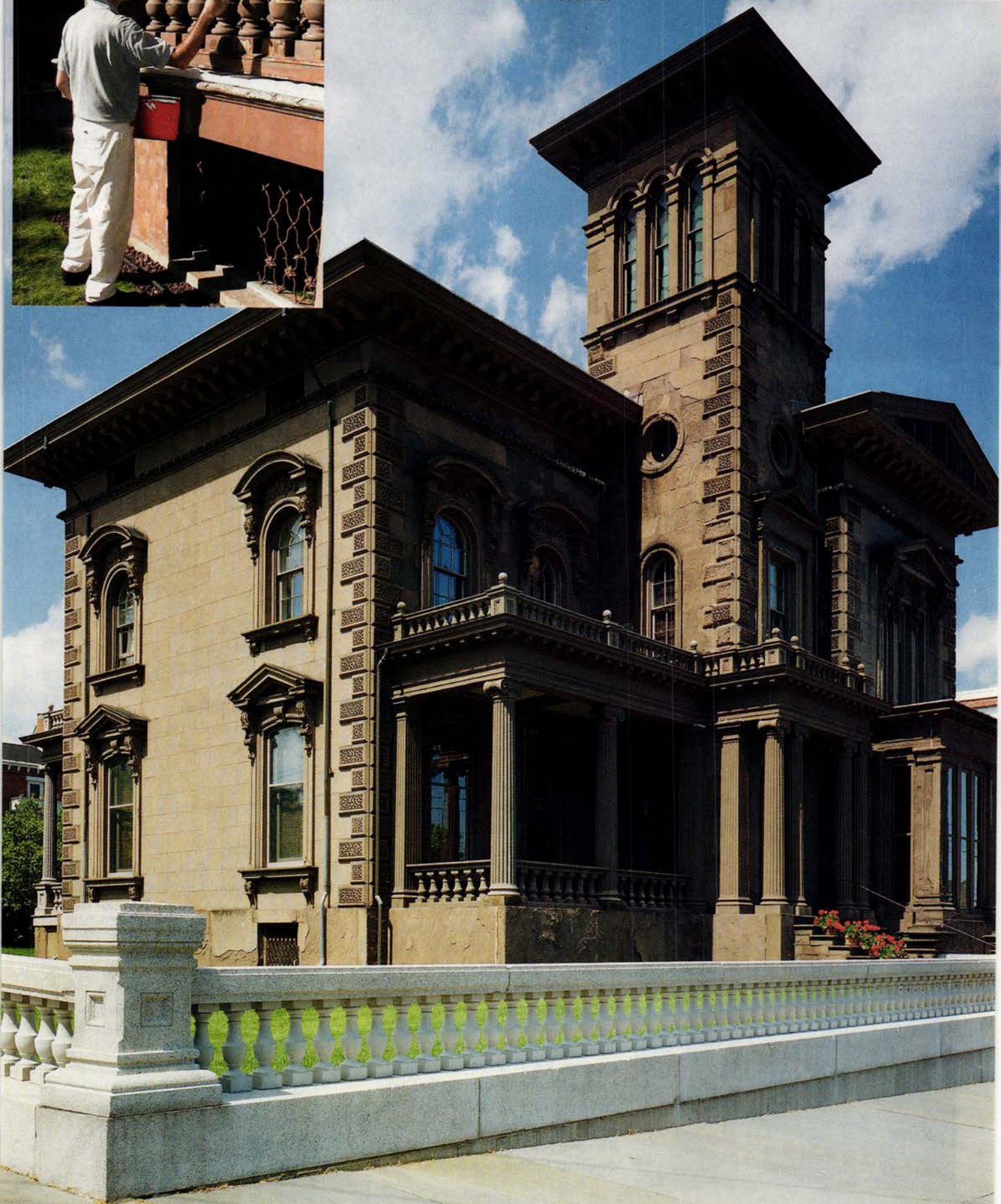
- Chalk

Comments

Simply grabbing tools and madly scraping away paint does not result in effective maintenance. First decide exactly what the problem areas and treatments are, then act on them in a deliberate and workmanlike fashion. One of the great efficiencies in spot paint maintenance is achieved by strictly limiting the work to only the areas where paint has actually failed. Use chalk to identify these areas. Pencils, pens, lumber crayons, or markers can leave permanent marks that show after painting.



On a porch at Victorian Mansion, painter Peter DePaolo follows the standard spot maintenance procedures that have been perfected at this house museum over two decades.





ALL PHOTOS BY JOHN LEEKE



Site-Tested Techniques

The methods, procedures, and materials presented here were developed over the past 30 years at Victoria Mansion (also known as the Morse-Libby Mansion). We are fortunate that the Victoria Society has taken such diligent care of this National Historic Landmark, including unusually good documentation of the specific materials and methods used in the past. This valuable information resource has helped us solve vexing paint problems that seem to plague many historic buildings these days. Rather than depend upon "single-shot" experience, opinions, and product marketing hype, for the past 16 years we have conducted real-world field testing with side-by-side comparisons of various products and methods to determine which actually work. Tradespeople with decades of experience helped develop these methods. When we were stumped by a paint problem, we consulted building scientists and paint chemists, then used our practical experience to develop effective solutions. The results are time-tested methods and materials with proven performance.

Painting an entire building the size and complexity of Victoria Mansion would cost so much that it is out of the question. Instead, every year we perform a round of spot paint maintenance at a relatively low cost that catches the worst areas of paint deterioration over the whole building. Then remaining maintenance funds are used to focus on other issues, such as safety or repairing a limited area like a window, a porch, or woodcarvings. Spot paint maintenance plays a key role in the museum's preventive maintenance program. It's a real balancing act, from-year-to-year, but one that has proven effective over the long-term. Since 1989 we have been able to raise the condition of the exterior and save important historic woodwork.



Step #2. Protect Area

Treatment

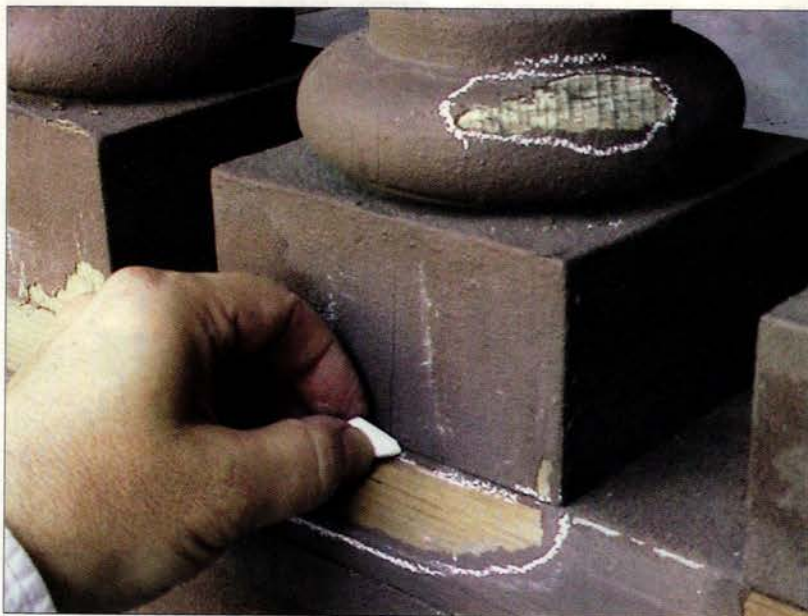
- Set up protection
- Close nearby windows and doors to keep dust out of building
- Cordon off work area to protect public & occupants
- Protect adjacent surfaces from damage and paint drips

Materials & Tools

- Cordon safety tape
- 6-mil poly sheeting
- Blue tape
- Duct tape
- 1x2 furring strips

Comments

Safety first! Old paint is likely to contain lead that can be a health risk. Keep all people other than designated workers out of the work area to prevent harm. Workers must follow effective worksite safety practices. Here the same plastic sheeting is used to protect adjacent surfaces and to keep the porch railings dry if it rains.



Step #3. Prepare Surface

Treatment

- Remove loose and peeling paint, keeping scraping tightly controlled and within chalk lines to prevent marring and scratching adjacent surfaces that will not be painted. (Loose paint that flakes off past the chalk line is OK.)
- Clean out joints between parts with hooked scraper and sandpaper
- Observe lead safety. Mist surface with water if debris is likely to contain lead. Otherwise scrape dry surface if paint does not contain lead.

Materials & Tools

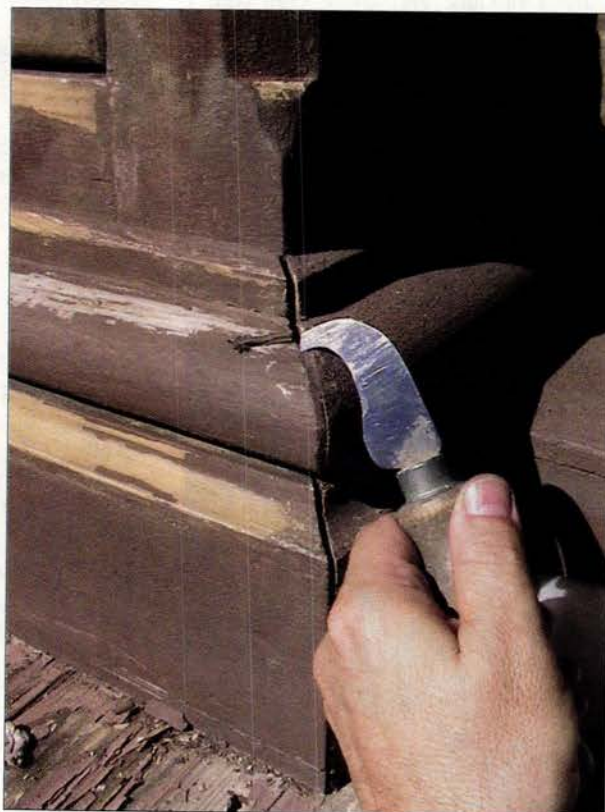
- Scrapers
- Scraper file
- Strip pads

Comments

Keeping pull-type scrapers sharp with frequent filing often gives more controlled results than pushing a dull putty knife or "5-in-1" tool. A re-ground linoleum knife makes an effective hooked scraper for joint and crack cleaning. Mist surfaces before and during scraping with a spray bottle (see Step 4.)

Maximizing Paint Performance

Protecting historic exterior woodwork is critical here on the coast of Maine, where we get the extremes of northern New England weather. Seasonal swings from the drying effects of severe winter cold, to the heat and humidity of summer (with soaking rain and drizzle for weeks at a time) stress any paint film to its limits as the wood underneath shrinks and expands. Added to this, the life expectancy of a whole-house paint job has diminished from 20 to 30 years early in 20th century, to 15 years in the 1960s, to just four to six years in the 1990s. With spot paint maintenance we can make a paint job last longer than that. On the south and west sides of Victoria Mansion, where sun and weather exposure are greatest, we are now getting four to six years of effective performance on horizontal wood surfaces and six to 10 years on vertical surfaces. On the north and east sides, where the sun shines less, the spot paint maintenance lasts 10 to 15 or more years before it needs to be renewed.



Step #4. Clean

Treatment

- Wear proper personal protection: long pants & shirt sleeves, gloves, respirator, and splash goggles or face shield (not shown) to prevent cleaning solution from getting on skin due to splash back.
- Scrub area with cleaning solution of detergent and ordinary household bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite).
- Rinse twice with potable water; allow wood to dry to 15% moisture or less.

Materials & Tools

- Heavy duty detergent, TSP (tri-sodium phosphate), or TSP substitute
- Potable water
- Scrub pad, open-weave abrasive

Comments

Cleaning is a critical step with no short cuts. Cleaning solution is a mixture of 6 fl.oz. bleach and 3 oz. of detergent in 1 gal. water. (Do not add ammonia, which can create hazardous gas.)

Spray cleaning solution on spot and scrub with pad, let set for 5 min. while moving on to next spots. Wet spots again with solution and let set for 5 minutes. Wet entire area with hose on fine mist. Scrub and rinse spots with hose, rinse entire area with hose.

Let dry, cover to protect from rain if necessary. We use a wood moisture meter to test for moisture. An old-time rule of thumb is to allow three sunny breezy drying days.



Step #5. Stabilize Substrate

Treatment

- Brush on oil to penetrate and stabilize porous wood surfaces, if needed
- Use a small brush to tightly limit oil to treatment area
- Allow to dry
- Lightly sand off whiskers or roughness

Materials & Tools

- Oil treatment, oil-based alkyd resin
- Mineral spirits
- 120-grit open-coat sandpaper or sanding screen

Comments

We no longer use the traditional boiled linseed oil & turpentine mix for this purpose, since it seems to feed insects and fungi that eat wood. Some paint manufacturers offer a special oil product for this purpose. You can also use oil-based, alkyd resin varnish. For greater penetration, thin the varnish or oil with 1 part mineral spirits to 3 parts oil or varnish.

Do not sand down the ridge of surrounding heavy paint buildup if it presents a lead-health hazard.

Step #6. Prime

Treatment

- Brush on primer
- Allow to dry, use a small brush to tightly limit primer to treatment area
- Skip sanding to speed up production time

Materials & Tools

- Oil-based, alkyd resin primer

Comments

We use primer that is noticeably lighter or darker than the topcoat so that, during its service life, we can readily see when the topcoat is failing and exposing the primer, indicating another round of spot paint maintenance is needed. Usually this means using ordinary white primer, rather than the common practice of tinting the primer to nearly the same color as the topcoat.



Step #7. Seal or Flash Joints

Treatment

- Apply backer rod and sealant at joints; allow to cure
- Or apply flashing

Materials & Tools

- Sealant (one-part, polyurethane high-performance type)
- Backer rod (compressible type for variable-width joints)

Comments

There is a wide variety of joint types, traditional and current flashing techniques, and sealant materials and methods. One standard method of today is shown here. At Victoria Mansion, we do not expect any sealed joint of this kind to last longer than three years, at which time we return to check and renew it. Our common strategy is to seal the top of a joint to keep water out, then leave the bottom open so water will drain out when the sealant above fails.

Step #8. Apply Topcoats

Treatment

- Brush on two topcoats; use a small brush to tightly limit paint to treatment area
- Avoid sanding to speed up production time

Materials & Tools

- 100% acrylic resin exterior house paint (at least \$30-\$40/gal. to assure quality)

Comments

Matching color hue and surface sheen is important with spot paint maintenance. It often takes two to four rounds of formulation and testing to get it right. Top coat within a few days of priming. Two top coats are necessary for best performance. Overlap the surrounding old paint just slightly. Sometimes we apply the last coat to an entire element to keep the maintenance spot from showing, but be careful not to create a heavy paint buildup that promotes peeling.

Step #9. Cleanup

Treatment

- Remove all equipment
- Dispose of all debris; save reusable temporary protection materials
- Final sweep down and pickup

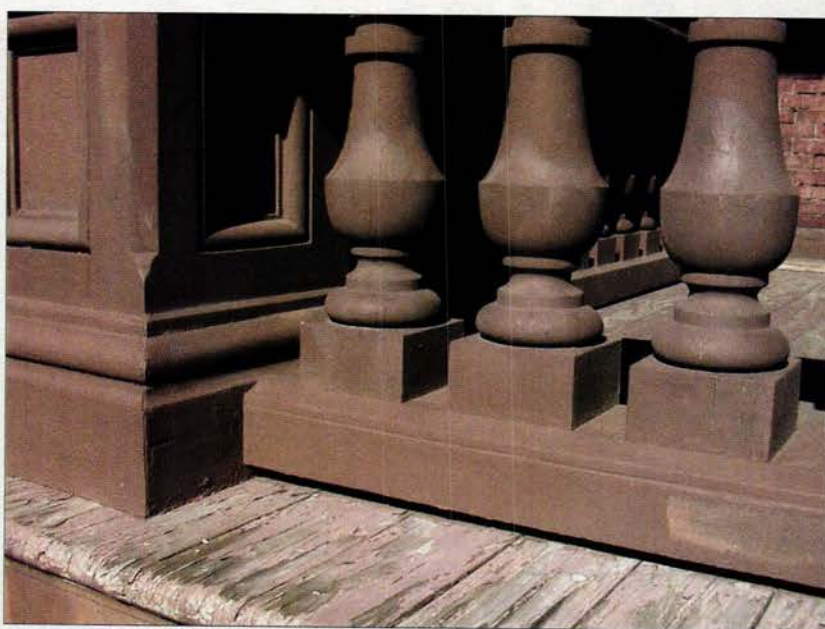
Step #10. Enjoy

Treatment

- Stand back and enjoy the appearance of your fine work.

Comments

Although finished work will not look brand-new, the somewhat variable appearance is acceptable with spot paint maintenance. If you stick to the standard method and use the same paint product and color, it will have that "burnished" well cared-for look after a few years.



John Leeke is a preservation consultant who helps homeowners, tradespeople and contractors understand and maintain their older and historic buildings. He hopes to get around to painting his own porch this summer (26 Higgins St., Portland, Maine 04103; 207-773-2306; www.HistoricHomeWorks.com).



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When Four Walls Won't Do

The Many Sides of Quirky Geometry in American Houses

By JAMES C. MASSEY AND SHIRLEY MAXWELL



This tiny octagon in the Wyoming neighborhood of Millburn, New Jersey, is as small as a house might get. Fortunately, there are additions on the left and rear, for living in this octagon alone would have been a very confining experience.

Americans have always been fascinated by off-beat building shapes. Over three centuries, our architectural landscape has been richly appointed with octagons, hexagons, buildings with 16 sides, and houses that look like silos or flattened spheres. All those anti-right-angled designs—properly called non-orthogonal designs, if you want to get technical—tickle our fancies like no mere rectangle could. Though octagons may be the most numerous and memorable in the public mind, they're but one facet of a search for the ideal house in the purity of geometrical shapes.

POLYGON PREHISTORY

Octagonal buildings have been around at least since ancient Rome, but they cropped up fairly early in American history too. Builders of the 18th century experimented widely with octagons and circles for auxiliary buildings of all sorts, from plantation offices to barns, privies, gazebos, tea houses, and school houses, as well as for building parts, such as wings and entries. The Pastures, a house that General Philip Schuyler built in 1762 in Albany, New York, has an octagonal entry, with one side attached to the main building block.

At Mount Vernon, George Washington had his little eight-sided garden house, as well as a 16-sided treading barn. In the new capital city of Washington, D.C., architect/physician William Thornton designed a multi-sided residence for his friend, John Tayloe in 1801. Although the Tayloe house became known as the Octagon, its plan was actually an irregular hexagon with a rounded entrance bay.

Thomas Jefferson, the embodiment of his era's Rational Man, mightily admired the octagon, both for its elegant geometry and for what he deemed its practicality. His home at Monticello is surmounted by a large octagonal cupola, while Poplar Forest, the small

PHOTOS BY JAMES C. MASSEY EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

The first two stories of the imposing Armour-Stiner octagon in Irvington, New York, were built ca. 1860. The huge dome with massive paired dormers and cupola was added in 1872, and presumably the wraparound veranda as well.



Below: Thomas Jefferson designed Poplar Forest, his remote retreat from the busy life at Monticello, while he was President, and it was ready for him to occupy in 1809. A striking feature is the skylighted cubical dining room in the center of the house.



Right: The Octagon House, Washington, DC, designed by William Thornton, was built in 1801. Although its name is traditional, the house is actually an irregular hexagon with a bow front. It has been owned by the American Institute of Architects for over a century and is now a museum.



The octagonal part of Glebe House in Arlington, Virginia, was built in 1857, adding to an earlier house. Above the traditional cupola, a large teak-wood eagle, installed by diplomat Caleb Cushing in the 1870s, surveys the grounds. After years of service as the offices of the National Genealogical Society, the house is now being restored as a private residence.





rural villa near Lynchburg, Virginia, to which Jefferson retreated from the bustle of Monticello, is a pure octagon. Inspired by Jefferson's admiration for Roman architecture, it reflects his conviction that the octagon was not only beautiful but practical, providing ideal light, ventilation, and traffic flow. Of course, it took Jeffersonian ingenuity to make a workable floor plan to fit the shape of the house, but his solutions never fail to intrigue and delight present-day visitors. Centrally placed alcove beds divide each of two semi-octagonal bedchambers, which benefited from fireplaces and windows on two sides for warmth in cold-weather months and superior ventilation in hot weather. In the rectangular dining room, located in the exact center of the house, a large, glazed skylight brightens the

space. Unfortunately, on rainy days the skylight had a tendency to leak and, at least once, a violent windstorm showered Jefferson's simple but choicely appointed dining room with shattered glass.

THE OCTAGON ERA

It wasn't until the mid-19th century, however, that the octagonal- and circular-house idea trickled down to the popular housing market. Thanks largely to the promotional efforts of Orson Squire Fowler, an amateur architect as well as professional phrenologist (who studied lumps on the human skull to ascertain character traits), the octagon house proved itself a true architectural phenomenon. Fowler maintained that octagonal houses built of a newly popular material that he called gravel—better

known today as unreinforced concrete—was the answer to most of middle-class America's housing problems. His book, *A Home for All, or the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building*, published under various titles and editions between 1848 and 1854, found an eager audience.

Fowler himself had been inspired by an early concrete stagecoach inn built in hexagonal form by the abolitionist Joseph Goodrich in Milton, Wisconsin, in 1844. Fowler built his own gravel-wall octagon in Fishkill, New York. His three-storey, 66-room house no longer stands, but the Milton House, a National Historic Landmark, has been restored as a museum.

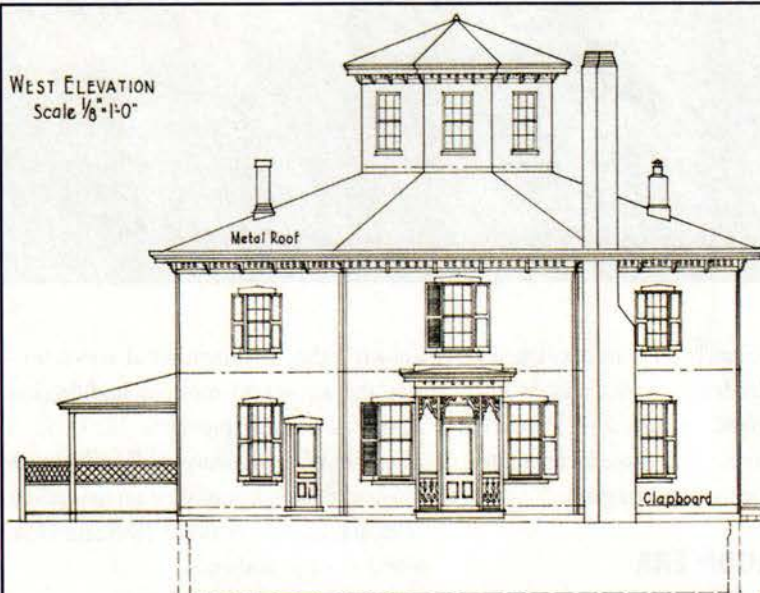
Unconventional as they were, for a while Fowler's ideas found fertile ground among the building public, even inspiring



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATCHEZ PILGRIMAGE TOURS

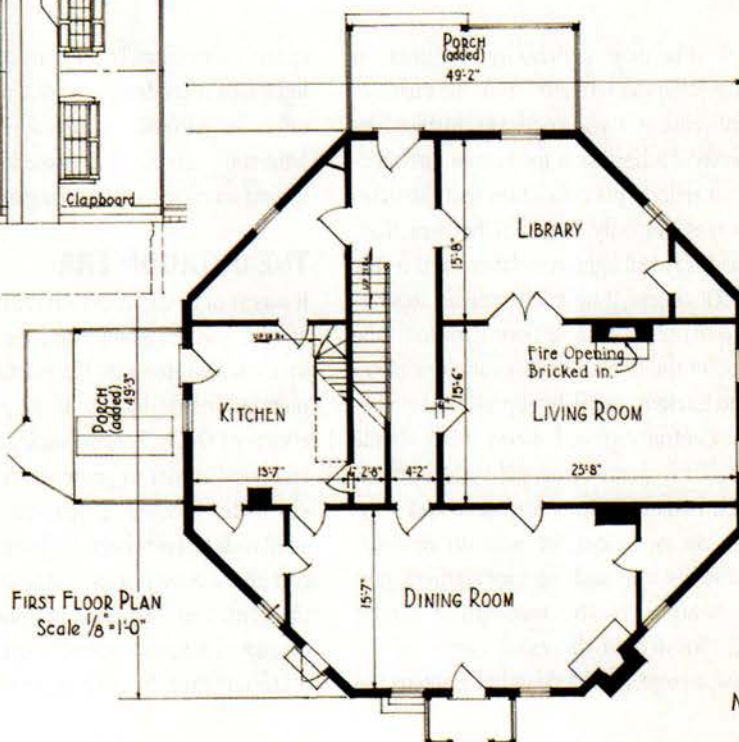
The Moorish Revival Longwood, or Nutt's Folly as it is popularly known, was started in 1860 in Natchez, Mississippi to the design of Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan. It was only partly finished at the onset of the Civil War when the owner, Haller Nutt, moved into the completed ground floor. Neither Nutt nor his descendants ever got around to completing the house. Today it is a museum offering a fascinating view of a house frozen in 150 years of time since the workmen packed up and left.

WEST ELEVATION
Scale $\frac{1}{8}" = 1'-0"$



Bebb House, Washington, DC.

Plan and elevation of a now-demolished octagon of 1865, from a Historic American Buildings Survey measured drawing. The complexity of the plan shows how hard it can be to arrange the rooms in a comfortable and practical way.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN
Scale $\frac{1}{8}" = 1'-0"$



One of two octagons in Boonton, New Jersey, that were built in 1854, and typical of the commonest octagon design: two stories with a wraparound porch and a cupola.

others to take his concepts to their Pythagorean limits. One apparent acolyte, architect Z. Baker, noted that "With regard to the form of a home, that which will best divide into the apartments required should be taken. Circles enclose more space within the same wall; next, those forms nearest approaching them; then squares; and lastly, or most removed, or enclosing least, are oblongs." To drive his point home, Baker included several designs for round houses—as well as octagons, hexagons, heptagons, and ovals—in his 1857 book *Modern House Builder*, highlighting how the circular plan could expedite travel from room to room.

If you think that laying out the rooms in an octagon sounds easy, just pick up a pencil and paper and give it a try. The schemes of 19th-century architects were all over the map. Sometimes they featured one large, rectangular room at the center of each floor, with smaller rectangles arranged about the core and left-over bits of oddly configured space around the edges for storage or other utilitarian purposes. Or sometimes the staircase was in the center of the octagon. Or, there might be a cluster of wedge-shaped rooms radiating from the center. Often, porches on one or more sto-

ries extended around part or all of the octagon. Cupolas also were very common features: large, small, octagonal, square, dome-shaped. Though not always present, they were a useful source of light and air.



Blending with Thomas Jefferson's octagonal Poplar Forest is this small brick octagonal privy, with an unusual octagonal dome roof, built around 1809.

A FASHIONABLE FORM

Cumbersome interiors must have seemed a tolerable trade-off to achieve the real impact of the octagon: an other-worldly appearance that could be used to repeat stylistic embellishments with kaleidoscopic effect. Mid-19-century octagons were most often decorated on the exterior in the highly popular Italianate mode, but Greek Revival trim was not unusual. Occasionally there were such oddities as a mansard-style octagon or an octagon with gable roofs on each of the eight sides. A notable deviation from the Italianate decoration rule is Longwood, also known as Nutt's Folly, a Moorish fantasy in Natchez, Mississippi, that was designed by the architect Samuel Sloan of Philadelphia. The largest surviving octagonal building in the United States, it was begun in 1860, just before the Civil War, and was abandoned by its Yankee work crews when the war broke out. The owner, Haller Nutt, moved with his wife and children into the only part of the building that was nearly finished, which happened to be the basement floor. Although the house remained in the family for generations, the rest of the house remains to this day merely an imposing shell presided over by a 16-sided cupola with an onion dome on top.

Right: Built in 1856 in Camillus, New York, the Wilcox Octagon (now a museum), is a fine example of the Fowler type down to its painted-cement walls. If octagons could be called the geodesic domes of their day, then Orson Squire Fowler was surely their Buckminster Fuller.

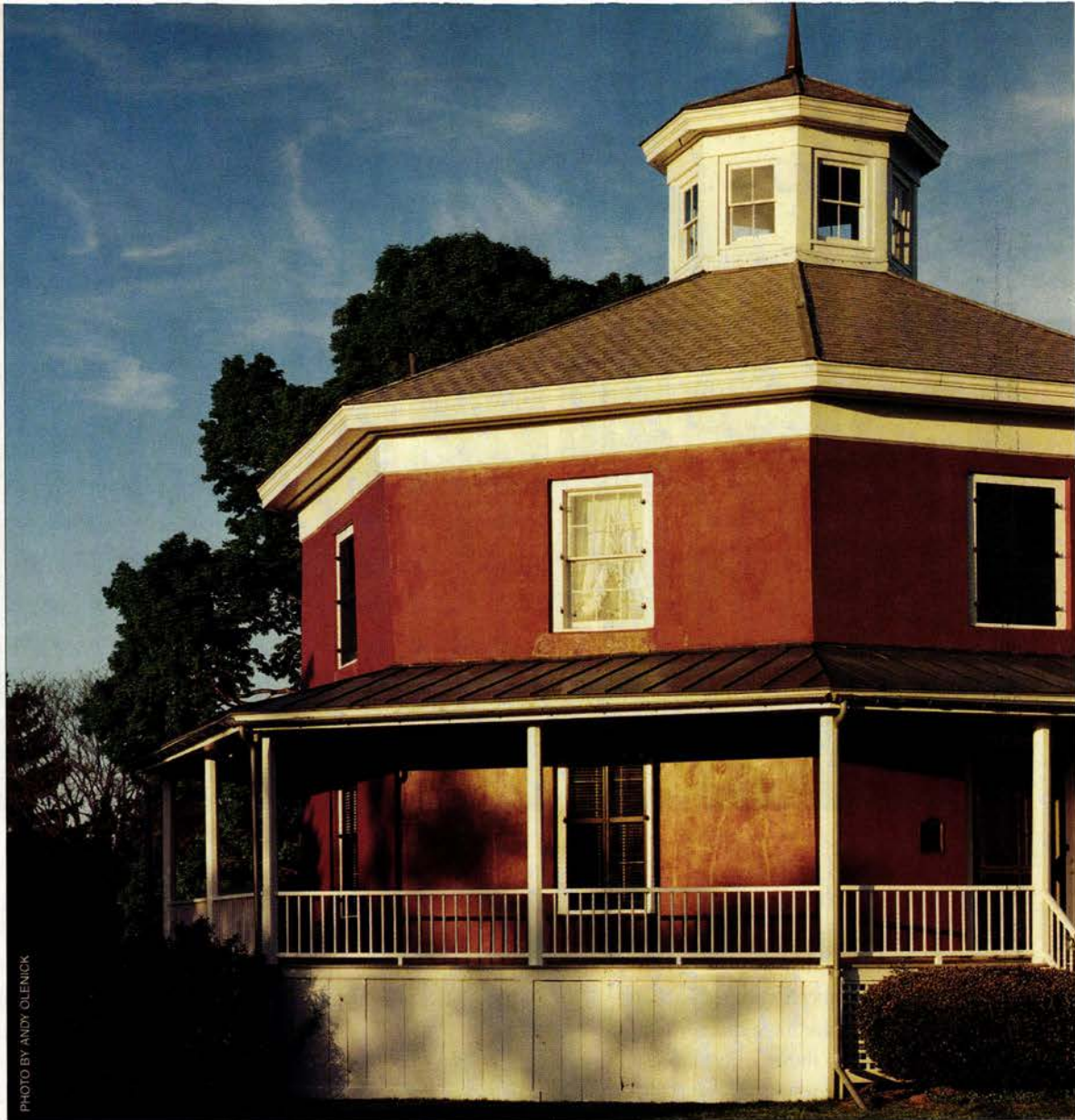


PHOTO BY ANDY OLENIK



This little stuccoed octagon in Harrisonburg, Virginia, with an abbreviated porch and a low roof, is as plain as can be. The octagon form easily rises in size from small cottage like this to the mansion size of the Armour-Stiner House.

At Glebe House in Arlington, Virginia, an octagonal front was added to a much earlier building in 1857. After serving for many years as the headquarters of the National Genealogical Society, it has now been restored as a private residence once again. Among the most colorful of the surviving octagons is the Armour-Stiner House, with its fully domed third storey, Roman temple-style cupola, and towering finial overlooking the Hudson River in Irvington, New York. Constructed in 1859-60, it was imaginatively enhanced (that dome, you know) in 1872.

The octagon craze came and went quickly. Born in the 1840s, it had virtually disappeared by the time the Civil War ended. Although octagons continued to be built occasionally, they were usually schools, barns, or other non-residential structures. Altogether, there were certainly



Below: Three-storey octagons are unusual, as is this splendid house built and designed by John Richards in Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1853. It has a 35' diameter and follows Fowler's ideas for a "superior design for a good-sized house."



well over a thousand of them, concentrated mostly in the northeastern states, particularly New York, and the old Northwest Territory, with a few popping up in West Coast locations such as San Francisco.

Octagons are still with us, of course, although the modern ones are generally used for commercial buildings such as restaurants and occasionally beach houses. These and other odd-shaped dwellings of the modern period, such as Buckminster Fuller's 1940s spherical Dymaxion House, though familiar, still seem slightly exotic.

Today, as in the past, the octagon's defenders almost always offer practical reasons for their choice of building shapes. They could be right, but you can't help suspecting that, in the end, it just may come down to the novelty of the thing—a small, secret satisfaction that something not quite ordinary is going on here. 🏠



A commanding presence on Amherst Street in Winchester, Virginia, the Hexagon House is a fine example of a rare shape. It was built in 1873 for John Burgess and is ornamented with elaborate scrollwork on the front porch and bay windows on the sides.

Closet Creations

When the bed leaves the bedroom, so can the closet



Before

After



A bedroom no longer needed for sleeping can offer a nice space for another activity. The same goes for the closet. Emptied out and stripped of its doors, it suddenly becomes an intriguing alcove ready for a new role.

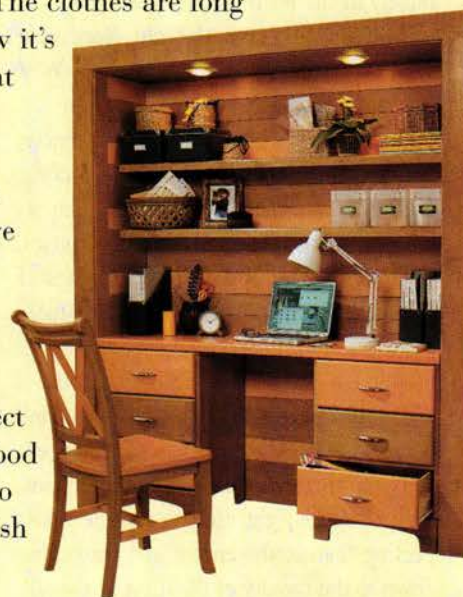
From Clothes to Shows

You might not think a closet could become a home entertainment center, but the one to the left offers positive proof. It was made from unfinished maple audio-video cabinets and shelf units. Before any of them were installed, the maple was given a coat of Minwax® Water-Based Pre-Stain Wood Conditioner to ensure even stain absorption. Then came an application of Minwax® Water-Based Wood Stain White Oak followed by two coats of Minwax® Polycrylic® Protective Finish Semi-Gloss. The clothes are long gone, but now it's the shows that go on.



Desk Job

A closet can easily become a space-efficient home office like the one shown here. The alcove was fitted with paneling, shelves, ready-made drawer cabinets and a desktop, all of them made of unfinished birch. The finishing started with a coat of Minwax® Water-Based Pre-Stain Wood Conditioner. Next, the two-toned stain effect was achieved using Minwax® Water-Based Wood Stain Cocoa and Cinnamon, followed by two coats of Minwax® Polycrylic® Protective Finish Semi-Gloss. It's a great place to work, and you can't beat the commute.



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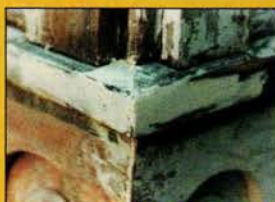
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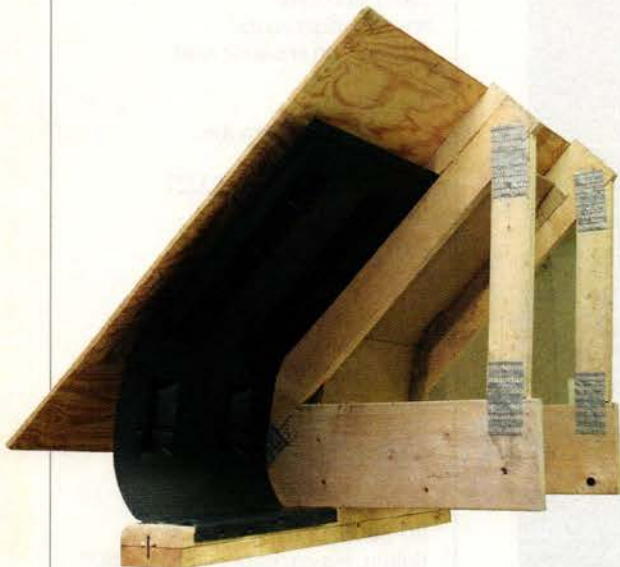
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Suppliers

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.

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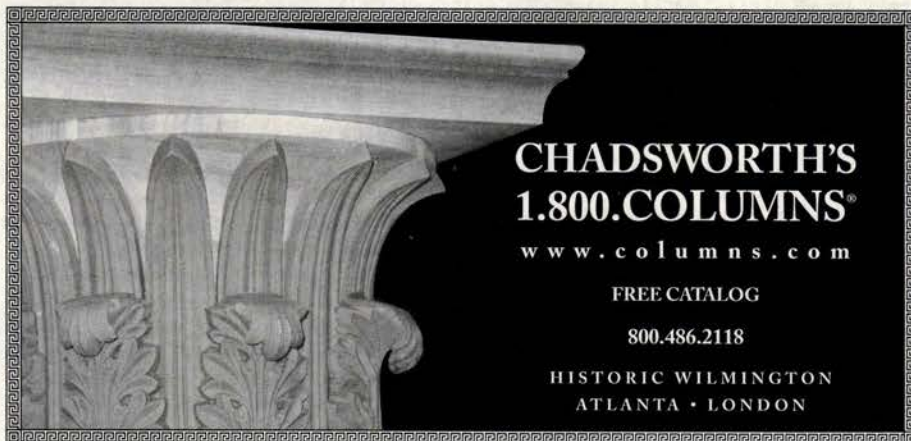
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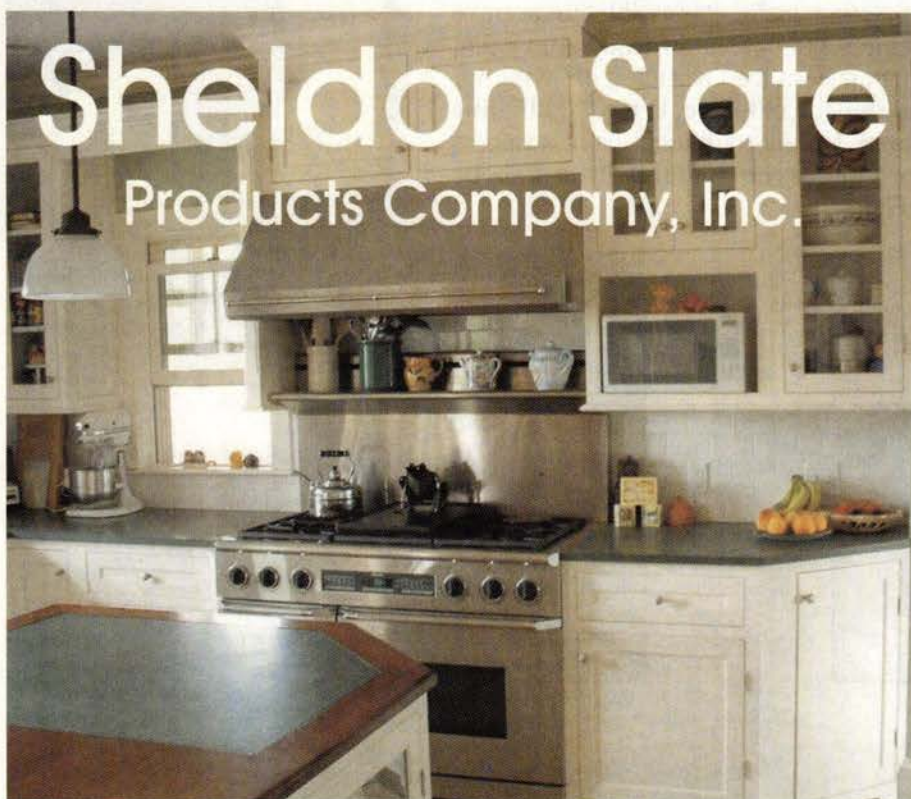


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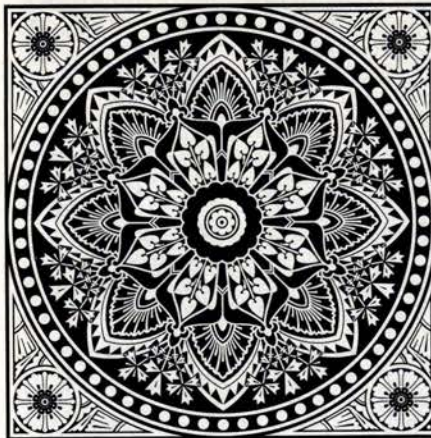
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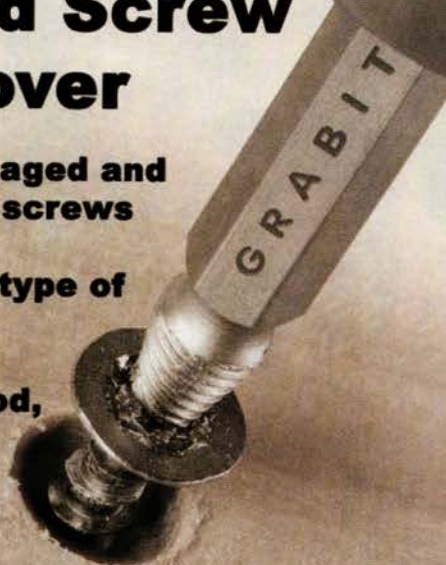




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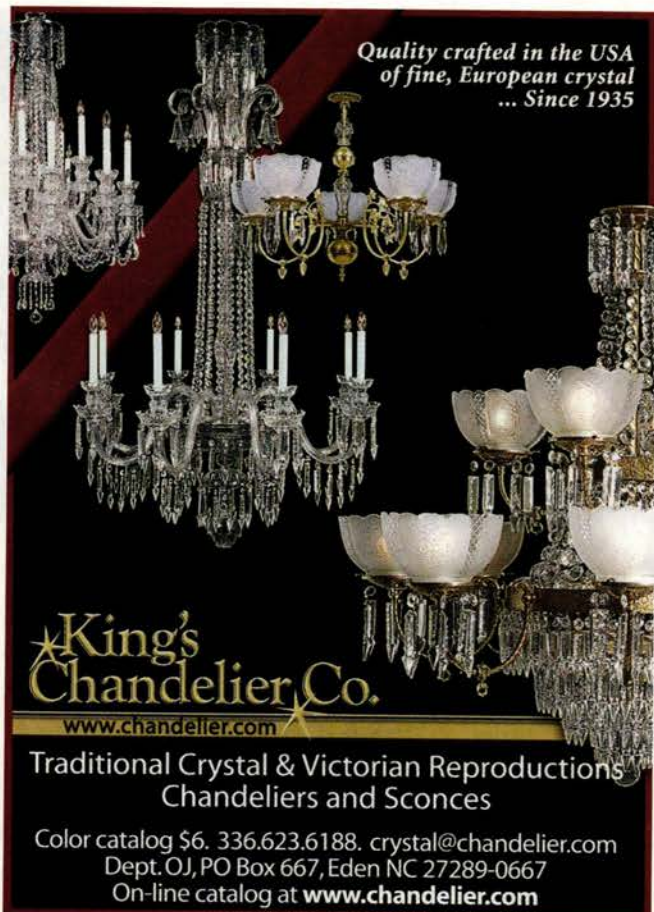


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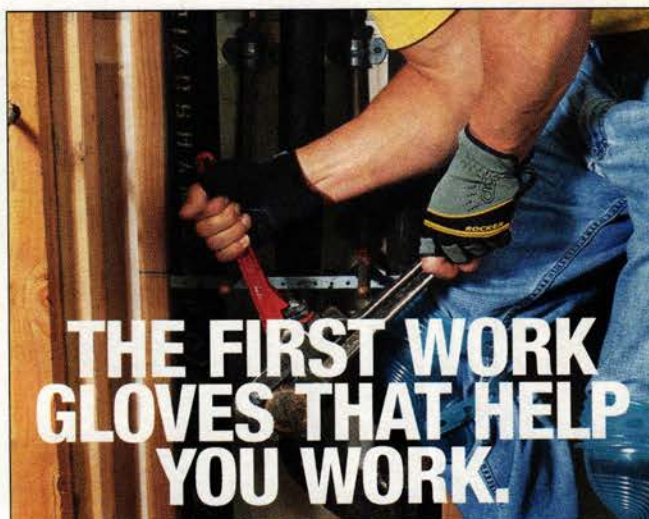
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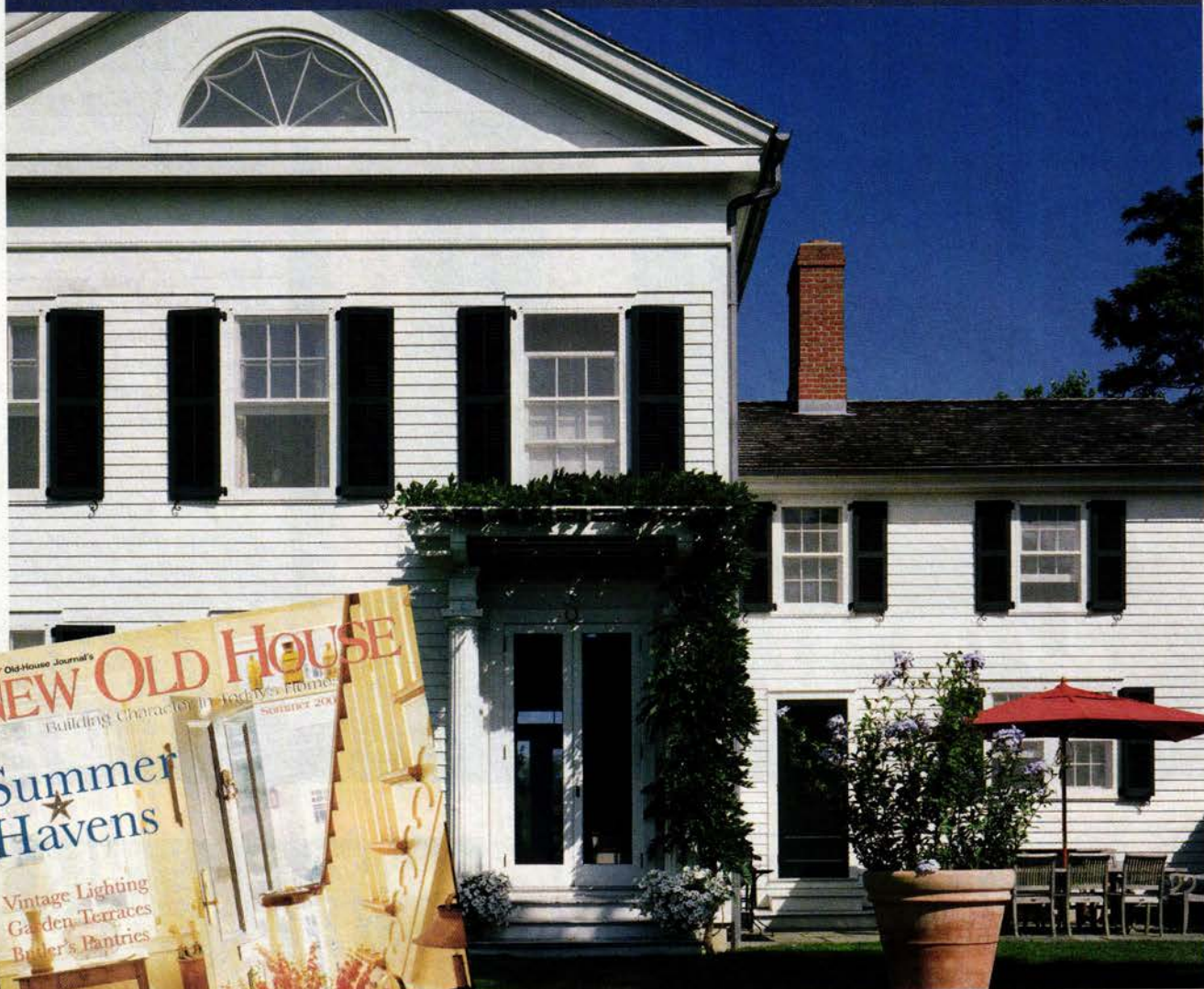
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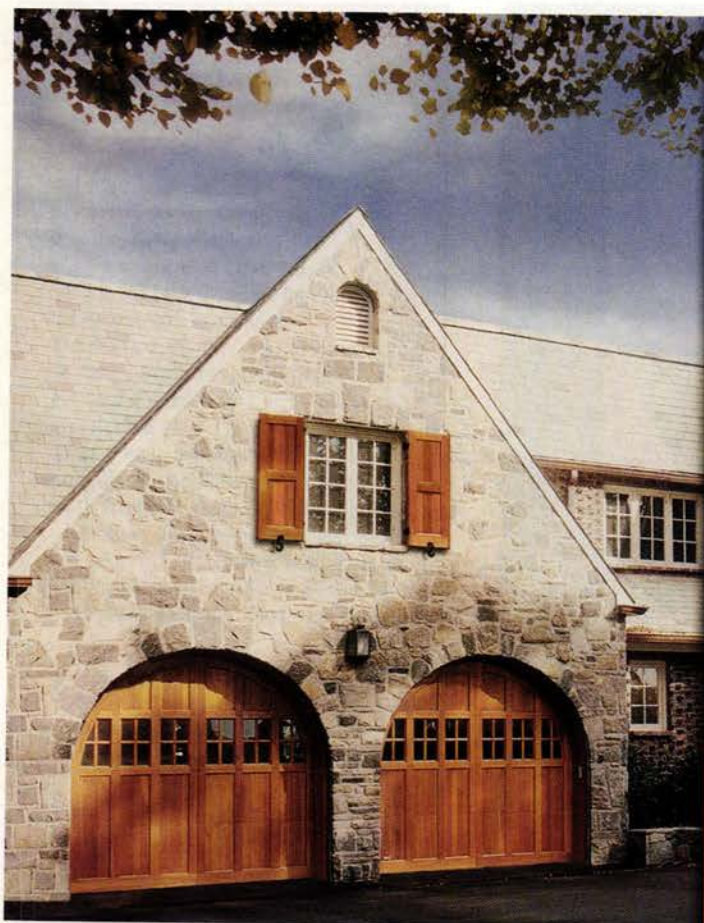
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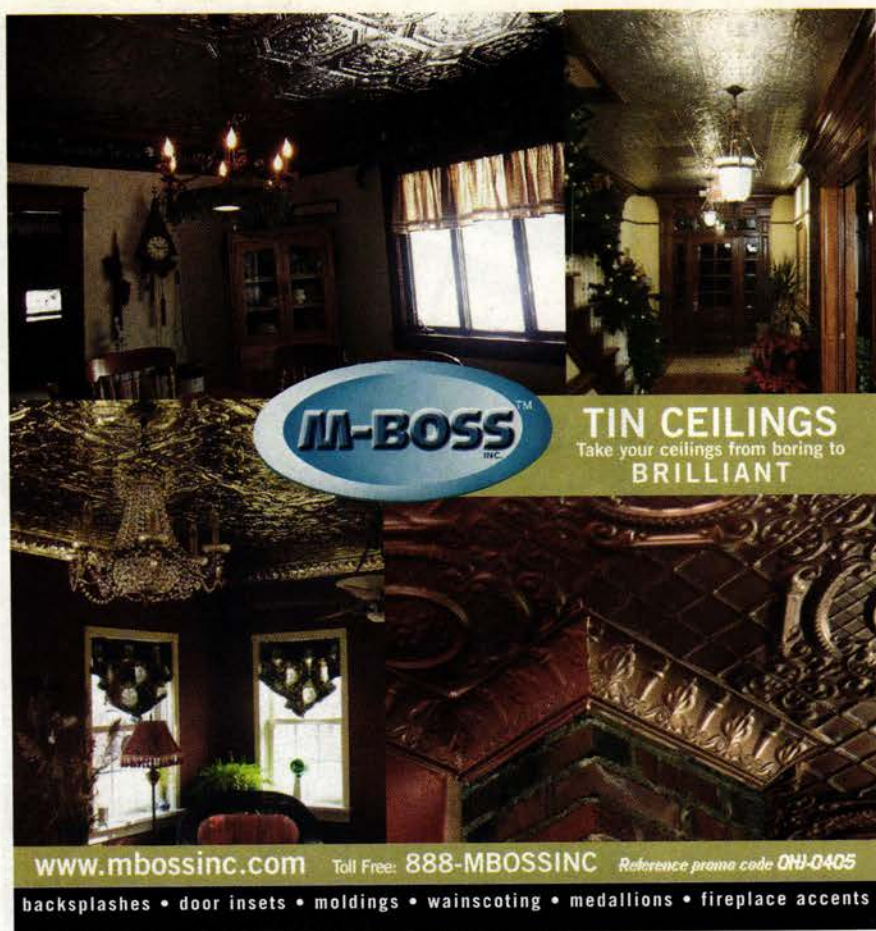
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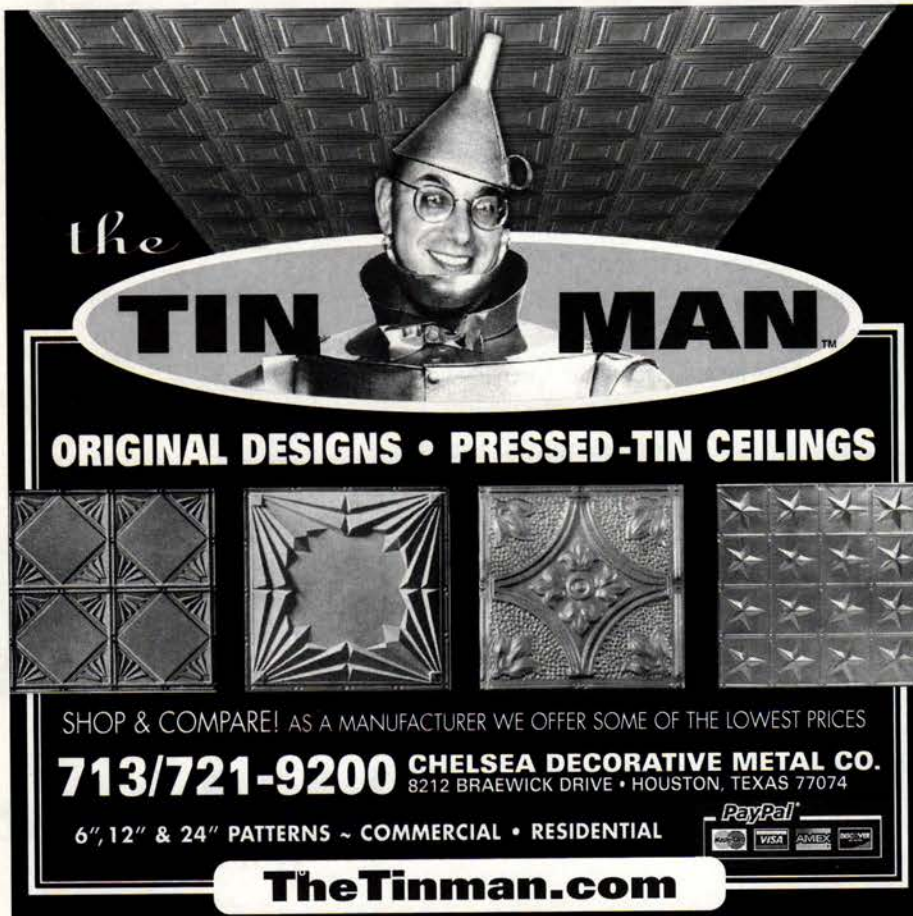
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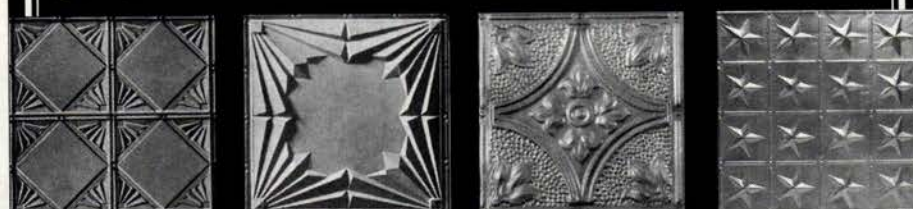
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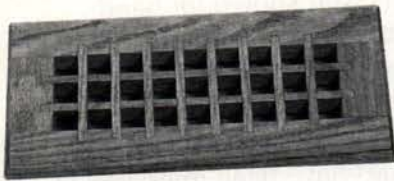
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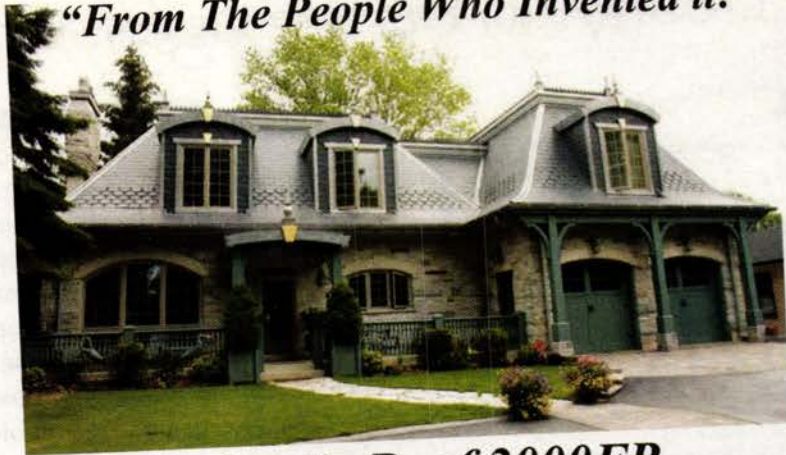
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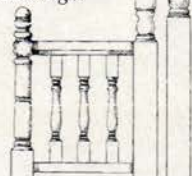
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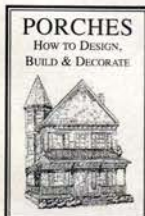
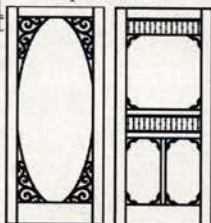
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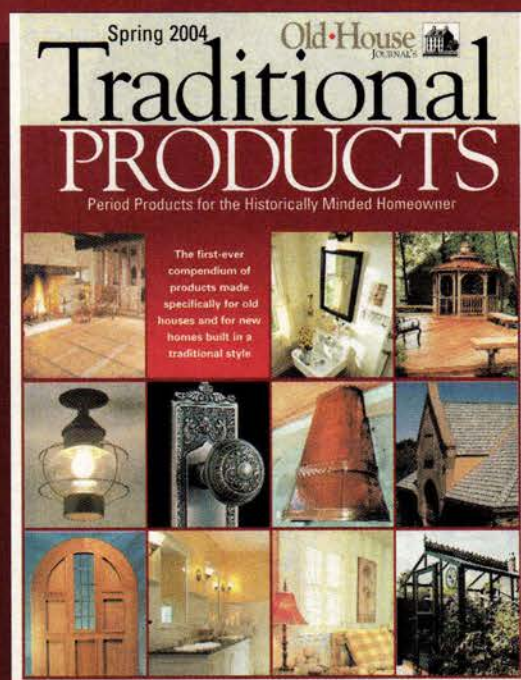
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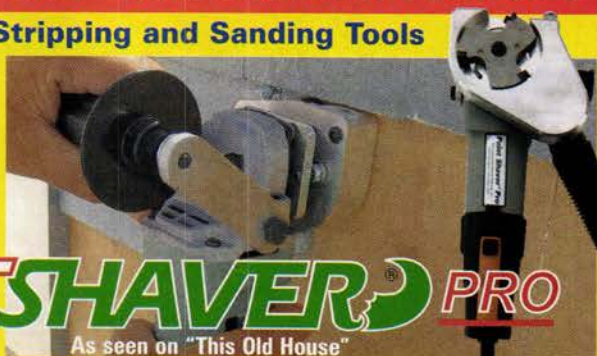
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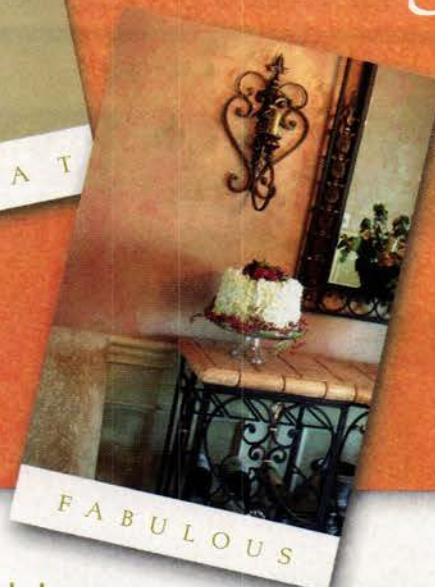
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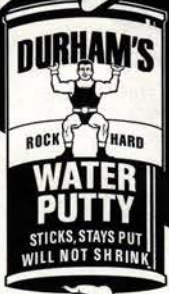
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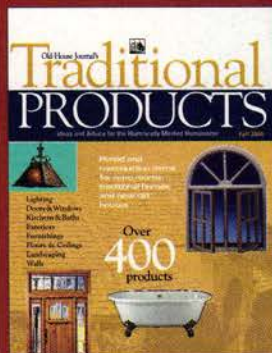


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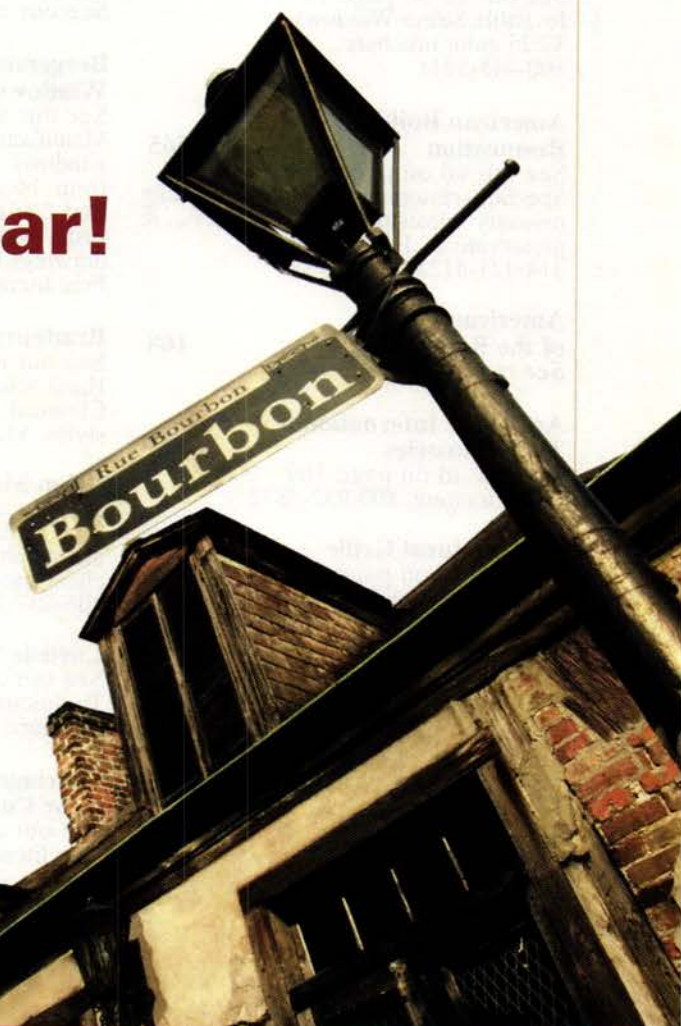
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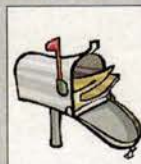
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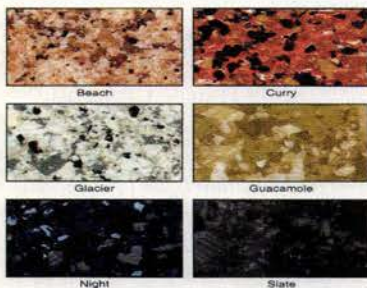
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WEST WINFIELD, NY—This 1900 architect designed house offers many desirable features including: paneled fireplace, huge front porch, 4 bedrooms, 2 1/2 baths, state of the art kitchen and wonderful gardens. An outstanding art studio of 2 stories w/living quarters makes this an ideal retreat. The studio is designed to accommodate large and heavy pieces w/an overhead trolley. \$350,000. Leatherstocking Realty. 607-547-9595. leatherstocking.net.



NEW TAZEVELL, TN—Well-preserved 1789 log home w/4 bedrooms, 1 bathroom nestled in Cumberland & Smoky Mountain foothills. 2 outbuilding, barn & 1-room log cabin. On 90 fenced & cross-fenced acres w/7 springs, creek & paved road frontage. \$350,000. United Country—1-800-999-1020, Ext 108. www.american-treasures.com/old American Treasures—a FULL COLOR magazine of older and historic properties for sale. Just \$3.95.



AMELIA COUNTY, VA—Winterham Plantation, circa 1855, built by John Garland Jefferson, cousin of Thomas Jefferson. Magnificently restored antebellum mansion. Just west of Richmond, 6000+ sq ft, 4-7 bedrooms, 5.5 baths, & 8 fireplaces. 6 porches and verandas overlooking pastures & 14-acre lake! Currently a B&B, this National Register and Virginia Landmark property offers endless possibilities! \$1,499,950. Hank Cosby, Hank Cosby Real Estate, 804-598-2875, www.HankCosby.com



CUMBERLAND COUNTY, VA—"West Hill", circa 1807 on Appomattox River. Main house has 3 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, central air, nearly 4000 sq. ft. living space w/11'5" ceilings, English basement, 7 nonworking fireplaces, 9-over-6 pane windows. Guest house w/3 bedrooms. Artist's studio. Near the future equestrian center of Southern VA. \$800,000 w/40 acres or \$3,300,000 w/550 acres. United Country Davenport Realty, 888-333-3972. Home #3780 at: www.davenport-realty.com

SPOTLIGHT HOUSE



CLARKSON, NY—Known as Whitehall, the Gordon Estate & Sagawa Residence, this 100 year-old 7564 sq.ft. Greek Revival Victorian is situated on 11 private acres, 25 minutes to Rochester. This outstanding property is a period showcase with interior columns, 9' ceilings & 5 expansive bedrooms & baths & 3rd floor servant's quarters. Large garage, in-ground pool & extensive gardens complete this distinctive offering. B&B, Conference Center or private home, this outstanding property awaits your inspection. \$750,000. **Mary Edwards, Danielle Windus-Cook Properties** 585-637-5810.



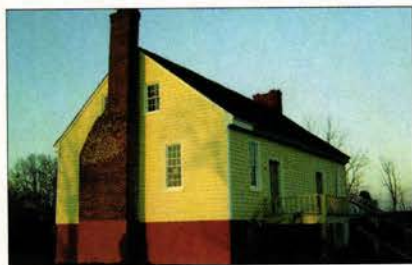
ESSEX, VA—"Hilton House" circa 1732 in charming Tappahannock, three blocks from Rappahannock River. Early woodwork, floors, mantels, 3 fireplaces, 4 bedrooms. Nice sized rooms w/high ceilings. New kitchen, furnace and air-conditioning. 23' x 11.5' sunroom, 2 full baths. First floor bedroom and family room. Half acre with carport, shed, & magnificent crepe myrtles. \$349,000 Dave Johnston "The Old House Man" 804-633-7123 or AntiqueProperties.com



HALIFAX COUNTY, VA—Circa 1940 home on 38-acre working farm. More land available. Several outbuildings. The house has over 1500 square ft. of living space, with 3 bedrooms. Quiet country road in rural Virginia \$200,000. For color brochure, 888-333-3972 (24 hours). United Country Davenport Realty, Keysville, VA. Floor plans & photos for Home #4060 at www.davenport-realty.com



POWHATAN, VA—Historic Courthope, circa 1809, lovingly restored French Huguenot country home w/Greek Revival elements. Just west of Richmond, close to James River and public boat landing, 2 acres w/pasture, old smokehouse, tool shed, workshop/garage. Exquisite original floors, mantels, doors, numerous porches and balcony overlooking scenic setting. 4 bedrooms, 3 1/2 baths, updated kitchen. \$349,950. Hank Cosby, Hank Cosby Real Estate, 804-598-2875, www.HankCosby.com



RED OAK, VA—Grandview, circa 1833 double pile frame house on 3.19 acres. Large kitchen with corner fireplace, parlor, dining and bedroom on 1st floor. Gabled roof without dormers with two refined bedchambers, each with its own stairway. 85% restored. 2 1/2 baths. New heating & cooling. Large walk-in fireplace in English basement. \$219,000. Max Sempowski, Realtor, Antique Properties. 434-391-4855. www.oldhouseproperties.com



REEDVILLE, VA—A "Summer Place", Or For Always! Excellent condition residence circa 1898-1917 in historic Reedville. Interesting water views from most rooms. First floor master suite w/fireplace, 3 guest bedrooms, family room w/fireplace, breakfast room, wetbar/utility, library, formal parlor, dining room. Enjoy 19th Century village life—walk to ice cream parlor, bank, restaurants! \$699,000. Port & Starboard Real Estate. realestate@port-starboard.com or 800-529-5071

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MELVILLE, NY—Beautiful circa 1853 center hall set on park-like 1.4 acres just 45 minutes from NYC. 3 bedrooms, 1 bath. Large living room, formal dining room, huge eat-in-kitchen restored w/original mantel, woodwork, windows and shutters. Original wide plank hardwood floors, 5 zone heat and 200-amp service are just a few of many amenities. Low taxes. Minutes from Long Island Expressway, Northern State Parkway and Route 110. A must see! \$869,000. Jennifer Grieshaber or Marin Bowe of Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate, 516-681-2600

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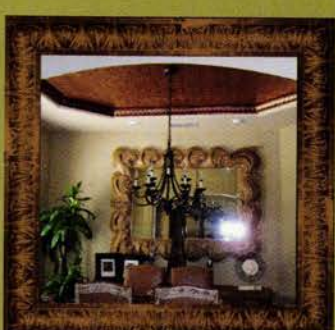
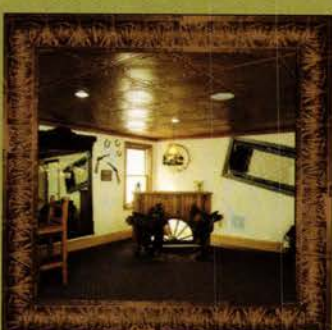
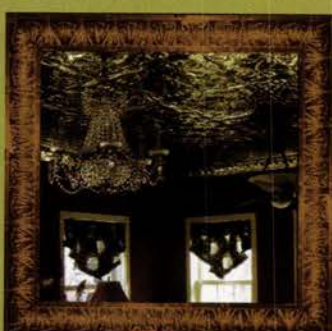
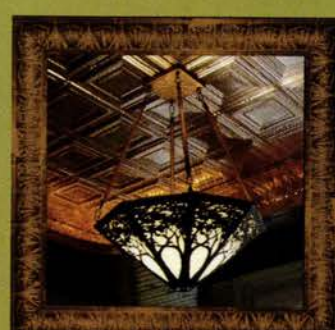
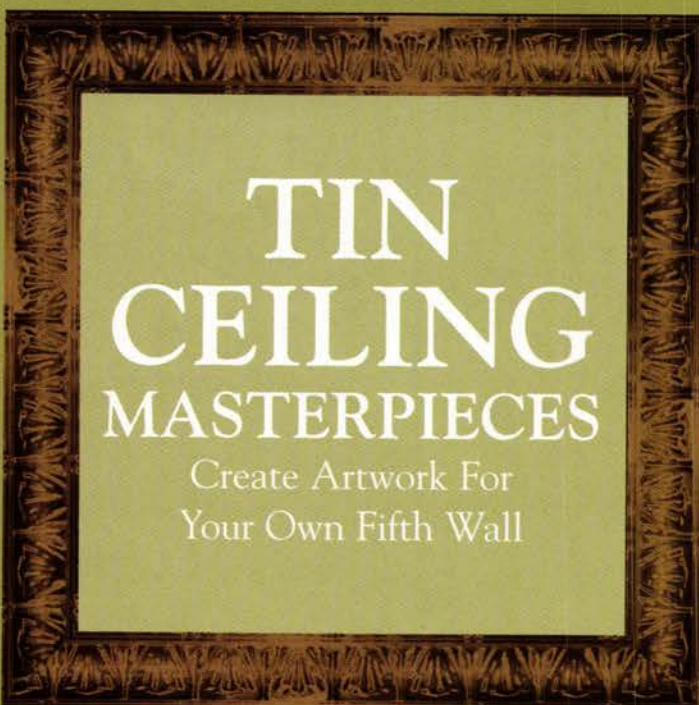
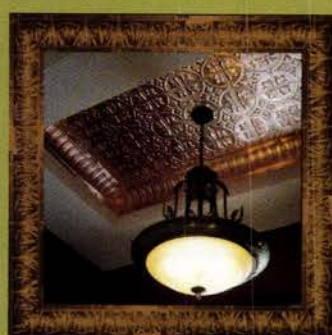


Thinking Inside the Box

No one denies that the homespun charm of a Foursquare lies in its utterly prosaic, boxy form, but that doesn't mean such a dwelling improves with increased cubage. Case in point is this Ohio house (above) that is now packaged by two-storey appendages at either side. Flat-roofed and dramatically different in massings and openings, these container-like constructions nearly engulf and obscure the plan of the original house, which might have once looked like the many other Foursquares in the same town (top). Time will tell if this signals the quiet end of an American building tradition, or merely the beginning of another.

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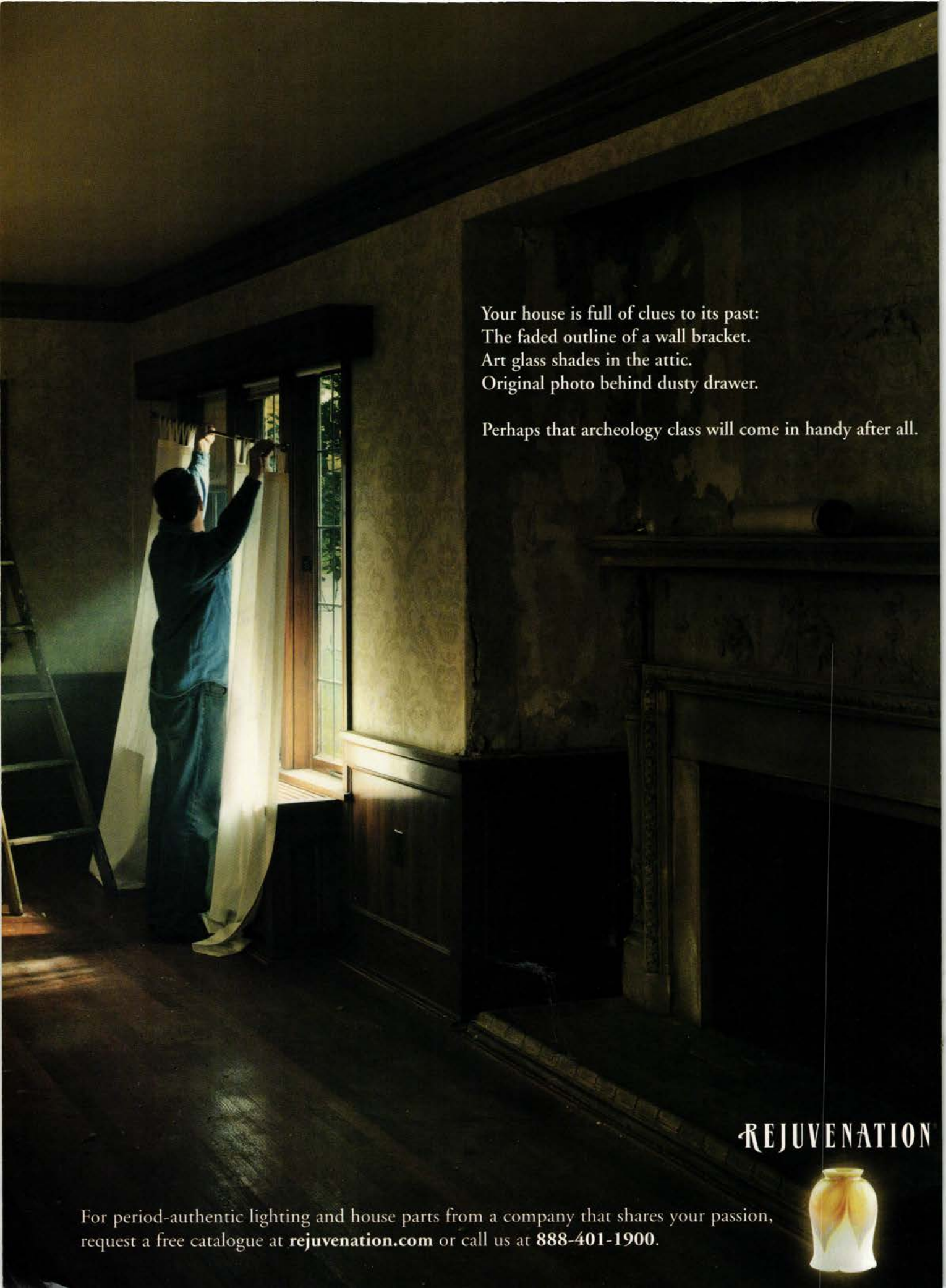
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