

THE ORIGINAL RESTORATION MAGAZINE

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# Old House JOURNAL

## Kitchen Classics

Cabinets in Context  
The Dope on Soapstone  
Retro Refrigerators

New

HOW-TO SECTION  
In Step with Interior  
Woodwork

Romantic Lights  
Buyer's Guide to 1920s  
Sconces and Lanterns

PLUS

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Revival Houses  
Roofing Q & A

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# Features

March/April 2007  
Volume 35/ Number 2  
Established 1973

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By Demetra Aposporos

Early designs of modular kitchen cabinets, which first appeared in the 1920s, can offer ideas for restoring a kitchen so that it is functional for the 21st century while retaining the look of years past.

## 44 Cold Comparisons

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The search for a period-appropriate refrigerator yields a surprisingly broad selection of options.

## 48 One Hot Rock

By Regina Cole

After a 50-year lull, soapstone is popular once more, garnering attention for its heat conductivity, longevity, and old-fashioned good looks.

## 54 Rooftop Clinic

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## 60 In Step with Wainscots

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## 62 Old-House Living: The Lustron Labyrinth

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## 66 When Evening Shadows Fall

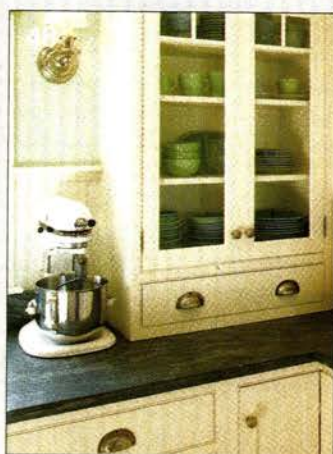
By John Crosby Freeman

When electric lighting began to mature after 1915, fixtures incorporated ideas from the past into the designs for sconces, chandeliers, and lanterns.

## 68 Style: The Changing Face of the Colonial Revival House

By James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell

Modeled on the early dwellings of a young nation, the versatile Colonial style came back into vogue with gusto in the 1920s and has dominated American suburbia ever since.



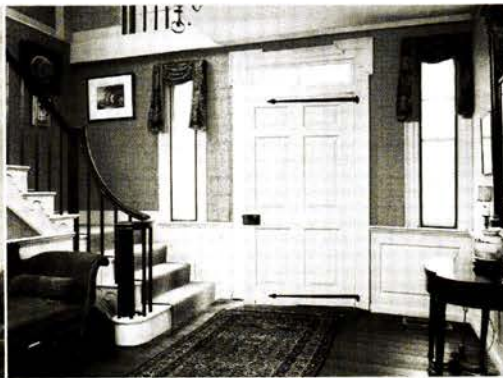
### ON THE COVER:

Herbs, earthenware jars, and comfortable seats share a cookstove's warmth in this country kitchen. Photo by Elizabeth Whiting & Associates/CORBIS.





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By Gordon Bock

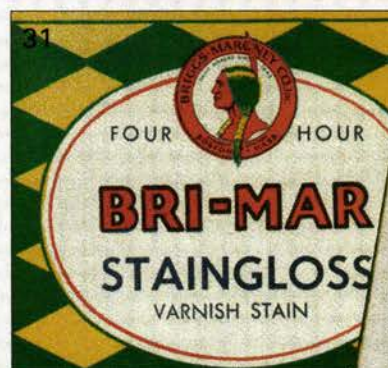
Two finishing techniques from the past, scraping and filling, help make wood floors look their best today.

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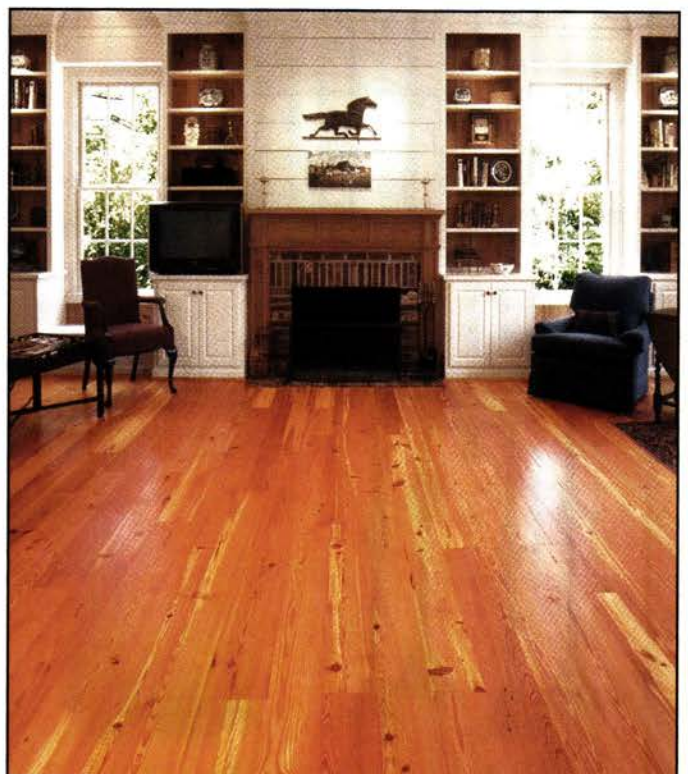
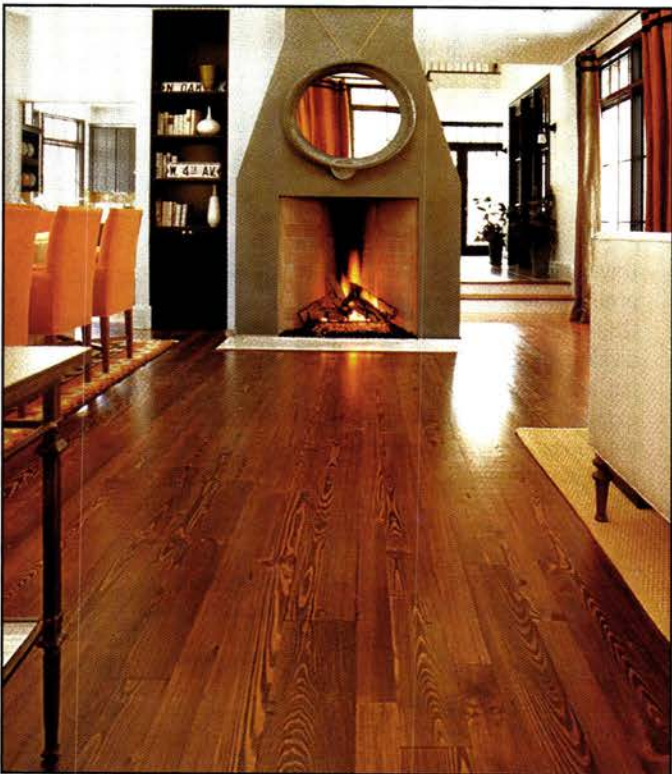
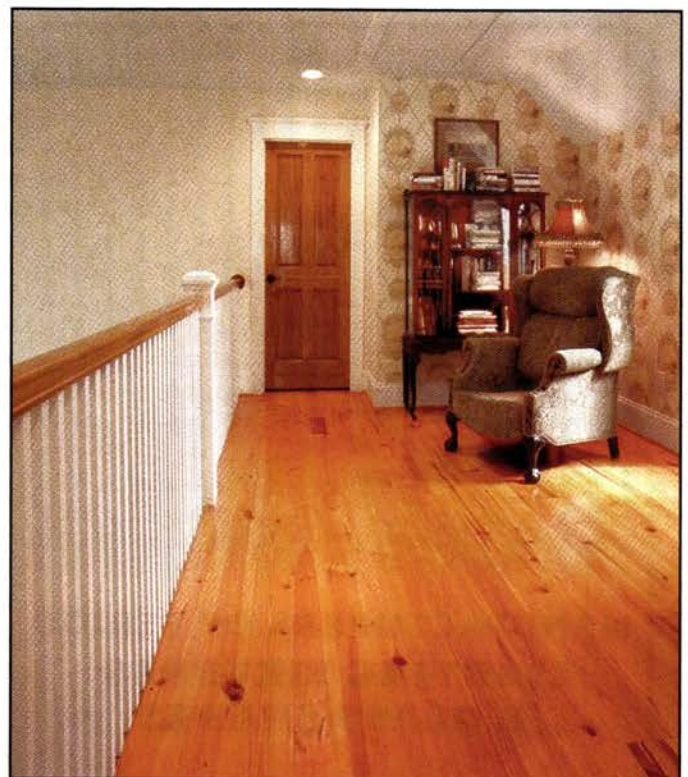
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### Cool Ways to Heat Old Houses

Your house is old and gorgeous, as are those wonderfully ornate cast-iron radiators, but these days energy prices are anything but old-fashioned. Go to the home page for new ways to conserve fuel without ruining the classic look of old radiators.

### Deco Lights the Way

When it comes to illuminating bathrooms of the 1930s and '40s, a little Moderne design goes a long way. Go to the home page for a look at the glories of Art Deco lighting.

### Talk

Have a question? Got a problem? Need advice? OHJ's bulletin boards, divided into six separate topics, are the perfect place to exchange information about old houses with fellow owners and enthusiasts.

### Period Homes

[www.period-homes.com](http://www.period-homes.com)

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## Uncommon Old-House Opportunities

You're already up to speed on the history of Lustron houses if you've been reading *Old-House Journal* for a while or seen this issue's Old-House Living article, starting on page 62. If you aren't, you'll be interested to learn that they're the prefabricated, enameled-steel houses promoted by industrialist Carl Strandlund in 1946 to ease the postwar housing crunch. Strandlund's company shipped more than 2,000 of the one-storey dwellings before the enterprise came to an end, with some 120 of them ordered by the Marine Corps for housing at their base in Quantico, Virginia.

Last year, we told OHJ readers about the Marine Corps' program to deaccession some of these buildings, and if you're reading this issue before March 1, 2007, there's still time to consider this opportunity again. The general guidelines are that a building is free for the taking to individuals who can show their ability to relocate and preserve it for their own use on their own property. However, like moving a house of any kind, the real trick isn't in acquiring the structure. In this case, there still remains the expense of constructing a foundation pad and then dismantling and reassembling the house, which has more than 30,000 pieces according to Michael Dowling of Clark Realty Capital, LLC, the lead developer for the project. Adds Dowling, "While the homes are free, the overall costs per building might be prohibitive to all but the most dedicated preservationists." To get the details on submitting a proposal, visit [www.lustronsatquantico.com](http://www.lustronsatquantico.com).

Folks further up the East Coast will be excited to know about a unique opportunity of another kind. Historic New England now offers a cutting-edge new program called Historic Homeowner as another level in its annual membership. Historic New England (formerly SPNEA) is the oldest and largest regional preservation organization in the country, with nearly a century of experience in caring for a world-class collection of historic properties. Now, through Historic Homeowner membership, old-house owners in New England and beyond can tap into the organization's expert staff for a wide range of advice and get input from mail-in consultation on historical paint colors to online assistance on technical questions. Membership also includes two electronic newsletters on historic-house maintenance and resource issues, as well as invitations to members-only historic-house workshops and events.

Historic New England has long been in the forefront when it comes to developing the methods widely used in building preservation today. The Historic Homeowner membership program is yet another example of how the group strives to preserve and expand our knowledge of the built environment. Old-house owners can learn more about joining by visiting [www.historichomeowner.org](http://www.historichomeowner.org).



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*Gordon Bock*

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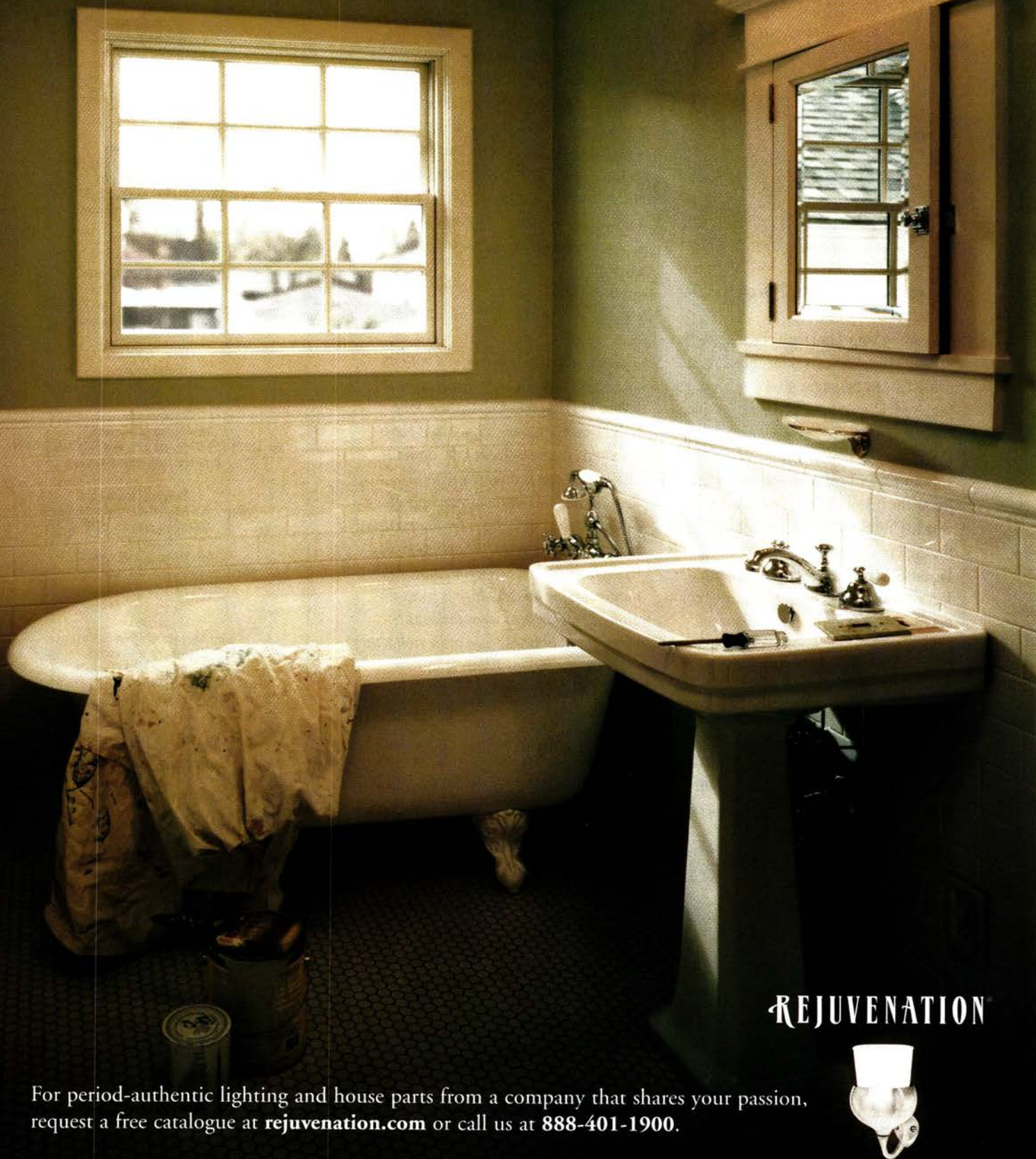


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## Tempest in a Peacock Room

In reading your January/February 2007 article "Dress Rehearsal for the Arts and Crafts," I saw on pages 40-41 the photo of James McNeill Whistler's Peacock Room, which I have visited at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

I wonder how many of your readers know the history of the Peacock Room, which Thomas Jeckyll originally designed for the London home of Frederick R. Leyland, a wealthy Liverpool shipbuilder. Jeckyll consulted Whistler on minor color details, as his painting of a Japanese princess would be prominently displayed in the room. Leyland approved some minor artistic changes, but while he was out of town and without permission, Whistler added extreme artistic flourishes to the room, including the peacocks. He then boldly invited visitors to tour the room in Leyland's absence. Leyland was not altogether pleased with Whistler's actions, and ultimately there was a showdown between the two over payment, after which Whistler never saw the room again. Amazingly, the room has been dismantled and moved three times.

Susan Nielsen  
Oak Park, Illinois

## Gothic Goof

As a subscriber since your three-ring binder days and with a passion for architectural history, imagine my delight at seeing a house from my hometown in your September/October 2006 article "What Goth Hath Wrought."

Unfortunately, the house pictured on page 82 was misidentified as the John B. Bibb house; instead, it belongs to my friend Margaret LaFontaine and was built in the 1860s by John W. Rodman. As luck would have it, an article about the real Bibb house appeared in our local paper this week. I am enclosing a picture for your reference.

Amanda Lange  
Frankfort, Kentucky

*A photo of the real Bibb house, with its three distinctive Gothic gables, appears below. This historic house, where John B. Bibb developed the lettuce that bears his name, is currently for sale. Built in 1857, the house is on the National Register and is a textbook example of Gothic Revival style, from the hand-carved scrolls on the bargeboards to the classic wrought ironwork. You'll find more information on the house, which is listed for around \$600,000, at [www.thekentuckytrust.org/BibbHouse.htm](http://www.thekentuckytrust.org/BibbHouse.htm) or by contacting the listing agent, Joe Johnson, at (502) 319-4754. —Eds.*

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whenever your magazine offers a new use for the foam that confirms something she thought I was a tad bit strange for attempting to do, she calls out, "Honey, you've got to hear this."

The one thing I have yet to read, though, is how to reuse a partially expended can, one with a hose that has become clogged from sitting too long, so I'd like to share a tip. I've found that a can of spray foam can be reused with a bendable straw (the Solo brand works best). All you have to do is snap off any excess dried foam on the outside and core out the hardened foam inside the attached nozzle by twisting into it a small screw (try not to puncture the inner seal). Then thread the straw, which can be cut to whatever length needed, onto the attached nozzle. If you have a straw that doesn't thread well, use electrical tape to wrap the attached straw shaft onto the nozzle.

When done, you'll have a new delivery tube with a nozzle capable of turning 180 degrees to spray hard-to-reach areas.

David Heckman  
Mechanicsburg, Ohio

## Old Windows Add Character

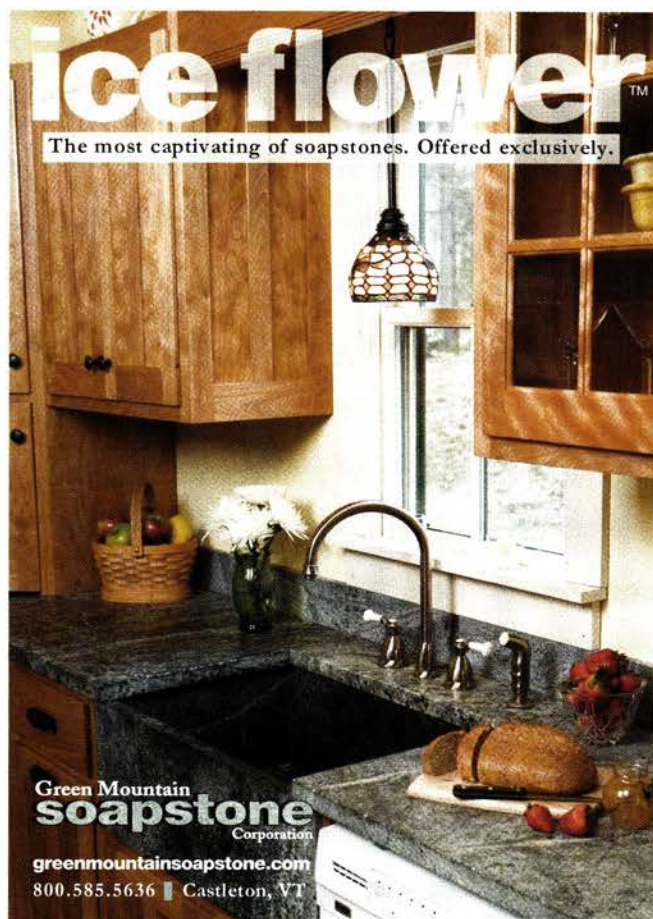
As a preservation consultant and advocate, I truly appreciated the article "The State of Old-House Real Estate" in the November/December 2006 issue. It is a topic I discuss with current and potential clients often. As president of the Michigan Historic Preservation Network, which published a 2001 study on the economic benefits of preservation in Michigan, I am familiar with the concept. I did, however, take issue with the graphic titled "Biggest Bang for Your Restoration Buck." Of the four items illustrated, the last was window

replacement, which is clearly neither restoration nor rehabilitation.

Original windows make up an important character-defining feature of any building. Replacement is not a decision to be made lightly. In addition, when original windows are well-maintained and used with appropriate storms, their energy efficiency can match and sometimes surpass that of replacement windows.

Pamela Hall O'Connor, President  
Michigan Historic Preservation Network  
and Preservation Practices  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

**Correction:** The Hensley Historic District in San Jose, California, was misidentified as the Hensley Park Historic District in the "State of Old-House Real Estate" in the November/December 2006 issue. We regret the error.

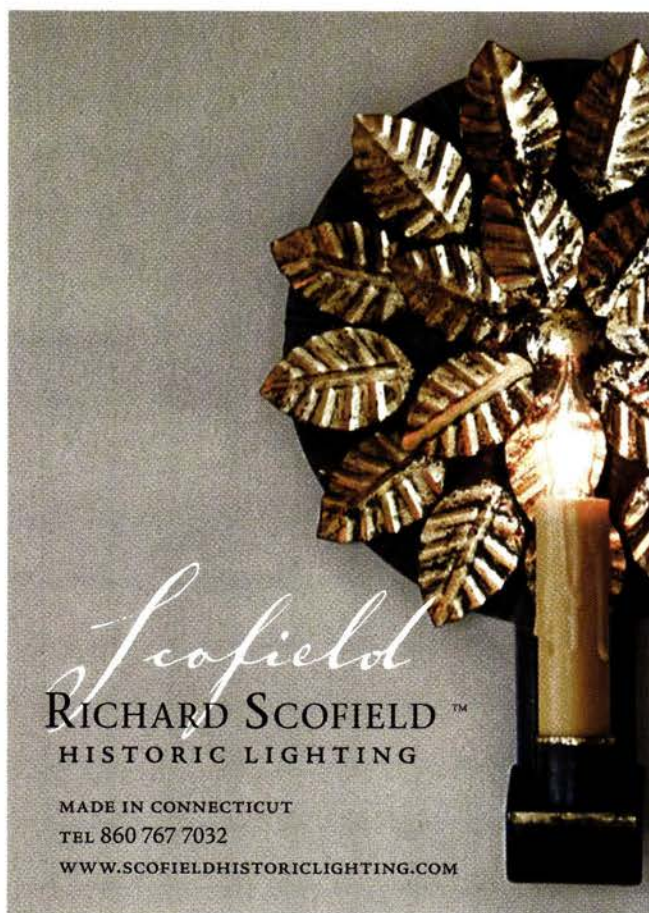


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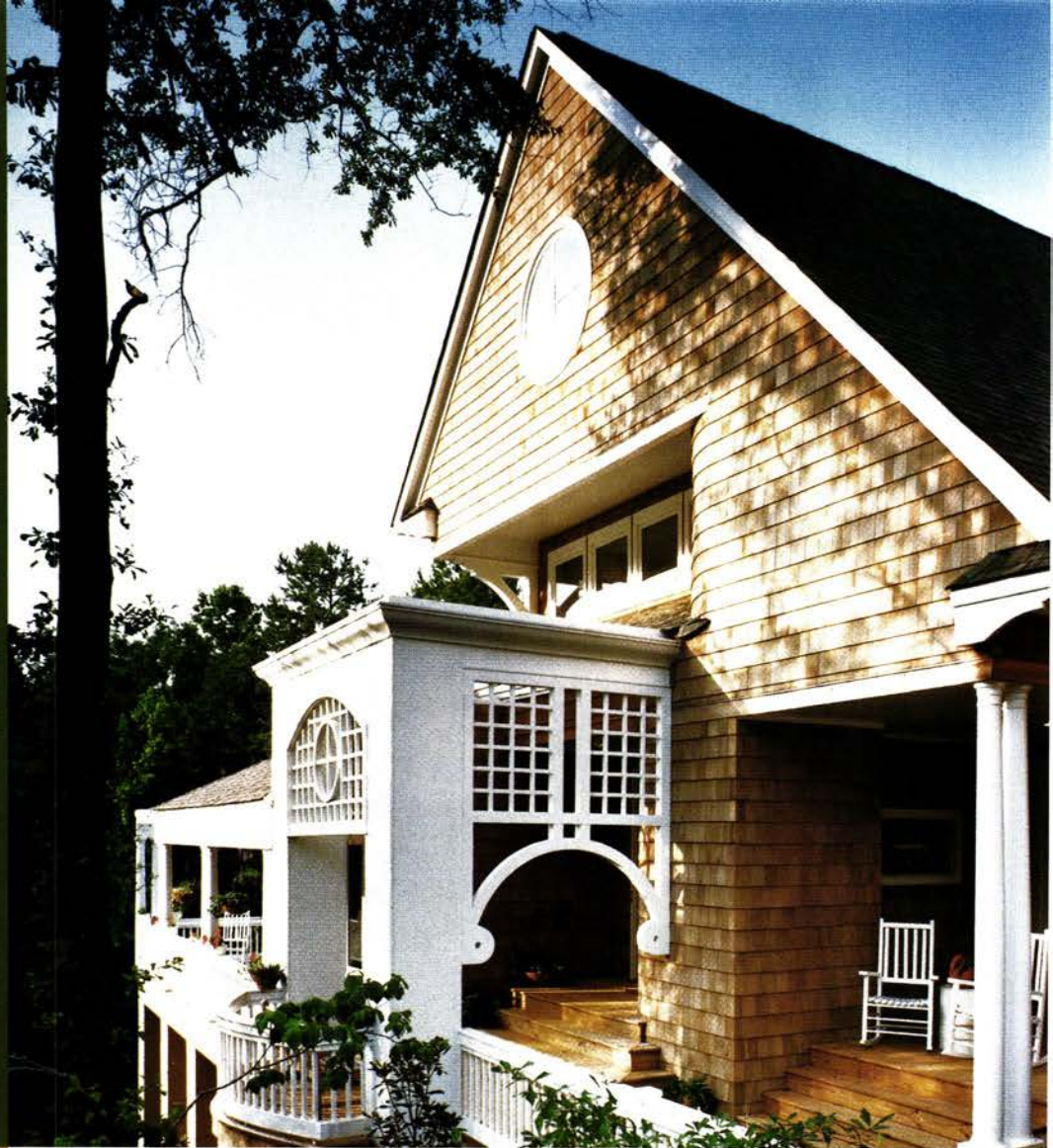
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## Calendar

March 3-May 27

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### Frank Lloyd Wright and the House Beautiful

This traveling exhibit, which began touring last year, compiles drawings, furniture, and textiles designed by the famous architect from both public and private collections. Wall panels display period and recent photographs of Wright interiors. For details, including the dates and cities where the exhibit will appear next, visit [www.franklloydwright.org](http://www.franklloydwright.org).

March 9-11

LEXINGTON, KY

### Antiques and Garden Show

Benefiting the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation, this show, now in its 10th year, features more than 50 antiques dealers, guest speaker luncheons, complimentary lectures, and a 7,000-square-foot garden tent showcasing the work of landscape architects.

Admission: \$10 daily or \$15 for a weekend pass. For details, see [www.bluegrasstrust.org](http://www.bluegrasstrust.org), or call (859) 253-0362.

March 15-17

CHARLESTON, SC

### Building Arts Festival

The American College of the Building Arts presents this festival to showcase the skills of master artisans in the building trades. Methods borrow from both traditional and contemporary techniques and tools. Admission: free. For more information, visit [www.buildingartscollege.us](http://www.buildingartscollege.us).

## Day Camps Nurture Budding Historic Preservationists

As a way to instill in kids a love of history and old buildings, historic-house museums are reaching out to some of their youngest visitors with weeklong summer day camps held on the premises. The summer camps, many of which were introduced within the past five years, also help dispel the notion that house museums aren't kid friendly. Only 29% of families with children showed an interest in visiting historic houses, according to a 2006 survey by research firms, Synovate and DataPath Systems, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

By using historic properties as educational tools, the day camps incorporate a mixture of archaeology, history, architecture, and preservation into their activities. At the



COURTESY OF AMHERST MUSEUM

In a summer day camp at the Amherst Museum, children learn about architecture by touring historic buildings.

Wilton House in Richmond, Virginia, for instance, children ages 7 to 11 tour the entire 18th-century plantation, learning how people lived, what they ate, and why the

house looks the way it does. "We talk about what makes it Georgian and how that's different from other architectural styles," says Wilton House museum director,

**Amherst Museum** ([www.amherstmuseum.org](http://www.amherstmuseum.org); 716-689-1440). July 16-20 for ages 8 to 12. A different camp theme is adopted each year on this 35-acre site with 12 historic buildings in Amherst, New York. Previous themes included archaeology, architecture, and 19th-century transportation. Cost: \$125.

**Clermont** ([www.friendsofclermont.org](http://www.friendsofclermont.org); 518-537-4240). August 13-17 for ages 11 to 14. The house's curatorial, horticultural, and research staff take kids behind the scenes of this mansion in Germantown, New York. Clermont also offers a day camp for elementary-school-age kids, 11 and younger, August 6-10. Cost: \$110.

**Herman-Grima and Gallier Historic Houses** ([www.hggh.org](http://www.hggh.org); 504-525-5661). July 30-August 3 for ages 9 to 12. In addition to tours of both 19th-century houses, activities are built around archaeology, art, and the architecture of the French Quarter in New Orleans. Cost: \$200.

**Old World Wisconsin** ([www.wisconsinhistory.org/oww](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/oww); 262-594-6300). Three sessions offered: June 26-28, July 17-19, and August 14-16 for ages 12 to 15. The docent apprenticeship camp is held on a 600-acre site with 57 restored buildings dating from 1848 to 1919. Various day camps for younger children are also offered. Cost: \$90, for apprenticeship camp only.

**Wilton House** ([www.wiltonhousemuseum.org](http://www.wiltonhousemuseum.org); 804-282-5936, ext. 2). Two sessions offered: July 23-27 and August 13-17, both for ages 7 to 11. Besides touring the entire plantation and a nearby historic church, kids discover what it was like to live in the 18th century. Cost: \$125.



## Calendar

April 8  
OAKLAND, CA  
**Easter Egg Hunt at Dunsmuir**  
Enjoy egg hunts, egg decorating, and traditional games on the grounds of this Neoclassical Revival mansion. Admission: adults, \$5; children 11 and older, \$4; children ages 4-10, \$1; and children under 4, free. For more information, visit [www.dunsmuir.org](http://www.dunsmuir.org).

April 25-29  
MOBILE, AL  
**Victorian Society Annual Meeting**  
This historic port is the setting for the 41st annual meeting of the Victorian Society in America. The meeting includes museum visits and tours of local churches, public buildings, and mansions that epitomize the region's 19th-century social and architectural history. For details, see [www.victoriansociety.org](http://www.victoriansociety.org), or call (215) 545-8340.

April 28  
CLEVELAND, OH  
**Cleveland Restoration Society Gala**  
Proceeds from this evening gala at Moreland Courts—a 1920s apartment development highlighting English architecture—benefit the Cleveland Restoration Society. The apartments are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Tickets: \$175. For more information, visit [www.clevelandrestoration.org](http://www.clevelandrestoration.org), or call (216) 426-1000.

Dana Hand Evans.

Activities get more sophisticated as the kids get older. Campers ages 11 to 14 at Clermont, an 18th-century New York mansion, design miniature period rooms for one activity and on the last day, put on a play about past residents. Teenagers are a harder sell, but Old World Wisconsin offers a three-day

camp for kids ages 12 to 15 that trains them to become junior docents. After spending three days learning about site interpretation, history, and building materials, the campers play tour guide on the final day. "We have them fully dressed in period clothing and working in a building along with the staff, answering questions from the

public," says Joe Monarski, education coordinator for Old World Wisconsin.

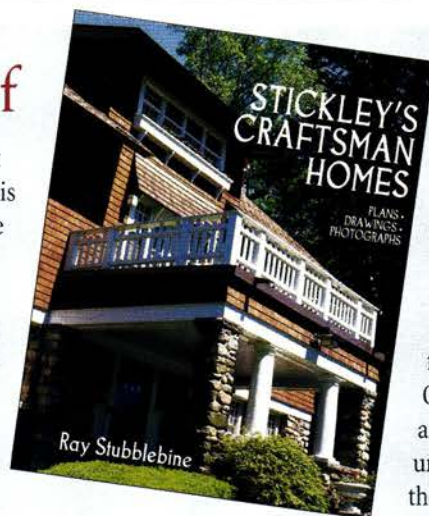
House museums typically offer camp sessions only one or two weeks during the summer, and most cap the number of kids at fewer than 30. Even though summer is months away, spaces—like those at all summer camps—fill up fast.

## Books in Brief

Exactly a century after he first rose to fame, Gustav Stickley and his meteoric Arts & Crafts empire have become the stuff of legend. Yet, within the saga of a backwater woodworker, who metamorphosed into a progressive furnishings purveyor, magazine publisher, and lifestyle proponent all before World War I, lie another tale and a mystery: Where are the houses erected from Stickley's equally short-lived and influential mail-order designs?

Though illustrations of the plans Stickley sold from 1904 to 1916 through his magazine *The Craftsman* have tantalized Arts & Crafts devotees for years, the opportunity to see built versions of these often innovative houses has been elusive—until now. Ray Stubblebine, a photojournalist and longtime Stickley scholar, has put two decades' worth of research into print in the form of *Stickley's Craftsman Homes*, the first book to exclusively explore the subject.

Stubblebine's inspiration for documenting executed Stickley plans dates to 1984, when he and his wife, Ula, already pioneer Stickley furniture collectors, fell in love with a 1911 brick house in the metropolitan suburbs of New Jersey. Much to their amazement, in the course of restoring the house, they learned it was built from plan 104. From here the quest was on, and since then Stubblebine has been criss-crossing the con-



tinental following sketchy historic evidence, as well as word-of-mouth leads from the Arts & Crafts network and his own uncanny recall of the Stickley oeuvre, in an architectural

treasure hunt from Maine to Alaska.

The fruits of this field research, presented in brief in a 1996 OHJ article and now in a 563-page book, are as remarkable as they are exhaustive. There are beautiful contemporary color photographs of Craftsman houses standing in Oregon, Kentucky, New York, and Quebec, as well as archival drawings and floor plans for nearly all 211 known Stickley designs.

Perhaps most fascinating is the wealth of background information on Stickley's ambitious enterprise and the many individual plans woven through each section, such as the early views Stubblebine has discovered of exteriors and interiors, even portraits of the people who built them. A welcome addition to the Arts & Crafts canon as well as an enjoyable read, *Stickley's Craftsman Homes* is destined to be the definitive reference for many moons to come. 🏠

—Gordon Bock



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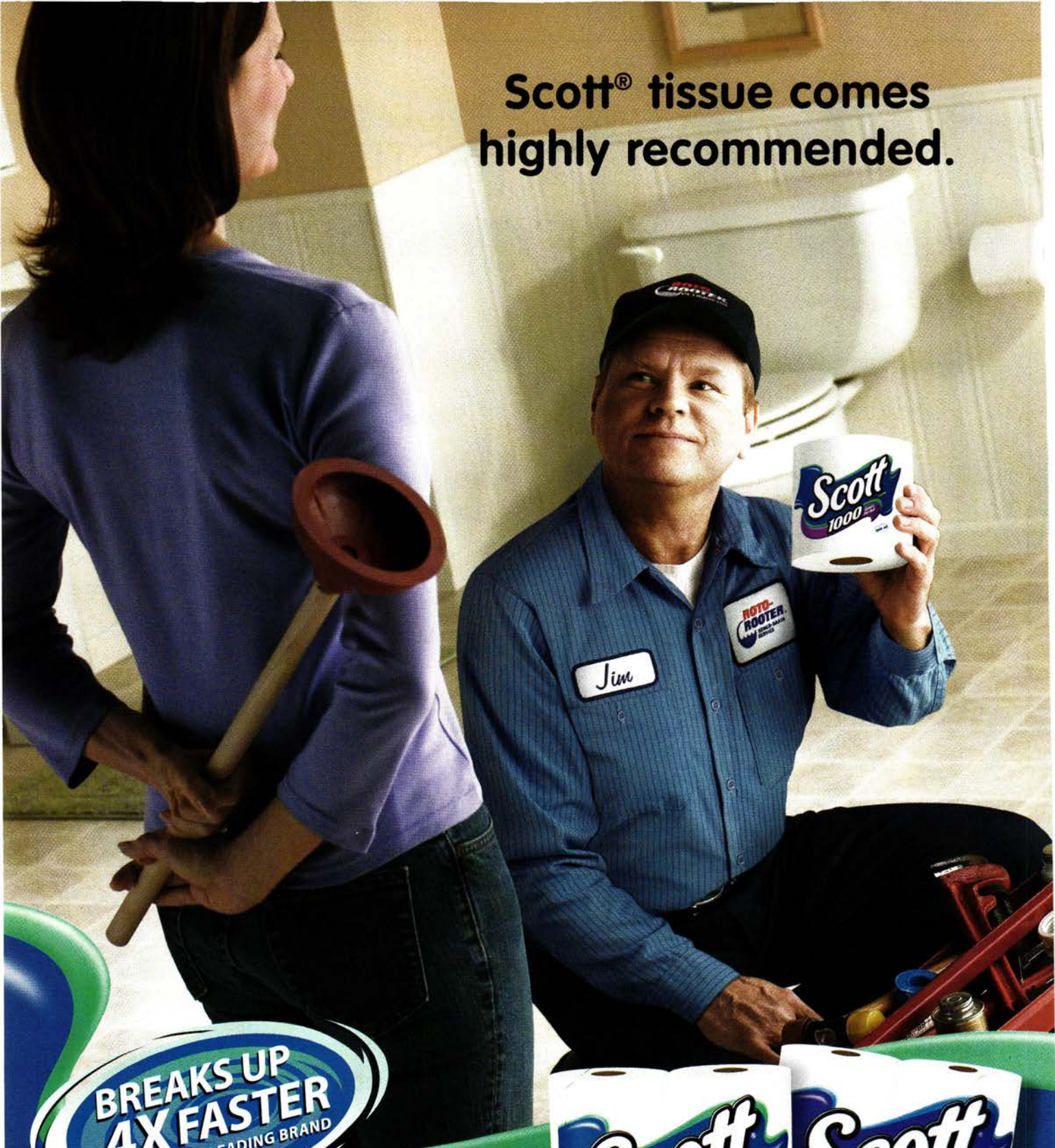
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## Cape Conundrum

Our Cape Cod house, which dates to 1820 as near as we can tell, seems rather early to have been built in the Greek Revival style here on the Maine coast. What do you think?

*Tod Brown*

*Warren, Maine*

Though there's no question that the Greek Revival style caught on big for houses in the 1830s, propelled in no small way by the plan books of Asher Benjamin and Minard Lefever, landmark examples of the style were being built much earlier. William Strickland's public buildings in Philadelphia, such as the Bank of the United States (1818), were among the first to draw upon this temple architecture vocabulary and received wide notice in a young America. Coastal Maine may seem a long way from urban Philadelphia today, but 200 years ago both were prime shipping areas in a nation connected by water, with an active commerce in ideas as well as goods.



Even the modest proportions of this full Cape Cod house exhibit Greek Revival styling in the corner pilasters, wide frieze board, and sidelighted entrance.

More likely, however, is the possibility that your house was built a little later, or even more likely, that it was updated with Greek Revival details—principally, the frieze board under the eaves, the pilaster boards at the corners, and the sidelights and transom window that define the entrance. Because you have evidence the el at right was originally a barn and later moved onto the house, that sketches a common scenario for farmhouses in your area. Starting in the 1850s,

many Maine farmers sought to increase the efficiency of their operations by hitching farmstead structures of all sorts to the main house to create what are called connected farm buildings, a phenomenon lucidly explored in the classic study *Big House, Small House, Back House, Barn* by Thomas Hubka. The practice is concurrent with the height of Greek Revival's popularity and would have been a natural time to give your cape a complete Greek makeover.

## Tub of Mysteries

I've restored old houses for decades and have never seen a fixture like this one in a grand 1912 house. Is it a bidet or a kid's bathtub?

*Brian Black*

*Grand Rapids, Michigan*

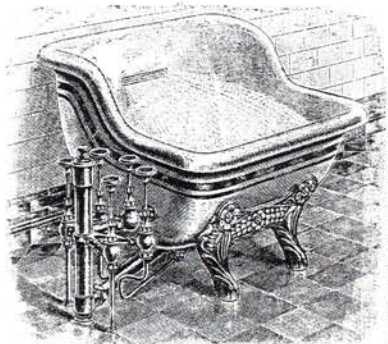
You're close. Judging by the raised rim along the back of the tub, and especially the perforated plate just below it, what you're looking at is a sitz bath. These fixtures were common in plumbing-parts catalogs by 1900, though far from necessary in an era when the average house was considered well-appointed with one bathroom containing a tub, lavatory, and commode. Along with needle

showers and foot baths, sitz baths were just one of several specialized bathing devices in high-end bathrooms of the early 20th

century designed for hygienic-therapeutic use (as well as to appeal to a taste for luxury technology). Made in both solid porcelain and vitreous enameled versions, they had a variety of applications, including that of a bidet. A 28-inch porcelain-lined sitz tub with decorated exterior and nickel-plated fitting could sell for as much as \$91 in 1902, nearly twice the price of a comparable six-foot bathtub.



The perforated plate on the back of this 1912 sitz bath (left) is the outlet for a back wave spray, one of several sprays designed for hygienic or therapeutic purposes.



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## Ask OHJ

# Baseline Baseboard Carpentry

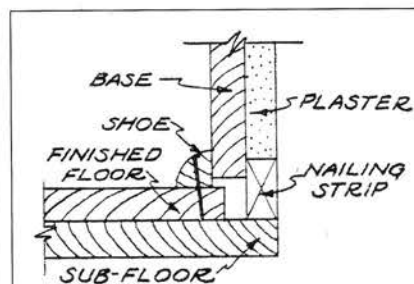
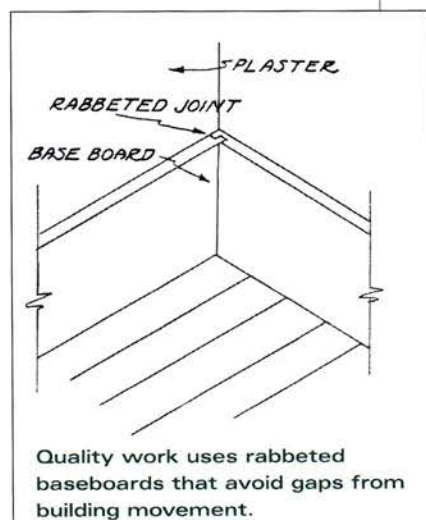
In our 1930s house, I can't seem to pry the baseboards loose at the inside corners. Aren't they just butted together?

*Mike Manger*

*Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey*

It all depends upon the quality of the carpentry in your house. In unsophisticated or rural buildings, you certainly may find baseboards or other flat trim butted together with the squared-cut ends of the boards simply placed at right angles to make a corner. But this method tends to show gaps as the building moves and ages. Adding nails to the joint won't help, and cutting the boards in 45-degree miters (the method used for outside corners) is time-consuming and not much more effective. However, a good carpentry practice common by the early 20th century was to make a rabbet joint where one baseboard is formed with a tongue that slides into a slot in the mating board. This method creates a joint that stays snug regardless of how the building moves.

Speaking of movement, you may find that the base shoe moulding at the bottom of the baseboards was nailed down in different ways depending upon who did the work. While an amateur might logically nail the base shoe to the baseboard, in practice it is nailed to the floor so that the moulding moves with the floor, always concealing the bottom of the baseboard. Where



possible, some carpenters would nail past the floor into the subfloor so that both flooring and baseboard could move independently of the shoe moulding.



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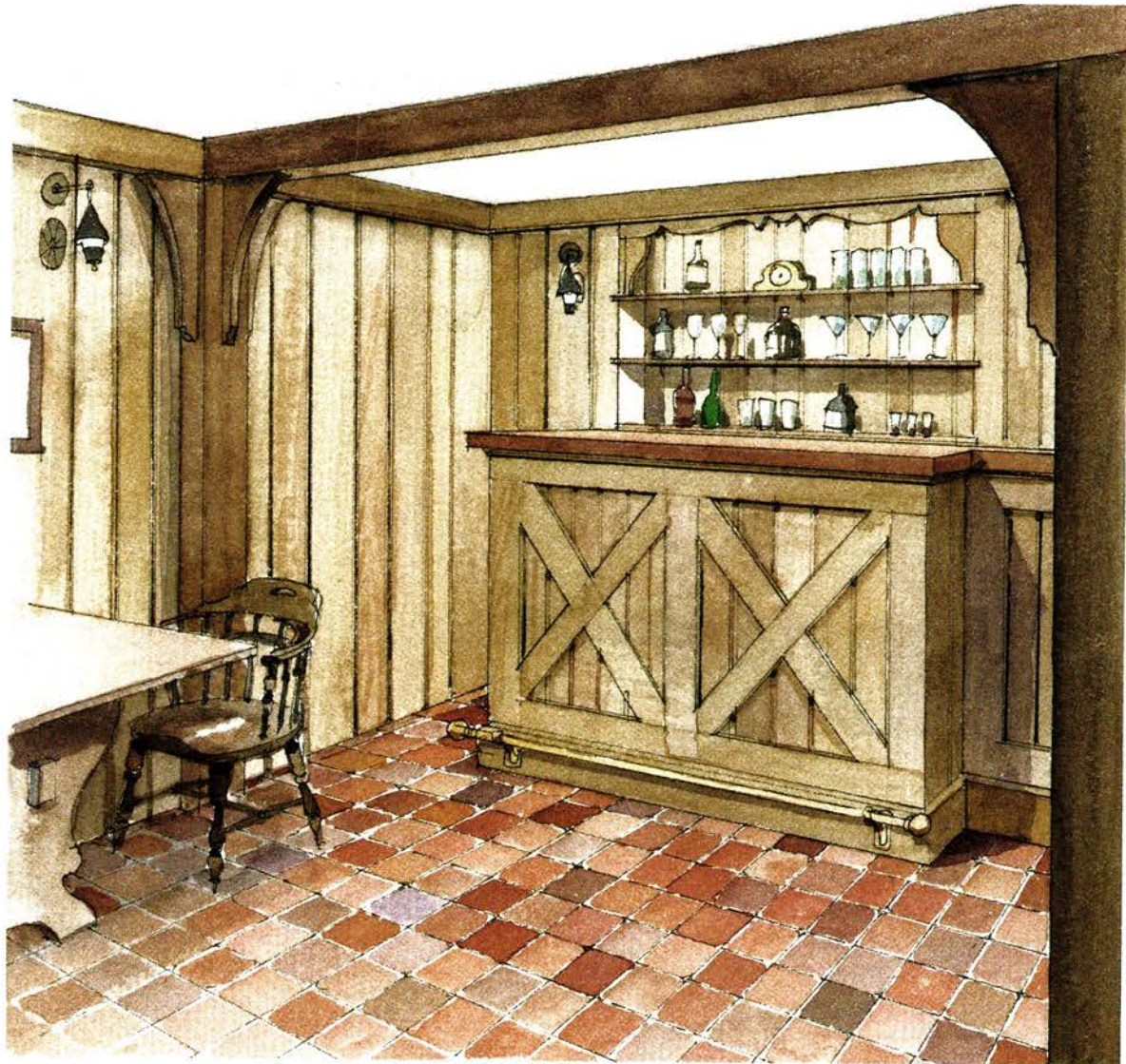
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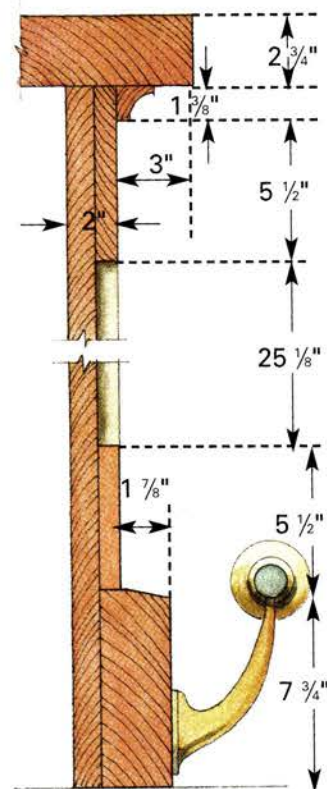
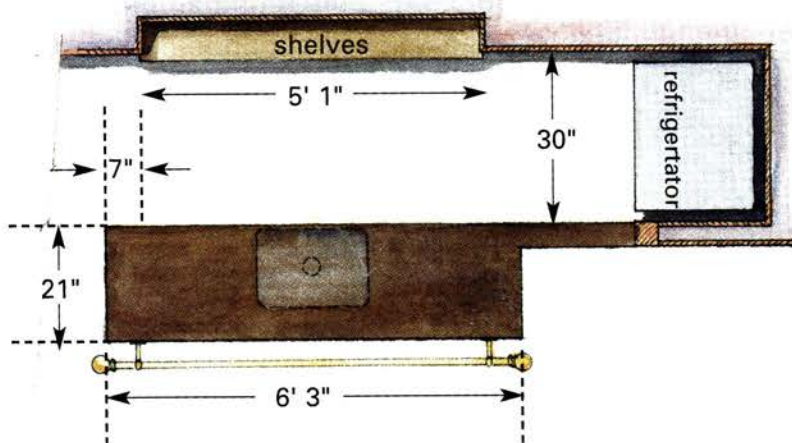
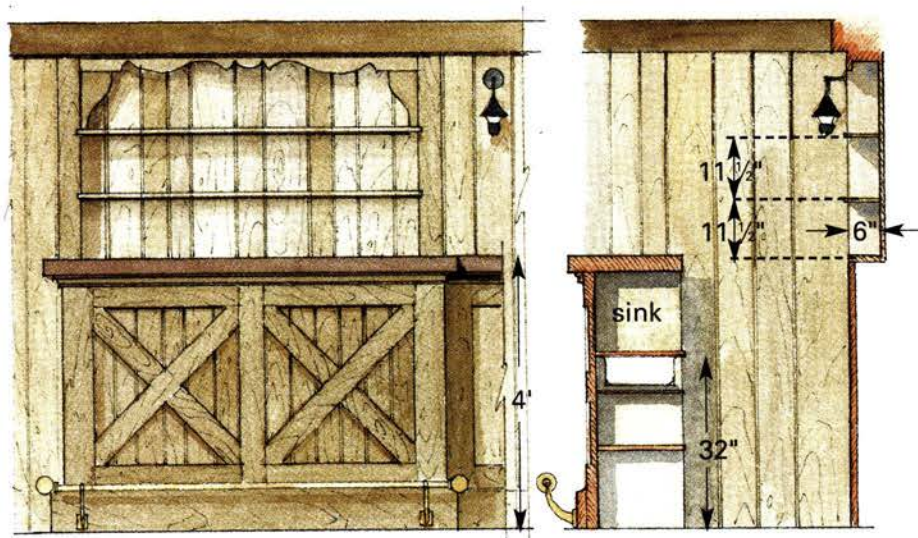
# Residential Tap Room

DRAWINGS BY ROBERT LEANNA



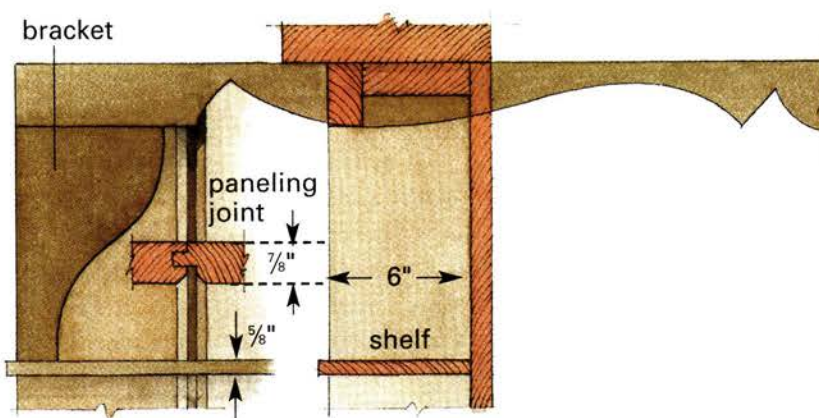
While there's no question that the Great Depression put the brakes on much house construction, contrary to popular belief it did not bring house design to a complete halt. By the early 1930s, programs sponsored by industry and the federal government encouraged architects and draftsmen to turn their T-squares to details, such as this private tap room, which might drum up a remodeling job in the absence of a commission for an entire building. Though the tap room is hard to pin down architecturally, the cross-buck motif fronting the bar, the decorated beams and valence, and the board paneling used to build them are typical of the Early American styling that came into vogue during this era and remained popular for many kinds of houses well into the 1950s and '60s.





bar section

Key to the design is the wood paneling—vertical, V-jointed boards of 1" nominal thickness laid up in random widths. The paneling not only finishes the walls and the surface of the recessed shelves behind the bar, but also, when combined with the board cross-bucks, it comprises the front of the bar. (Additional framing would be necessary to support the sink under the bar counter and any other appliances or features.) As designed, the bar counter is a wood slab roughly 3" thick, and an equally hefty plank makes up the baseboard supporting the brass foot rail. The recommended species for all this woodwork was cypress, filled and stained to a dull finish, but pine would be an equally attractive choice. ■



part elevation of back bar



our lawn and  
our newspaper."

- member report #12737

got some  
very envious  
neighbors."

- member report #1456

On time.  
Both times."

- member report #5678

was a miracle  
worker..."

- member report #10100

is in good  
hands."

- member report #47872

a great job...  
when they  
show up."

- member report #12342

while a gre

- member

"Their  
reputation is  
as spotless as  
their work."

- member report #5178

"He's a  
cat hater."

- member report #11222

"Don't  
expect him to  
negotiate."

- member report #3462

"No pressure.  
Just honest and  
professional."

- member report #4160

"...the price was  
excellent given  
the detail  
involved..."

- member report #11454

"It's a shame  
we only see him  
when something  
breaks."

- member report #8165

"The  
came  
ove  
estir

- member

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"He respected  
my time, opinion  
and privacy."

- member report #1313

"Absolutely  
outstanding."

- member report #2011

"...a c  
like th  
rare

- member

"There  
was a very  
hard language  
barrier..."

- member report #4567

"Went to small  
claims court –  
we won."

- member report #1099

"T  
excee  
expect

- member

"...it was also  
tough to get  
the deposit  
back."

- member report #2636

"...they were  
Johnny on  
the spot..."

- member report #7477

"I can't believe  
how great it  
looks and how  
inexpensive  
it was."

- member report #9273

"They did it  
in just a couple  
of days."

- member report #13772

"They will help  
you lift things  
out of your car  
and so on."

- member report #12222

"...not the  
electrician to  
call if you  
have pets."

- member report #1313

"I nev  
rushed  
a dec

- member

"Grandpa did  
the estimate...  
Pa and son did  
the work."

- member report #5789

"I had to hire  
someone else  
to redo half  
the job."

- member report #10232

"They were  
here two hours  
and charged  
me \$840."

- member report #9323

"...make sure  
you ask for the  
discount..."

- member report #11357

"We waited  
almost two  
weeks for our  
appointment"

- member report #6783

"He treated  
my house like it  
was his own!"

- member report #4592

"...eve  
corn  
bump  
the

- member

"...he couldn't  
have been more  
disinterested  
in the job..."

- member report #31257

"These  
employees love  
what they do  
and it shows."

- member report #6942

"A fence  
even a neighbor  
could love..."

- member report #10101

"We kicked  
them out before  
something else  
happened."

- member report #3425

"I wish every  
home project  
would go this  
smoothly."

- member report #2319

"My wife  
wanted him to  
stay for dinner."

- member report #17852

"T  
prefe  
commu  
oi

- member

"I offered to pay  
him something  
additional, but  
he refused."

- member report #6543

"They never  
showed up and  
never called..."

- member report #8765

"They  
worked like  
bees and did an  
excellent job!"

- member report # 7371

"What a mess!"

- member report #1737

"...clean shaven  
and most  
professional  
looking..."

- member report #2737

"Made me feel  
like I was their  
only client."

- member report #9832

"No  
how  
job is  
still

- member

"Got the  
response  
'I don't know'  
a lot."

- member report #15672

"...quote was  
reasonable and  
the actual price  
was lower."

- member report #6479

"The workers  
were an hour  
late, but did  
great work."

- member report #8900

"They  
were friendly,  
and even let  
my daughter  
pretend to  
help."

- member report #31455

"...destroyed  
part of my lawn  
by leaving  
equipment  
on it..."

- member report #8721

"He understood  
because he has  
kids of his own!"

- member report #6521

"Show  
kid fr

- member

"A first  
class job by first

"...the whole  
place turned  
out just the way

"The end result  
was first rate—  
cosmetically

"...great quality  
and attention

"She did  
not charge  
because she

"...he even  
helped me  
with a 'word

"At le  
providi



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## Down to the Finish

**Two finishing techniques of the past, scraping and filling, help make wood floors look their best today.**

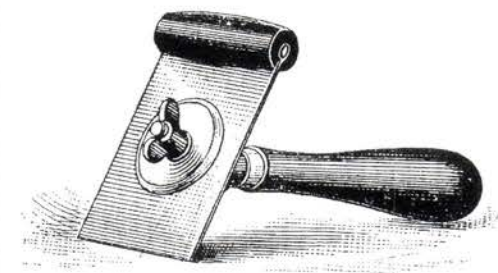
BY GORDON BOCK

The earliest wood floors in North America were generally softwood, mostly Eastern white pine in the Northeast as well as local species such as cypress in the South. The wood came from virgin growth trees that were once abundant in large diameters, and though durable, they were easily worked into boards with simple hand woodworking tools. Wide-board softwood floors were typically painted or left bare, but by the mid-19th century, the picture was changing rapidly.

Industrialization, and the mass production of wood products it made possible, dramatically altered the equation for wood flooring. Steam-powered woodworking tools greatly improved the volume and sophistication of wood flooring that could be produced, simplifying its installation with ready-formed narrow boards of tongue-and-groove flooring, thereby reducing its cost. This increased availability shifted the flooring market from softwood to hardwood, such as oak and maple, and with it came a new interest in finish. Hardwood presents another level of richness when coated with a thin, clear, flexible film that enhances the grain and adds an appealing glow. Though the vogue for clear floor finishes can be traced to parquet floors developed in 16th- and 17th-century France, the natural waxes and shellacs of that time were labor intensive to maintain, and not a viable option for Industrial Age American floors. Oil varnishes were the more durable alternative, and to give the coating glasslike depth and shine, two preparation steps borrowed from furniture making became essential.

High-gloss oil varnish was the finish of choice for the golden age of wood floors. It was marketed in a variety of stain and varnish mixes by the 1910s.

The Starrett Tool Co. designed this circa-1900 scraper specifically for floors. One hand pressed on the metal blade while the other pulled the handle.



### Scraping

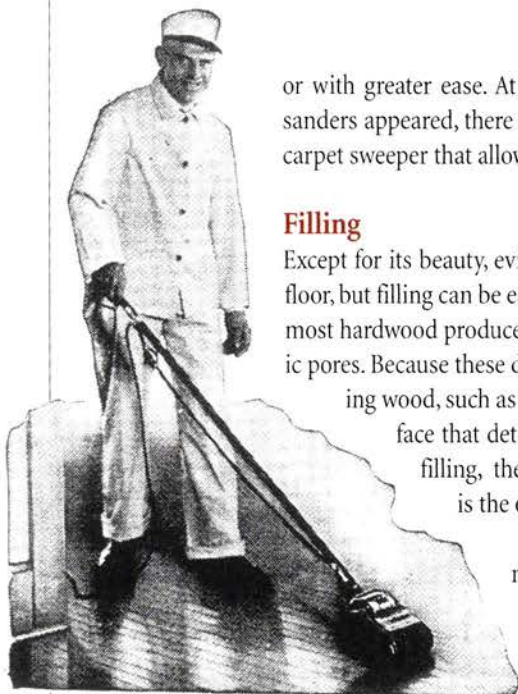
Wood grain patterns are most distinct under a clear finish when the wood surface is razor flat and literally slices across the cellular structure to bring the color gradations of the annual rings into focus. Though flooring fresh from a planing mill may be flat, it is not smooth enough to obtain this quality, so the important first step in floor finish preparation became scraping to remove mill marks. Working on hands and knees, carpenters or flooring mechanics would level out any high spots using hand planes and then go over every inch of the floor with scrapers. Related to planes, scrapers are ancient, simple finishing tools—in essence, pieces of steel with one edge burnished to produce a wire-thin cutting edge. When drawn across the wood (or finish) at a slight angle, the scraper shaves off paper-thin curls of wood similar to shaving a beard, leaving a surface that is both smooth and remarkably even.

Scraping produces high-quality results and is still better than sandpaper for removing mill marks, but it is a laborious process, requiring careful work and repeated sharpening of tools. Even by 1906, when the demand for finely finished floors was at a high-water mark, trade manuals noted that floor planing and scraping required “a peculiar degree of skill” and was the “the hardest work about a building” and “no place for a man who is lazy or grouchy.” To improve production and reduce the toil, tool manufacturers developed a variety of patented scrapers intended to hold the cutting edge at a consistent angle



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The demand for wood floors at the turn of the 20th century led to long-handled scrapers—a tool designed to increase production but one that some criticized for mediocre results.

or with greater ease. At the height of scraping in the 1910s, just before the first electric sanders appeared, there were long-handled scrapers on the market with little wheels like a carpet sweeper that allowed the mechanic to stand upright while working.

## Filling

Except for its beauty, evidence of meticulous scraping may be hard to see today in an old floor, but filling can be easy to detect with close inspection. The natural cellular structure of most hardwood produces sawn boards with open grain, a surface covered with microscopic pores. Because these depressions are fairly large and conspicuous in some popular flooring wood, such as oak and ash, under a clear finish they leave a pitted or rippled surface that detracts from final gloss and clarity. The solution to this condition is filling, the process of building up the voids in the open grain and, in its way, is the opposite of scraping.

Fillers of many kinds have been used for generations in the furniture trade, and those adapted for floor work sought the same attributes: transparency or at least a matching wood color (to allow the natural appearance of the wood to hold center stage), low cost, and ease of use. Wood fillers have been formulated by the end user for centuries, and by the 1890s the typical filler might be

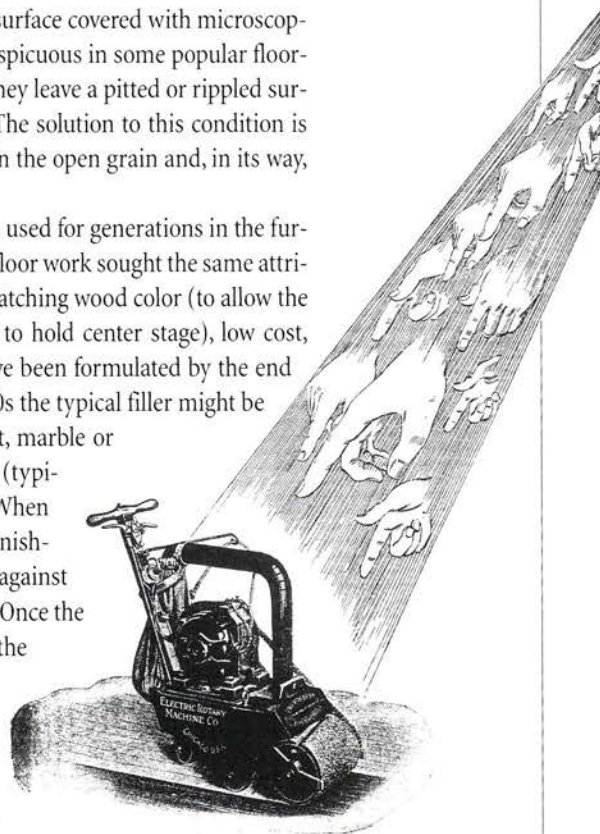
a finely ground, pigment-like material (such as wood dust, marble or quartz dust, or corn starch) mixed with a drying oil binder (typically linseed oil) and thinned with a solvent (turpentine). When mixed to a paste the consistency of mashed potatoes, the finisher would apply the filler over the floor with a rag, working against the grain of the wood to force it into holes and depressions. Once the filler had begun to dry, the finisher would wipe it from the floor using burlap or wood shavings, leaving the remainder below the surface in the wood pores. The result was a smooth, level surface ready for final finishing. Though it's possible to clear-finish open-grain wood without a filler by repeatedly applying and rubbing out varnish until there is a level surface, applying filler as the first step is far more economical. Nonetheless, shellac was sometimes applied as a clear finish or filler and then scraped down to the wood surface so that only minute amounts were lodged in the pores.

## Tips for Today

Though it would be hard to find anyone willing to hand scrape a floor in our time, the principles behind scraping and filling still apply to many old-house floors:

- For old or new work, sand down to the finest grit practical in stages to remove mill marks, moving from, say, 80 grit to 220 grit. Vacuum meticulously between sandings, and don't make wide leaps between grits.
- Traditional wood fillers are still available for fine woodworking (albeit increasingly in altered, clean-air formulation) and can be an option for new open-grain wood floor installations. Test first to judge results.
- When refinishing floors, study the floor and existing finish first. Removing the old finish may remove old filler and varnish down to fresh wood, opening pores that will accept finish or stain unevenly. To avoid this possibility, consider applying a filler, or at least a stain controller, over the floor to even the absorption as well as level the surface.
- For shine or a deep appearance, apply at least three coats of finish, sanding lightly between coats. The first two only fill the wood surface, smoothing it for the final coat.

Portable electric motors became practical in the 1920s and soon spawned the drum floor sander that made scraping obsolete.



For a list of  
**SUPPLIERS,**  
see page 74.

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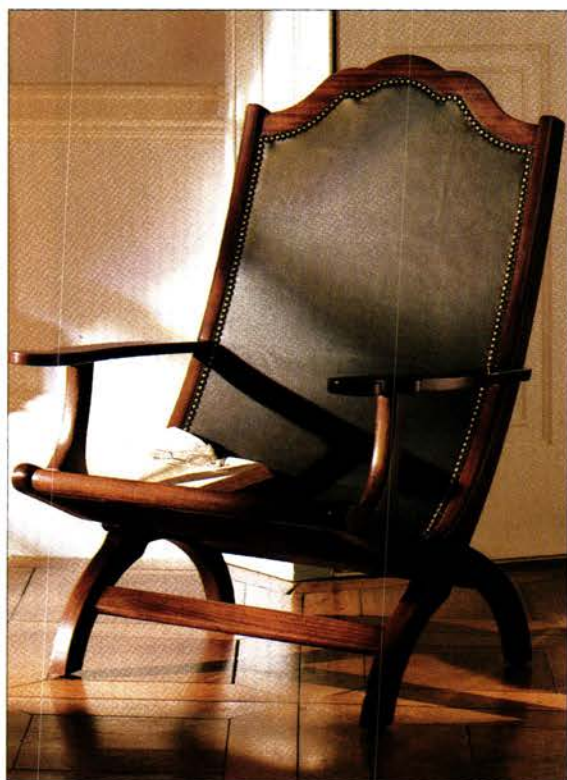
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# Fine Design



## A Seat at Monticello

The Campeachy chair is a replica of one so beloved by Thomas Jefferson that he waited more than 10 years for it to arrive after the first one he ordered was lost in a shipwreck. Once the chair came, Jefferson had several copies made, one of which still sits in the parlor of his home, Monticello, today. Identical to the design that captivated Jefferson, this \$1,295 chair, which is sold through Monticello's online store, has a mahogany frame, an x-shaped base, curvy armrests, and a comfortable sling seat made of black, green, or burgundy leather. To order, visit [monticellostores.store.yahoo.net](http://monticellostores.store.yahoo.net), or call (800) 243-1743. Circle 11 on the resource card.

## Horse Sense

Mid-19th-century weathervanes often depicted famous racehorses of the day in copper or iron. The Weathervane Factory manufactures several horse-themed weathervanes including the one pictured here (model #292), which is hand hammered from two 16-ounce copper sheets and then soldered together to form a hollow figure. Measuring 33" long by 17" wide, the \$395 weathervane comes with a brass rod and stainless steel spindle, a large and small copper-ball base, and 18" brass letters. To order, visit [www.weathervanefactory.com](http://www.weathervanefactory.com), or call (800) 255-5025. Circle 10 on the resource card.



## Get a Grip

Sash lifts attach to the lower corners of a window and provide convenient finger holds for lifting it open. The beaded design of the Oval Sash Lift from House of Antique Hardware is particularly suitable for Victorian-era houses and measures 3 3/4" wide by 1 1/2" tall. The sash lift retails for \$15.39 apiece in an antique brass finish or \$10.39 in pressed brass. To order, call (888) 223-2545, or visit [www.houseofantiquehardware.com](http://www.houseofantiquehardware.com). Circle 12 on the resource card.





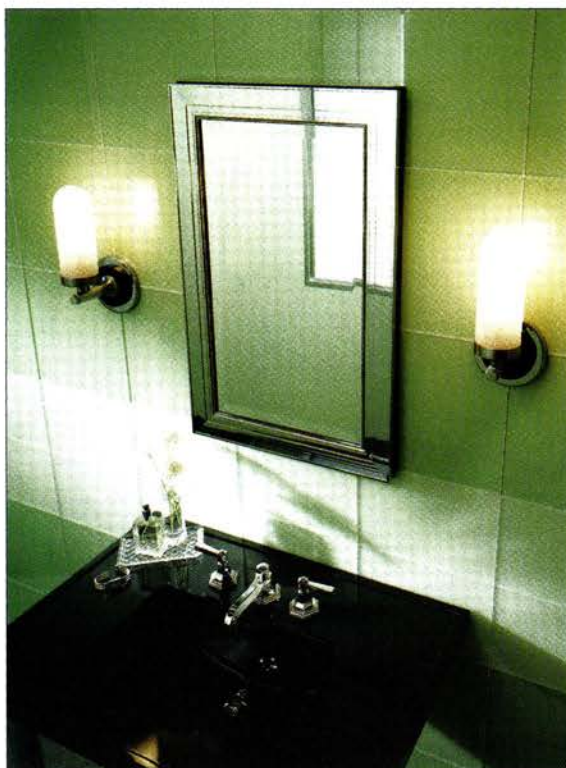
## Quick-Change Artist

Combination doors have been around at least as long as the Combination Door Co. has been in business, since 1912, but the ingenious time-saving concept is just as appreciated today. Instead of taking off the winter storm door and putting on a summer screen door, you replace only the door's middle panel, which easily pops out and snaps back into place. The door frame, still hinged, stays put year-round. Made of pine, mahogany, or red oak, the Easy-Change Door costs between \$350 and \$750, depending on the wood selected. The company also sells different door styles in addition to the Prairie style shown here. For more information, visit [www.combinationdoor.com](http://www.combinationdoor.com), or call (866) 745-5367. Circle 13 on the resource card.



## Radiator Coveralls

Although they didn't become popular until the 1920s, radiator covers are an elegant, functional way to dress up an old radiator with a custom-built wooden cabinet. This radiator cover from TomKat Fine Woodworking is made from oak-veneer plywood and solid red oak with a metal grille in front. The brass or silver grille comes in one of three patterns: punch hole, union jack, or clover (pictured). Because the cabinets are built to individual specifications, prices vary but generally start at around \$500 for a 3'-wide cover with a metal grille. For details, visit [www.tomkatfinewoodworking.com](http://www.tomkatfinewoodworking.com), or call (973) 443-0544. Circle 14 on the resource card.

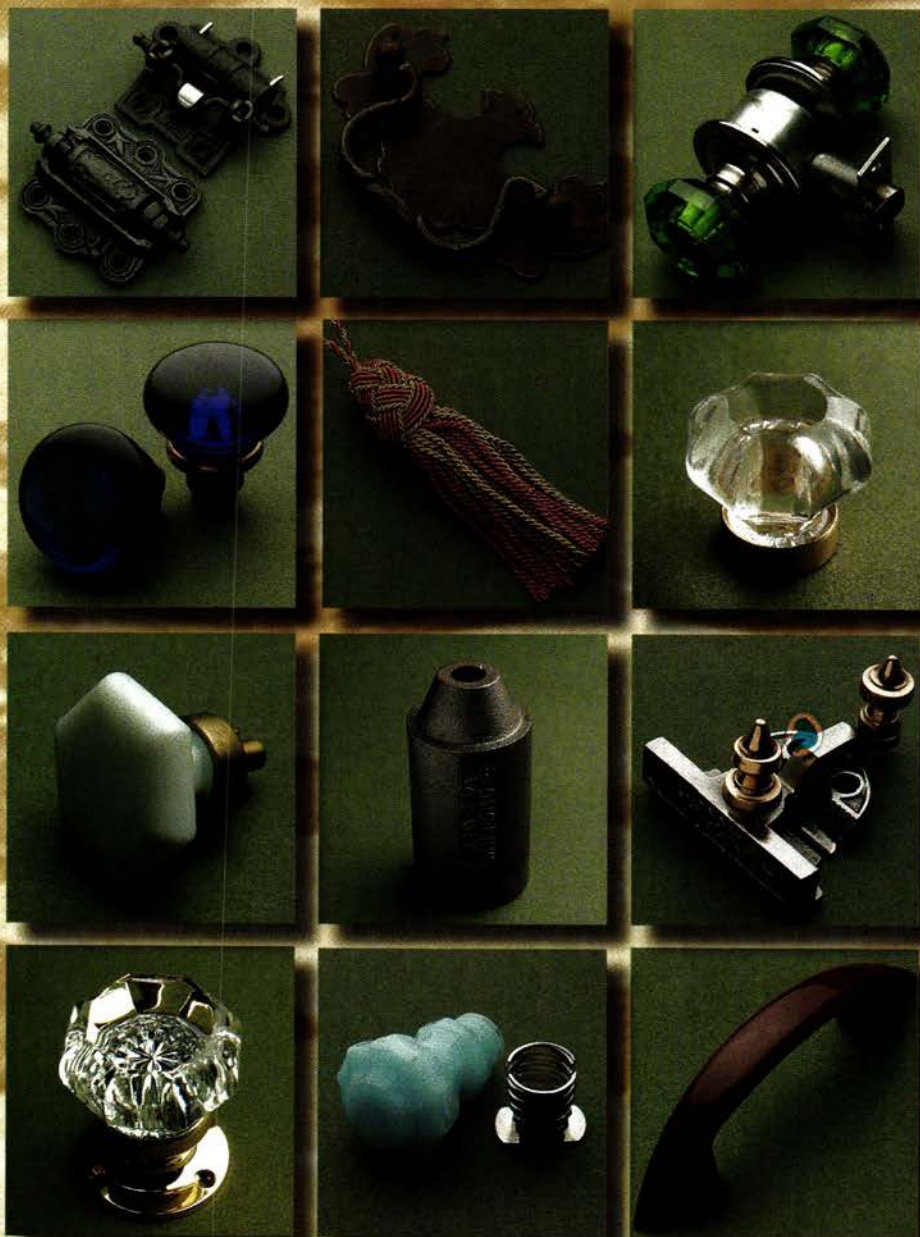


## Heavy Metallique

As sleek and stylish as a Hollywood starlet, this medicine cabinet in Roborn's Metallique line evokes the Art Moderne look of the 1930s and '40s. Offered in polished nickel or chrome, the cabinet also has a few updated touches: a swing-out magnifying mirror, rust-free construction, and an optional lock box for securing prescriptions and jewelry away from the prying eyes of nosy guests. Sold in four sizes (choose from a 20" or 30" width and a 30" or 40" height), the cabinet is priced starting at \$938 for the smallest dimensions. For details, visit [www.roborn.com](http://www.roborn.com), or call (800) 877-2376. Circle 15 on the resource card.



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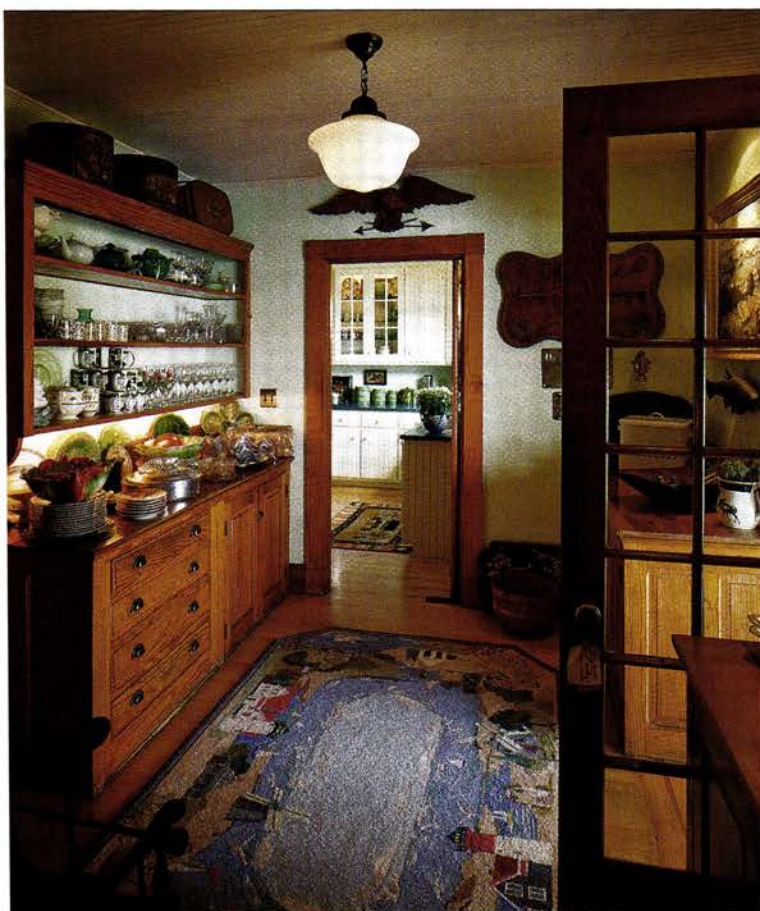
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# Kitchen Cabinet Revolution

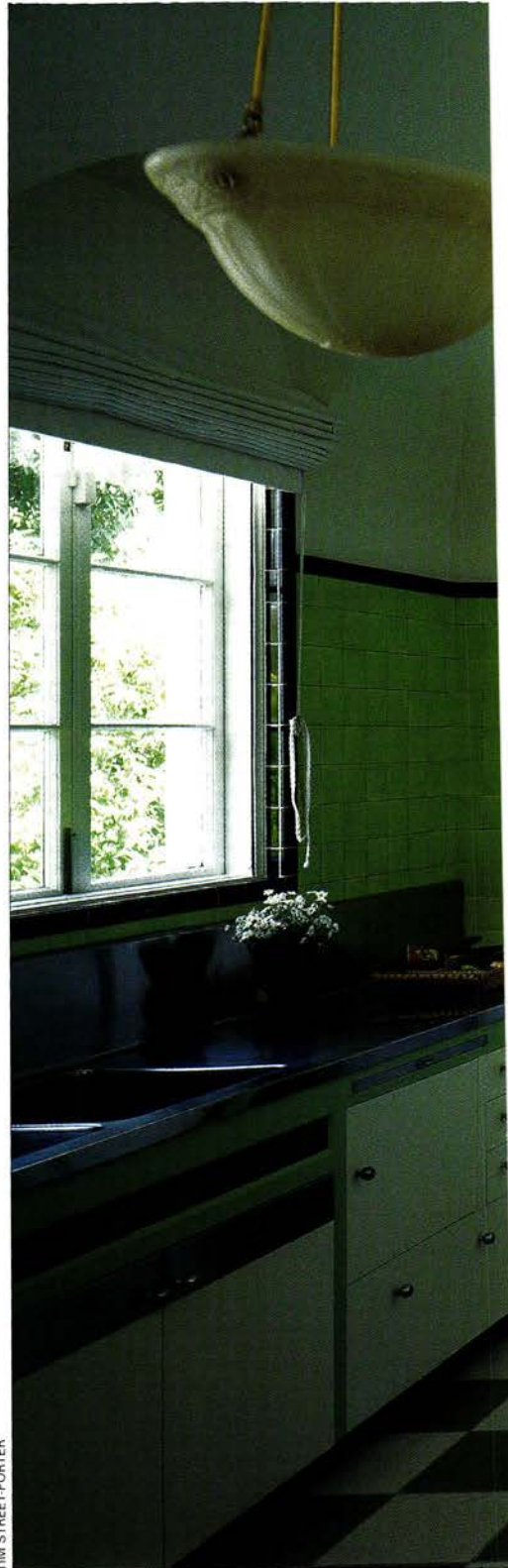
By DEMETRA APOSOROS

**Uniform kitchen cabinets didn't exist before the 1920s, when they strategically appeared thanks to a design army's maneuvers for greater efficiency.**



BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

Pantry dressers for storing cooking utensils, china, and sundries always appeared outside the kitchen, usually in houses staffed with servants.



TIM STREET-PORTER

For many old-house owners hoping to create a historically appropriate kitchen, cabinets are an area of compromise. That's because the cabinets common today—continuous expanses of storage and workspace partnered with countertops—didn't exist before the 1920s. Before then, kitchens had precious few storage areas, and those that did exist bore little resemblance to the modular boxes now

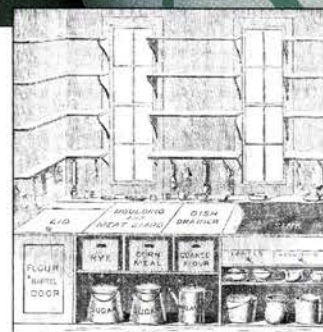


Early modular cabinets, such as these from circa 1930, were the first step toward making kitchen space more efficient, although the idea of recessed overhead cabinets that didn't impede access to counterspace was still to come.



considered a virtual necessity in modern kitchens. So for many folks, the path between historical accuracy and cutting-edge convenience is a clear one—the more cabinets the better. While it's fine to design your old-house kitchen however you choose, a look at how modular kitchen cabinets came into being affords lessons not only in design history but also on options for installing cabinets and other storage spaces that resemble those of years past.

The story of modern kitchen cabinets is full of historical tangents, linked as it is with the emancipation of women, a series of time-and-motion studies, and an early 20th-century quest for efficiency in all things. By modern standards, 19th-century kitchens didn't have cabinets. The rooms were large, open, and utilitarian with a simple worktable, sink, and stove all borne on legs. For most average homeowners, the center worktable and some



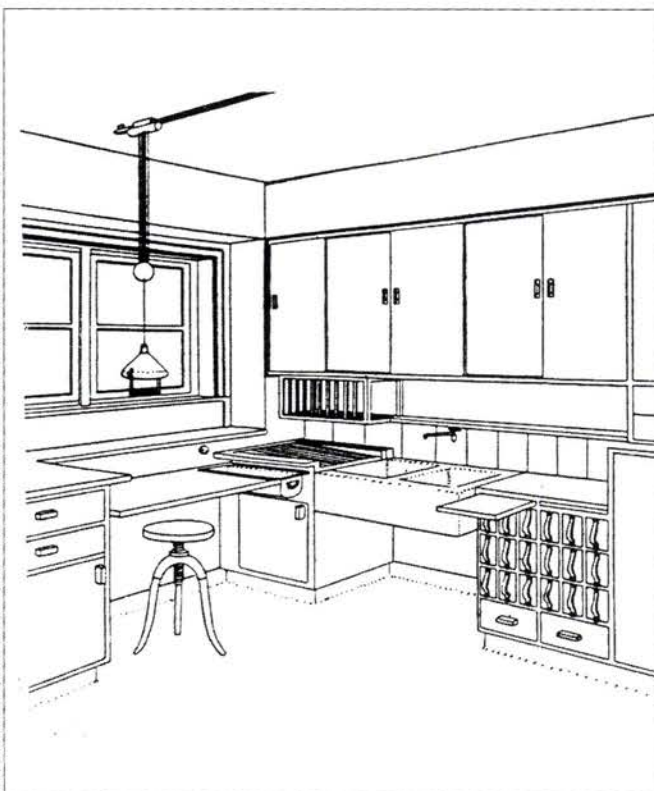
Catharine Beecher's ideal kitchen, from 1869, put storage areas inside the kitchen.





The kitchen (above) in the Fassel-Roeder House in Fredericksburg, Texas, dates to 1858 and is unusual for its built-in wall of cabinets interspersed with worktables and a freestanding storage cupboard, the bare bones essentials for the time.

THE BATHROOM, THE KITCHEN, AND THE AESTHETICS OF WASTE/PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS



A prototype for modern kitchens, the 1925 Frankfurt kitchen featured scientific built-in storage and workspaces integrated into every inch of available space.

wall shelves had to suffice for storing all of the cooking implements. In upscale houses, where teams of servants toiled over cooking and serving meals, a pantry provided additional storage. There, an expanse of built-in, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry, called a pantry dresser, was designed to keep pots, china, and food out of sight. While pantry dressers were handy, they were uncommon in the kitchen proper and appeared in more fashionable houses.

### A Galley Good Idea

The winds of cabinet change started blowing with Catharine Beecher in 1869. A sister of abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, she was a doyenne of 19th-century domesticity who wrote several self-help books for women to create smooth-running households. According to Klaus Spechtenhauser, author of *The Kitchen* (2006), "Beecher saw perfect working conditions for a housewife manifested in the functionally minimized galleys of Mississippi steamboats, and in 1869 she designed an ideal kitchen based on that model."



Beecher's kitchen featured built-in bins for staples, such as flour and corn meal, thoughtfully placed to help ease the preparation of food. While her revolutionary ideas didn't immediately take hold, by around 1890 they had become the model for large, freestanding, legged cabinet units full of organized storage compartments, integrated racks, a small counter for food preparation, and a large half-round drawer designed for raising dough. These "baking cabinets" took American kitchens by storm.

Commonly known as Hoosiers, a nickname derived from one Indiana company that manufactured them, the cabinets were advertised as helpful time-savers and necessary in every kitchen. "Save miles of steps," screams one old Hoosier Manufacturing Co. ad, which went on to describe the bulky cabinets as "careful housekeepers that save many steps each day and will save work for you." Appearing at the same time as the women's emancipation movement and a move to smaller houses in growing suburbs, the cabinets were a huge success. Popular

thinking viewed fewer hours spent in the kitchen as liberating. Smaller houses, of course, meant less space for servants, so more and more upper-middle-class women began to do their own cooking. And deprived of domestic help, what housewife didn't want to make her workload a little lighter?

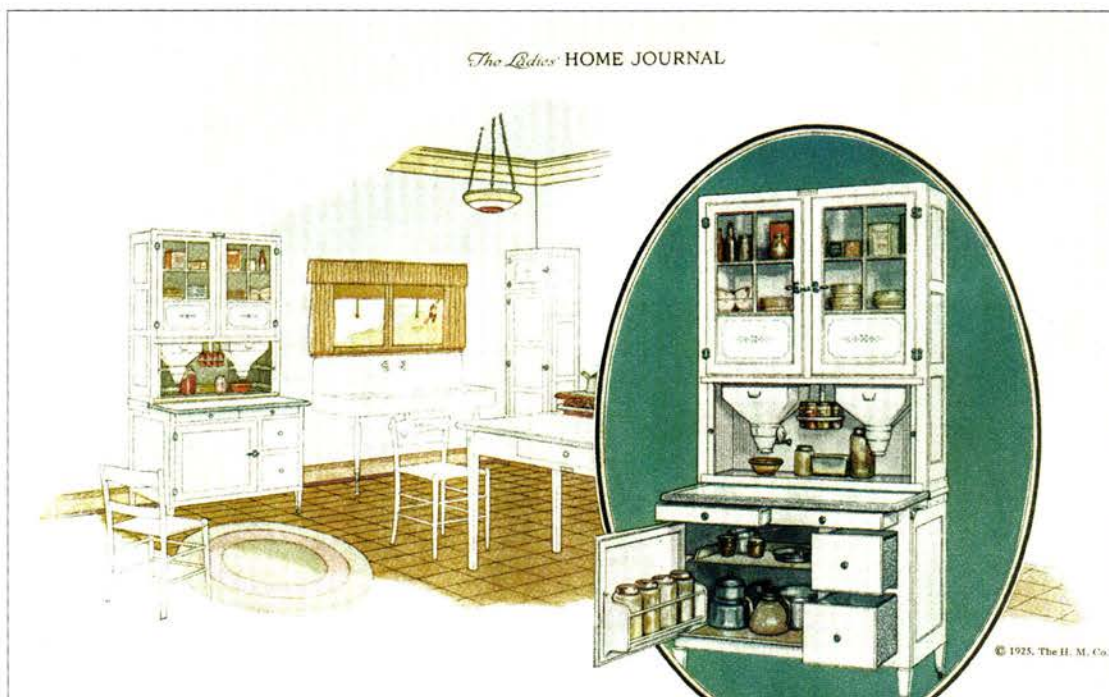
Within a decade, another innovative woman would take up the cause of kitchen efficiency. Christine Frederick wrote a series of articles for the magazine *Ladies' Home Journal* during the early years of the 20th century, as well as a number of books, on the subject of how to save time in the kitchen. The Martha Stewart of her day, Frederick went so far as to install a test kitchen in her Long Island home to investigate new ways of preparing and serving food in less time and with less physical exertion, in the hope of making domestic chores less tiresome. She argued for a more thoughtful layout of kitchen appliances and workspace. "Equipment connected with these two processes [preparing and serving food] and their respective chain of steps should be arranged in a correspon-

ding order. This principle of arranging and grouping equipment to meet the actual order of work is the basis of kitchen efficiency," she wrote in her 1920 bestseller, *Household Engineering*; it was revolutionary thinking for the day.

## Industrial Underpinnings

In large part, Frederick's studies followed on the heels of similar experiments in the industrial world, particularly scientific management and efficiency studies made popular by Frederick W. Taylor, who sought to find the most efficient, labor-saving, and cost-effective ways to improve the manufacture of goods. Taylorist principles, which accelerated mass production, inspired a race for efficiency in all things, as highlighted by the work of people such as Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, scientific management specialists in Rhode Island. Professionally, the Gilbreths labored to find the best approaches for increasing efficiency and productivity in industrial settings. Privately, as the parents of 12 children (two of whom authored the book

*The Ladies' HOME JOURNAL*



**The 1925 Hoosier Highboy!**

*the most scientifically designed model and the greatest value ever offered,  
say domestic science authorities*

Baking cabinets, such as the Hoosier, touted in this 1925 ad from *Ladies' Home Journal*, were designed to make cooking easier and housewives less tired by grouping together kitchen essentials.



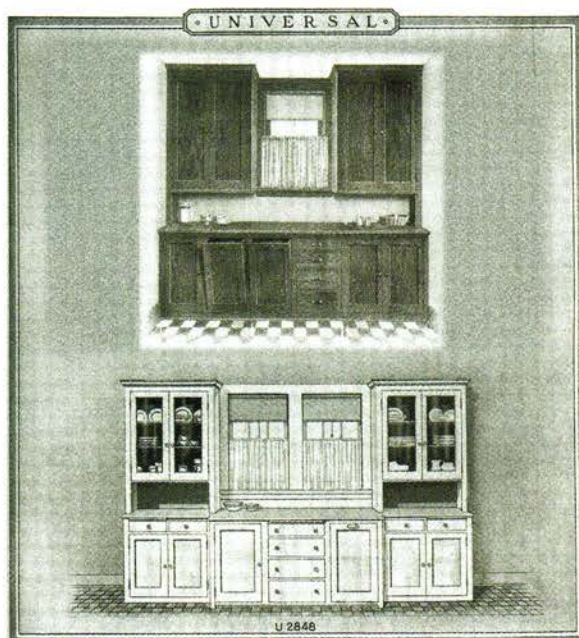
For related stories online, see "Bungalow Kitchens," "Everything for the Kitchen Sink," "Kitchen Classics," "Kitchen Lighting in Context," "New Light on Old Kitchens," and "The Full Range of Cookstove Issues." Just click to "The Magazine" section, and go to the alphabetical list of recent features.

By the 1930s, updated versions of Catharine Beecher's ships-galley-inspired kitchen were a common sight, with cabinets, shelves, and drawers all placed within easy reach in narrow spaces.



BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

A page from a 1927 Universal Millwork catalog shows the variety of built-in modular cabinets increasingly available to the average consumer; floor-to-ceiling units could be ordered with a choice of pullout bins, drawers, and cabinet fronts in an array of wood.



*Cheaper by the Dozen*), they became fanatical about making daily routines easier, going so far as to take moving pictures of their children to analyze their activities and eliminate extraneous motions.

When applied to kitchens by Christine Frederick, Taylorist principles became a call for placing major appliances more logically around the room to eliminate unnecessary footsteps and movement that made household duties tiring. Frederick also advocated moving the cabinets traditionally reserved for a butler's pantry into the kitchen itself. As she explained in *Household Engineering*, "the fewer the detached pantries and cupboards, the simpler will be the processes both of preparing and serving food."

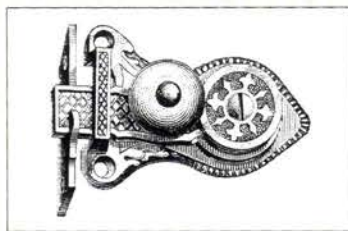


## CATCHES, TURNS, AND PULLS

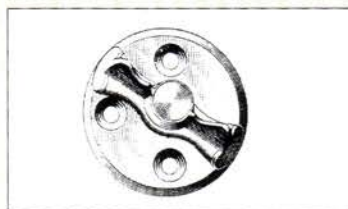
Was there kitchen cabinet hardware before there were kitchen cabinets? In a manner of speaking, yes, because the basic functions of cabinet hardware—keeping doors shut and pulling drawers open—were necessary for other applications (workshops, stores, offices) long before the dawn of the modern kitchen. As an example, the Russell and Erwin Hardware catalog from 1865, one of the earliest such records, lists a variety of all-purpose drawer pulls that would look right at home in a bungalow kitchen a generation later.

In fact, until the 1930s introduced plastics and streamline styling, kitchen hardware was nothing if not brilliantly functional and beautifully no-nonsense. Cabinet doors, which had to attach to traditional face-frame cabinets, typically swung on butt hinges with or without ball tips—just like room doors only smaller. Surface hinges saved on installation but added decoration if they were embossed with a design. Catches ranged from metal versions of the simplest turn buttons and pivot latches (originally made in wood) to miniature turn mechanisms. In most average houses, hardware was cast iron from the 19th century well into the 20th, with nickel plating as an upscale option; forged or stamped versions in steel, brass, or bronze were more common by the 1920s. Though cast decoration was popular for iron, early 20th-century texts noted that “garish or gaudy ornament should always be avoided in all classes of hardware.”

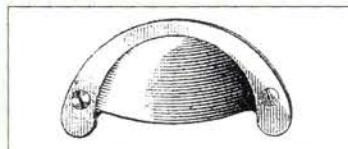
—Gordon Bock



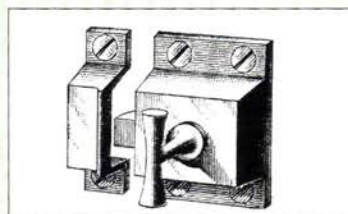
Latches use a knob to lift a pivot arm off the strike.



Turn buttons are among the oldest ways to secure doors.



Drawer pulls had ergonomic half-moon or barrel forms.



Catches employ a T-bar or knob to operate a spring bolt.

Frederick's ideas influenced the layout and design of kitchens, and her theories on step-saving movements around the kitchen are arguably the basis for today's work triangle layout of refrigerator, stove, and sink. It is, however, a little ironic that she met with fame and fortune and left the bonds of household slavery behind her by teaching other women how to perform the drudgery of domestic chores.

## European Inspiration

All of this research into efficiency design came together in mid-1920s Europe, where, thanks to high population densities and a serious housing crunch, well-designed kitchen space was in much greater demand than in the United States. In

1925, the Frankfurt kitchen debuted, built around a unified concept and designed to enable efficient work; it would forever change the way kitchens were viewed.

Designed by the Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, the Frankfurt kitchen was the first to boast modular cabinets and thoughtful, fitted features that used every nook and cranny of space. The Frankfurt kitchen boasted waist-level cabinets with hinged fronts and overhead cabinets with sliding doors. There were rows of integrated aluminum drawers and bins made of oak (the wood repelled mealworms) for storing flour. There was a built-in garbage drawer for scraps, as well as a work counter, a rack for drying dishes installed over the drain board beside the

sink, and a layout that optimized workflow. Similar kitchen designs were soon the standard throughout Europe, and it wasn't long before the designs became popular in the United States, too.

A glimpse through early 20th-century catalogs illustrates just how quickly the change to uniform, fitted, modular cabinets trickled down to average consumers. In a 1910 edition of the Sears Roebuck catalog, there are just a few pantry dressers, but a 1927 Universal Millwork catalog devotes several pages to cabinets that were intended to fill entire kitchen walls. There are cabinets stretching from floor to ceiling (standard height was eight feet, six inches) that feature waist-level pullout bins for storing flour and other staples; cabinets with rows of hinged doors, behind which were shelves to hold an array of kitchen utensils; and cabinets built around integrated sinks and refrigerators. There are cabinets designed to fit into a recessed wall or project into a room, as well as a choice of solid wooden or glass cabinet doors. For certain cupboard combinations, homeowners could choose to have the countertop made from one solid piece of wood. They could also order special features such as built-in spice racks, broom closets, or rows of drawers. Cupboards could be broken down into individual, modular units designed to fit narrow spaces (one cabinet sporting a stack of drawers, for example). There's even a waist-high floor cabinet that features a recessed toe board, a design the catalog says “allows one to get up close to the table while working.”

Those early modular systems, referred to in catalogs as “kitchen cupboards,” were built from a variety of solid wood such as oak, walnut, mahogany, or pine, with cheaper wood sometimes painted a shiny white. These ideas represented major breakthroughs in kitchen design that reverberate to this day. It should be noted, however, that none of these kitchen cupboards stood on support legs. Instead, they sat firmly and flatly on the floor, a new design element intended to alleviate the drudgery of yet another household chore: cleaning beneath bulky furniture. 🏠



# COLD Comparisons

BY TONY AND CELINE SEIDEMAN

A couple's quest for the perfect period refrigerator opens the door to the many options available to old-house owners today.

Modern refrigerators are efficient, frost-free, and able to make their own ice. Unfortunately for old-house lovers, they also tend to resemble stainless steel coffins. What's more, if you try to dress them up with faux-wood cabinet facing, they really do look like coffins.

Of course, refrigerators are also among the most important appliances in any home. It's hard to miss these six-foot-tall, three-foot-wide monoliths in nearly every American kitchen, and because equipment that size can't help but define a room, my wife Celine and I knew we'd have our work cut out for us when we began looking for a fridge to suit our 1903 house.

The object of the author's affection, Kelvinator's Foodarama was loaded with storage shelves and compartments on the doors, which held impressive quantities of prepackaged foods.



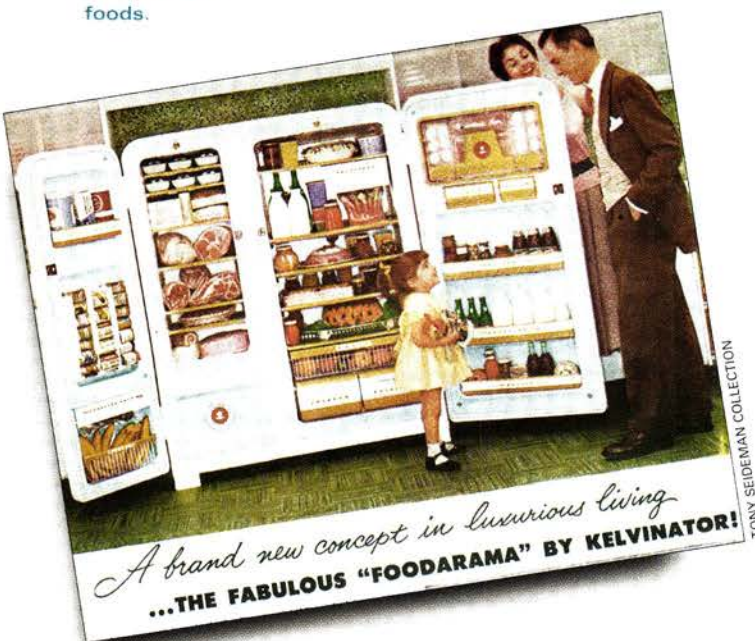
ANTIQUE APPLIANCES

We knew we wanted an antique fridge, not a modern anachronism. Finding our dream refrigerator took a great deal of research (and far too much eBay time), but what we learned can help anyone on the hunt for a historically appropriate fridge.

A removable compressor above the cabinet made GE's Monitor Top refrigerator instantly recognizable, and its price tag—\$300 in the late 1920s—was affordable for many families.

## Kitchen Assumptions

From the beginning we knew that re-creating a turn-of-the-century kitchen in our old house was simply out of the question. Back in 1903, kitchens weren't the upscale havens of family life, fancy granite, and showy technology they've become today. Kitchens were, until after World War I, strictly functional spaces where maids, cooks, and wives (whose career options were brutally confined) performed a lot of manual labor. So we knew that any attempt



TONY SEIDEMAN COLLECTION



By the mid-1930s, no well-equipped house was complete without an electric refrigerator, and architects began designing built-in cubbies to hold these kitchen workhorses.



LINDA SVENDSEN

to design a kitchen that works in modern terms, yet pays tribute to the past, would be a fictional creation—a novel written with stone, tile, water, and steel.

In our melting pot of a house, which combines Victorian, Queen Anne, Bungalow, and Colonial Revival elements, original blueprints show that the kitchen started off as two different rooms—one for making food, the other for handling that tiresome, endless domestic chore: laundry. In the

1960s, previous owners removed the wall between the kitchen and laundry room to create one large space fringed by crumbling cabinets that were cheap, ugly, and decaying from the moment they were installed. By 1999, when we owned the kitchen, it was time to gut it, and the fact that there was no original kitchen to preserve gave us the license to start from scratch.

We had already selected a restored 1920s Reliable gas range with six burners,

two ovens, and festoons of nickel brightwork because Celine liked its design. But choosing a refrigerator from the Jazz Age was unthinkable. Noxious gases were one good reason we wouldn't consider a 1920s or early 1930s refrigerator; practicality was another (see sidebar on page 47). In those simple, pre-consumer-economy times, refrigerators were designed for little more than keeping dairy and meat products fresh and making ice cubes. That



means early electric refrigerators are relatively small, with tiny little freezers and (gasp!) no shelves on their doors.

## Appliance Envy

The refrigerator picture changed radically in the abundant years of the 1950s. Suddenly, a cornucopia of chilled and ready-made products hit the market, from frozen vegetables to concentrated juices. With television sucking up vast amounts of leisure time, TV dinners appeared to streamline cooking. Looking to ride the trend, manufacturers launched refrigerators designed around food. The Kelvinator Foodarama was created to pack the goodies in, with shelves in its doors to keep butter fresh, and compartments in the freezer to hold can after can of those marvelous frozen juices. If you want shelves and storage space, the 1950s are your decade.

Standing about four feet tall and four feet wide, the Foodarama was a top-of-the-line, feature-filled beast. It pioneered the side-by-side refrigerator-freezer combo concept, while being one of the first frost-free machines. (As someone who had accidentally ice-picked a refrigerator to death, this feature held special relevance.) Celine and I decided the Foodarama was the fridge for us. We searched Craig's List and BargainNews.com and every other source we could think of for a Kelvinator Foodarama. In the end, it was eBay's vast reach that got us the cool refrigerator we wanted after more than a year of hunting. Of course, we're still waiting for it to be restored—but that's another story. In the event you don't want to follow the Foodarama route, here are some other options to consider if you're interested in getting a period-looking refrigerator.

**Buy an antique.** Old refrigerators can still chill. We know an apple orchard that's been running the same 1930s refrigerator for decades. Experts say antique units were so overbuilt that you shouldn't replace key components such as compressors until the originals have totally given out. Nonetheless, antiques do have drawbacks. Pre-1960s units incorporated an astonishing variety of now-obsolete insulating materials. A small pinhole in the



One of many successful early refrigerator manufacturers, Westinghouse made this 1931 model with an icebox-styled latch and hinges.

case is all that is needed for condensation to turn R-value into slush.

**Restore one.** Sometimes you find the perfect fridge, but it hasn't run in years. That's when a professional restoration company can save the day. Antique Appliances ([www.antiqueappliances.com](http://www.antiqueappliances.com)) consistently gets top recommendations.

**Apply wood facing on a modern fridge.** Virtually all refrigerator companies sell wood trim packages that can, in effect, make a modern refrigerator disappear—or at least recede into the woodwork.

**Buy a new, retro-styled unit.** A few companies make refrigerators with mid-century appeal. Elmira Stove Works ([www.elmirastoveworks.com](http://www.elmirastoveworks.com)), The Big Chill ([www.bigchillfridge.com](http://www.bigchillfridge.com)), and Heartland ([www.heartlandappliances.com](http://www.heartlandappliances.com)) all have created refrigerators with great retro lines.

**Get a reproduction icebox.** We found two companies that make appliances that look like iceboxes: Klondike Case Co. ([www.oldicebox.com](http://www.oldicebox.com)) and Rose-land Icebox Co. ([www.iceboxes.com](http://www.iceboxes.com)).



ELMIRA STOVE WORKS



BIG CHILL

Modern fridges with retro styling include those from Elmira (left), Big Chill (right).



## REFRIGERATION RECORD

Refrigeration is as old as humans and food; even cavemen knew that burying meat in snow made it last longer. But refrigeration didn't reach the masses until around 1825, when inventor Fredrick Tudor developed the technology and transport systems for distributing natural ice easily and affordably. Ice-cooled fridges were on the market for chilling beverages by the 1880s and common into the 1930s.

Mechanical refrigerating machines appeared in the United States in the 1850s, first to cool warehouses and then to make ice for shipping fruit cross-country by refrigerated railroad cars. By the 1880s, manufacturing plants were creating artificial ice using a closed system in which a liquid with a low boiling point (say, 32 degrees Fahrenheit) circulates through a series of coils that alternately condenses the liquid, allowing it to boil and turn into a gas. The heat energy produced by this process keeps temperatures around freezing so that ice forms. The same

principle is used in electrical refrigerators and freezers.

The first residential refrigerators were like early computers: huge, cumbersome affairs in stationary cabinets cooled by external machinery. Things changed in the early 1920s, when manufacturers such as General Electric and Frigidaire were able to pack electric motors, compressors, and cooling coils inside the refrigerator cabinet. By the late '20s, scores of manufacturers were marketing early home refrigerators. Unfortunately, many of them used poisonous gases as coolants.

We store our 1929 GE monitor top refrigerator in our garage because it is powered by sulfur dioxide, a gas that can kill you but which smells so bad you'll have plenty of time to run away if there's a leak. Many other early refrigerators used methyl chloride, which can be lethal, odorless, and colorless. For this reason, by the mid-1930s, Freon—a stable, non-toxic chemical—had become the refrigerator gas of choice.



ICEBOX MEMORIES

Early refrigerators, like this one, used a block of ice to keep food cold.

**Convert an original ice-cooled refrigerator.** If you're looking for the ultimate in period accuracy and your house was built after 1830, retrofitting an ice-cooled refrigerator—a freestanding or built-in cabinet made of metal-lined wood—with electric cooling equipment may be for you. On the plus side, you'll get a large, historically appropriate unit that will wow your friends and family. On the minus side, it's impossible to rig a freezer compartment into the refrigerator, so you'll need a separate, stand-alone freezer to stock frozen foods.

There are a few approaches for refurbishing an icebox. Restoration companies

such as Antique Appliances can custom outfit the unit to suit your needs in a number of ways: by creating a fluid-filled copper tank that re-creates the original block of ice, placing the compressor between the icebox and the floor, or hiding it behind a wall in a nearby room. Prepare to pay around \$5,000 for a custom job.

Another option is to find an old ice-cooled refrigerator on eBay or at your local antique dealer and then ask your favorite local restaurant who works on their walk-in refrigerators. An iced refrigerator box is, in effect, a small walk-in refrigerator, so

most competent specialists should be able to modify your unit.

Like any search for an authentic or quality reproduction old-house fixture, finding something to match your vision is as much an adventure as the purchase itself. We were outbid on at least five refrigerators before we got the one we wanted, so good hunting and keep your cool! 🐾

*Tony and Celine Seideman write regularly about old houses from their late-19th-century house in Peekskill, New York. The thought of owning an antique refrigerator sends chills up their spines.*



HEARTLAND APPLIANCES

and Heartland (above).



BURT HUNECKE

Retrofitting an icebox with a cooling tank is also possible.

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For a list of  
**SUPPLIERS,**  
see page 74.



# One Hot

**Versatile and enduring, soapstone has long been revered for its ability to conduct heat and withstand tough conditions.**

BY REGINA COLE

If you like contradictions, you'll love soapstone. Despite being unimaginably dense, soapstone is softer and easier to work with than any other stone.

Even though it only ever commanded a tiny niche in the building industry, soapstone still manages to inspire strong feelings because it tends to dominate a room. "Either people have no use for soapstone, and that's about 99% of people, or they love the stuff," says Glenn Bowman, president of Vermont Soapstone in Perkinsville, Vermont. "No one's in the middle."

In old buildings, soapstone has a long and varied history of use, often for kitchen sinks and stoves, and even for exterior

building trim. Philadelphia's Independence Hall, for instance, has a water table, quoins, and column bases made from soapstone that are original to the building, built between 1732 and 1756. Because the stone is non-porous, it is impervious to acid rain and pollution. Usually grey or a greenish grey, soapstone darkens over time when exposed to air, although the almost black color favored for kitchen sinks and countertops comes from applying oil (see sidebar on page 51). Such a solid, durable material would seem like a natural fit for old houses. The material, though, fell out of favor by the mid-20th century and only recently began capturing the attention of consumers, who are rediscovering soapstone for its heat conductivity, longevity, and simple good looks.

## SOFT STONE

Also called steatite, soapstone is a metamorphic rock that forms deep below the earth's crust in the mantle, says Andrew Kurtz, an assistant professor of earth sciences at Boston University. "That makes it pretty interesting and somewhat rare geologically. Getting mantle rocks to the surface takes some doing, which is why you typically find soapstone in mountain belts, where rocks are deformed, metamorphosed, and brought to the surface."

In its purest form, soapstone is talc, used to make all of the world's baby powder. Talc gives soapstone the characteristically greasy feel for which it is named. The softest of minerals, talc is number one on the Mohs scale of mineral hardness; diamonds are at the opposite end at number 10. According to New England folklore, farmers knew they'd found soapstone when their plow hit a rock that didn't clang.



Soapstone fireplaces radiate warmth up to 24 hours after the fire has died. Because of its density, the stone stores heat and then releases it slowly.

COURTESY OF TULIKIVI

BRIAN VANDEN BRINK



# Rock

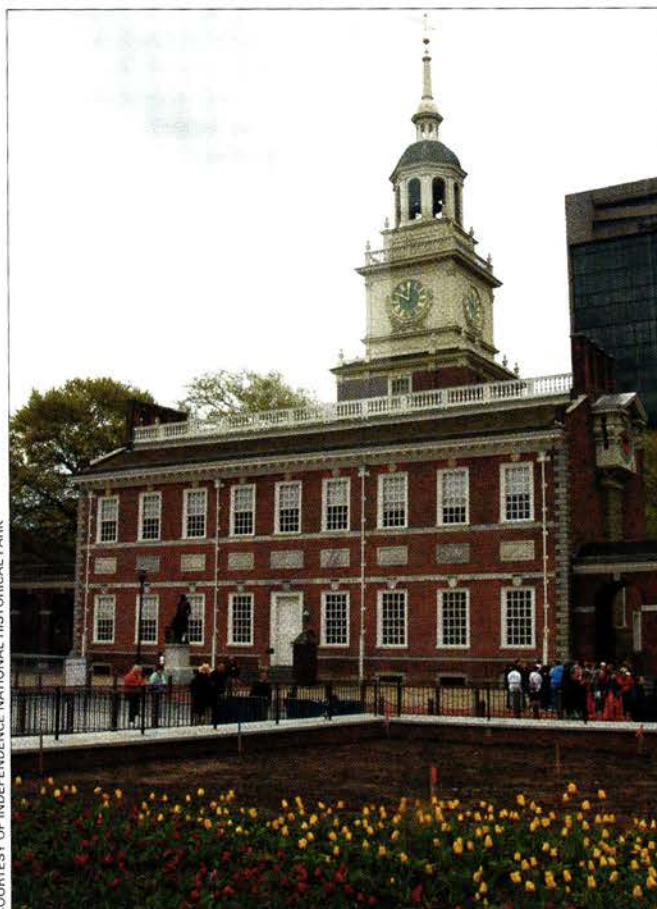
Unlike marble or granite, soapstone doesn't stain, not even from alkalis and acids, making it a smart choice for countertops. Never upscale, soapstone was featured in the kitchens of 19th-century apartments built for the working classes.







They may not have occupied center stage, but soapstone sinks were common in kitchens (above) at least through the 1910s. By World War I, soapstone deposits were becoming harder to find, especially in Vermont, a key supplier of soapstone in the United States.



COURTESY OF INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



COURTESY OF INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Philadelphia's Independence Hall (left) features soapstone quoins dating to the 1730s. Above, the column base at the building's south tower was added 20 years later; it, too, is soapstone.



The percentage of talc is what determines soapstone's texture and strength, with a high talc content ideal for sculpture. The ancient Egyptians, for instance, favored soapstone for carving scarabs, and the Christ figure above Rio de Janeiro is clad in a mosaic of soapstone squares. Soapstone with a high talc content is too soft to use as a building material, and if the talc content is too low, the stone is too brittle. The happy medium, at least for sinks, architectural trim, and most building purposes, is a stone that is 60% to 80% talc.

## SOME LIKE IT HOT

And what a broad range of purposes soapstone has served. Native Americans made soapstone tools, ornaments, and bowls 3,000 years ago in what is now northern Georgia and northeastern Connecticut. Those Native Americans understood that nothing holds heat better than soapstone, which was why they cooked their food in soapstone bowls. At about the same time, tribes in the Arctic regions began using the stone to carve seals. In later centuries, tailors traditionally used a chalky version of the stone to mark clothing for alterations, and soapstone was and still is used to make paper and paint fillers.

But it was soapstone's heat conductivity that propelled its use in the 19th century, when small quarries dotted the Northeast, particularly in mineral-rich Vermont, where the lion's share of soapstone stoves, sinks, and griddles were made. The stone was also used for boot and bed warmers, as well as foot warmers in sleighs and automobiles before they had built-in heaters. Even today, soapstone's thermal properties are still being applied in new ways. Bucks County Soapstone in Perkasie, Pennsylvania, makes soapstone shower pans under which customers install radiant heat for a toasty warm shower floor.

The advantages of soapstone, including its ability to retain and radiate heat, have a lot to do with the material's density. "Unlike iron or other metal, which absorbs the fire's heat and then rapidly releases it, soapstone is so dense and stable that it releases the heat slowly," says Tim Butler, a customer service representative and head

## CARING FOR SOAPSTONE

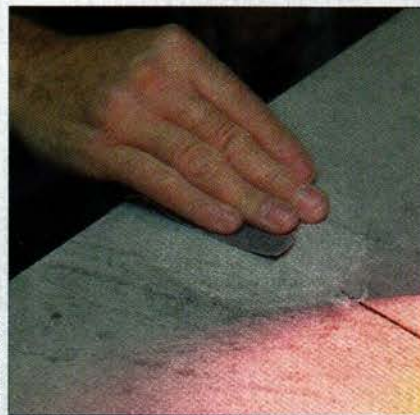
The beauty of soapstone is that, whether brand new or decades old, its good looks are easily restored. That's a key selling point for a stone that is softer than granite or marble and tends to scratch or dent easily.

Most marks will disappear by dabbing ordinary mineral oil on top, but deep scratches may need more help. Scott Seuren of Bucks County Soapstone recommends using a piece of fine steel wool the size of a cotton ball to remove scratches. For deep scarring, some manufacturers suggest starting out with an 80-grit sandpaper and increasing steadily to a higher-grit paper as the groove diminishes. If your soapstone is new, ask the manufacturer what it recommends for eliminating blemishes.

All soapstone benefits from regular applications of mineral oil, and none more so than soapstone that has just been sanded and as a result had its protective coating removed. Applying oil not only restores the finish but also adds luster and color to the stone. Even though soapstone darkens over time from oxidation, oiling it hastens the process and ensures a more uniform appearance. Vermont Soapstone's Glenn Bowman recommends oiling the stone every six months, with sinks needing more frequent applications because dish detergents will remove the oil after a few washings. Apply the oil using a rag in a circular motion and mop up any excess oil so that the stone isn't too greasy.

To clean the surface, use ordinary soap and water or a non-abrasive household cleaner. Although abrasive cleaners won't harm the stone, they will strip it of any protective coating.

Bear in mind there is no standard appearance for soapstone. "In 12 houses with soapstone countertops, they will all look different," says Bowman. "It's a natural material that looks best when you spill on it, mop it up, cut food on it, and oil it every once in a while. Soapstone doesn't like to be ignored."



Scratches and even deep grooves can be removed using steel wool or sandpaper.



Regular applications of mineral oil speed up the stone's natural darkening process from oxidation.



Manufacturers recommend oiling the stone after it has been sanded to restore its protective coating.





The sink above shows soapstone in its natural color: grey or greenish-grey, although some foreign soapstone is dark red or green. At right, the seams of two soapstone slabs are fused together with epoxy to form the corners of a sink.



JON CRISPIN

of financing for the Woodstock Soapstone Co. in West Lebanon, New Hampshire. "Long after your fire has gone out, the stove is still warm and radiating heat." Butler believes the stone stays warm because it has millions of microscopic hot air bubbles trapped inside. "All stone holds and radiates heat the first time it's heated, but only soapstone keeps on doing it each and every time, forever," adds Bowman. Count Rumford, the Massachusetts-born inventor and scientist, knew this about soapstone when he chose it to line his early 19th-century stoves. The material was also used for fireplaces and not just for those in wealthy homes. Practically every humble farmhouse in northern New England boasts fireplaces with soapstone cheeks.

Heat retention was less important for soapstone's other predominant role in old houses—sinks—but its density was a factor there, too. Although today we tend to think of a soapstone sink as belonging in a chic country-style kitchen, soapstone didn't start out upscale. In the late-19th century, it was used for down-market laundry and kitchen sinks in triple-decker apartments in Maine and Massachusetts. Eventually, soapstone developed a reputation for being indestructible. Impervious to almost anything, including acid, soapstone has long been the countertop material of choice in chemistry labs. "You could put soapstone into a nuclear reactor, and what you'd get at the end is soapstone, exactly as it was before," says Bowman, whose company salvages old sinks and also sells standard and custom-made sinks nationwide. He sees 150-year-old soapstone sinks that are still perfectly serviceable today. "With modern waterproof seam epoxies, you can clean up and seal the old joints," he says.

### In Search of New Deposits

Despite its durability, soapstone never overcame its second-fiddle status for sinks and other building purposes because small deposits limited a manufacturer's potential for profit. Even in the 19th century, the cost of quarrying the stone was such that it was only profitable in large





For a list of  
**SUPPLIERS**,  
see page 74.

At Vermont Soapstone, the stone is cut into thick slabs that weigh about 25 pounds per square foot. Sinks are sized to individual specifications with holes cut out for faucets, soap dispensers, and drains.

JON CRISPIN

quantities, and just as consumers became interested in soapstone stoves and sinks at the end of the century, easier-to-produce and cheaper-to-ship materials began to appear. Meanwhile, Vermont, one of the leading producers, was reaching the limits of its supply. "Vermont soapstone deposits are small, and by World War I, the quarries were mostly played out," says Edith Hunter, who wrote a history of the state's soapstone industry. Finding new deposits was prohibitively expensive, and the bureaucratic hassles associated with quarrying soapstone skyrocketed.

It took the oil embargo of the early 1970s to reawaken consumer interest in soapstone stoves, which were more attractive than metal ones. Then, a public captivated by natural products and all things antique took another look at those basement laundry sinks and decided that they liked what they saw.

Today, soapstone is making a comeback in part because the material is being imported like never before. The soapstone sold in the United States, which has mostly small deposits, comes from Malawi, China, Canada, and Brazil. "There may still be a few active quarries around the Great



COURTESY OF TULIKIVI

Lakes, but nothing is produced in any real quantity in this country," says Butler. His employer, Woodstock Soapstone, imports its raw material from Quebec, while that for Vermont Soapstone is quarried in Brazil. But some soapstone could come from American quarries again. Bowman plans to dig a new quarry in Newfane, Vermont, in the next few years because, he says, "if current interest in soapstone continues, it's worthwhile." 🐾

Like marble or granite, soapstone is quarried from the ground in blocks. The soapstone sold in the United States is mostly imported from abroad, where new deposits are helping to sustain the material's resurging popularity.





COURTESY OF FOLLANSBEE

# Rooftop Clinic

By JEFFREY S. LEVINE



Known as TCS II, this roofing material is a stainless steel sheet coated with a zinc-tin alloy that has been used for historic buildings such as the visitors center at Monmouth Park in New Jersey.

**A**s a roof consultant in Pennsylvania's Delaware Valley, I frequently speak about roofs before various homeowner, religious, and non-profit organizations. The format and emphasis of each event varies, from an evening slide presentation on one roof system in particular, to an all-day workshop covering various steep- and low-slope roofing topics.

In every case, I set aside a significant portion of time for questions from the audience, and over the years, I've noticed some common themes lobbed my way. Some of them arise so frequently and are so similar that one can only imagine a single list of queries being recycled from one group to the next. More likely, we all just want to know the answers to the same roofing issues. Below, then, is my attempt to shed light on some of the great roofing mysteries that puzzle old-house owners.

**Q** Can I remove my gutters so that I don't have to clean them?

**A** Whoa, slow down. Cleaning hanging gutters can be a hassle, especially if there are a lot of trees around shedding leaves, needles, buds, or flowers all year long. But gutters are important features because they collect rainwater from the roof and channel that water safely to grade or to an underground drainage system. Removing the gutters could have adverse consequences: water running

down walls and penetrating the house, saturated soil creating damp or leaky basements, and even a deteriorating foundation caused by the backsplash of the rainwater falling off of the roof eave. Severe soil erosion and icy patches on sidewalks could also become a problem.

There are instances where you might get away with removing the gutters—if you live in an arid climate or your house has exceedingly wide eaves of, say, three or more feet. A grade that slopes away from the foundation and is landscaped in such a way that the roof's rainwater runoff won't cause erosion also may eliminate the need for gutters.

**Q** I'm tired of cleaning my gutters. Should I install gutter guards?



No time-saver, gutter guards need to be cleaned as debris often collects on the surface, blocking rainwater.

**Our roofing expert fields common old-house questions, with advice on maintenance and materials from the top down.**



Lacking gutters, this building developed open mortar joints, algae growth, and loose brickwork at its foundation.

**A** Gutter guards (screens or louvers that cover the gutters) are not a cure-all. At best, your gutters will still need to be cleaned, just less frequently. Dirt, roof granules, nuts, pine needles, twigs, and leaf fragments often pass through the guards to clog the gutter, or that debris rests on top of the guard blocking the gutter so that rainwater spills off the roof instead. Some gutter guards are easily damaged by the weight of snow and the crushing force of the ice that forms at the eaves. The best gutter guards are hinged or easily removed



Ceramic tile, such as that used for the roof of the Ames Gate Lodge in North Easton, Massachusetts, is one of the heaviest roofing materials around, weighing between 10 and 20 pounds per square foot.



PAUL ROCHELEAU

for cleaning. I often recommend that homeowners skip the gutter guards and simply clean their gutters once in the spring and once or twice in the fall. Many roofing contractors provide this service and may even give you a break on the price if the work can be done at a time that best fits their schedule.

**Q** What about removing the strainer basket from the gutter's outlet tube so that my gutters won't clog?

**A** No, your gutters may not clog, but your downspouts and underground drain lines most surely will. This scenario is especially true if there are elbows or miters where the downspouts change direction. The potential for damage from clogged downspouts and drain lines is far worse and harder to detect than that stemming from a clogged gutter. Even worse, clogged downspouts and drain lines cost more to clean and repair than clogged gutters do, so leave those strainers in.

**Q** Why is my slate roof leaking? Doesn't slate last forever?

**A** Slate shingles are one of the most durable roofing materials available, but they don't last forever. A slate roof's longevity depends on a number of factors, including the type of slate installed, the roof's slope and orientation, the type of

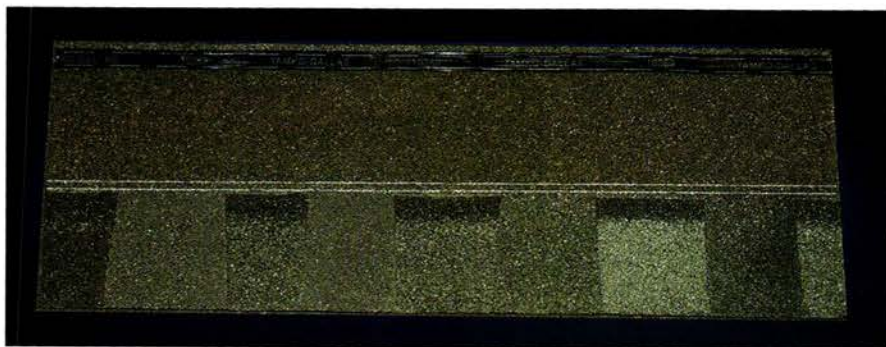


Slate shingles delaminate and soften with age. Projecting nails caused the holes in the center of the slates.

nails used to secure the slate, local climate, and workmanship. In general, slate from Buckingham, Virginia, lasts approximately 175 years or more; New York and Vermont slate roughly 125 years; and Pennsylvania soft-vein slate at least 60 years. Pennsylvania's hard-vein and Peach Bottom slates, neither of which is still quarried, were expected to last roughly 100 and 200 years, respectively. It's no surprise that many residential slate roofs are now due for replacement as more squares of slate were installed during the late-19th and early 20th centuries than in any other period.

Recognize, too, that most flashings will wear out long before the slate itself. Copper flashings, for example, last 50 or 60 years at best. So if your slate roof is in the prime of its life (between 30 and 80 years old, depending on the type of slate) and few broken or delaminating slates are visible, any roof leaks are probably caused by open seams, holes, punctures, or some other problem with the roof's flashings.





BRUCE WATKINS/TAMKO BUILDING PRODUCTS

Shingles that are nailed where the manufacturer designates—in this case, the white markings in the middle—are more likely to stay in place in high winds.

When blocks of slate are split into individual shingles at the quarry, tiny fragments remain on the opposing cleavage faces. Slate fragments also result from the installation process, particularly when nail holes are punched and slates are trimmed to size. Even though most slate-roofing contractors sweep the roof clean when they're done, small fragments may remain on the slate until the next few rainfalls wash them off. After that, though, you should see little slate debris in the gutter.

**Q** I had a slate roof installed about a year ago, and now I've noticed several broken slates. Did the contractor do something wrong?

**A** The short answer is probably not. A few broken slates are normal. Slate sometimes gets broken as the contractor is dismantling his equipment, or it is cracked during installation in places where the damage isn't immediately visible. I often

anticipate this possibility and specify that the contractor returns after a year to repair any broken slates.

**Q** Is it okay if I replace my slate roof with asphalt shingles?

**A** Mechanically speaking, of course it is. Today's dimensional asphalt shingles are available in many colors, textures, and profiles, with warranties ranging from 25 years to a lifetime. While most asphalt shingles look nothing like slate, some do give the impression of slate. Keep in mind that the detailing and cost of the flashings associated with a new asphalt shingle roof, particularly on a home with a complex roof form, is roughly the same as that for a slate roof. Consequently, the overall cost of the project may not drop as much as you might expect. Before committing to a new roof, get several opinions from contractors to make sure that the slate really does need replacing.

**Q** I am having a new asphalt shingle roof installed, and the contractor wants to use a nail gun to fasten the shingles. Is that a bad idea?

**A** The problem with nail guns has to do with nail placement and the force with which the nail is set in place. We did a test with a reputable roofing contractor several months ago in which several shingles were nailed using a nail gun. Roughly a third of the nails were set dead on the manufacturer's sweet spot—that narrow nailing band delineated on the shingle. The other two-thirds were set either above or below that spot, or with too little or,



Slate fragments from a new roof typically wash into the gutters after the first few rainfalls.

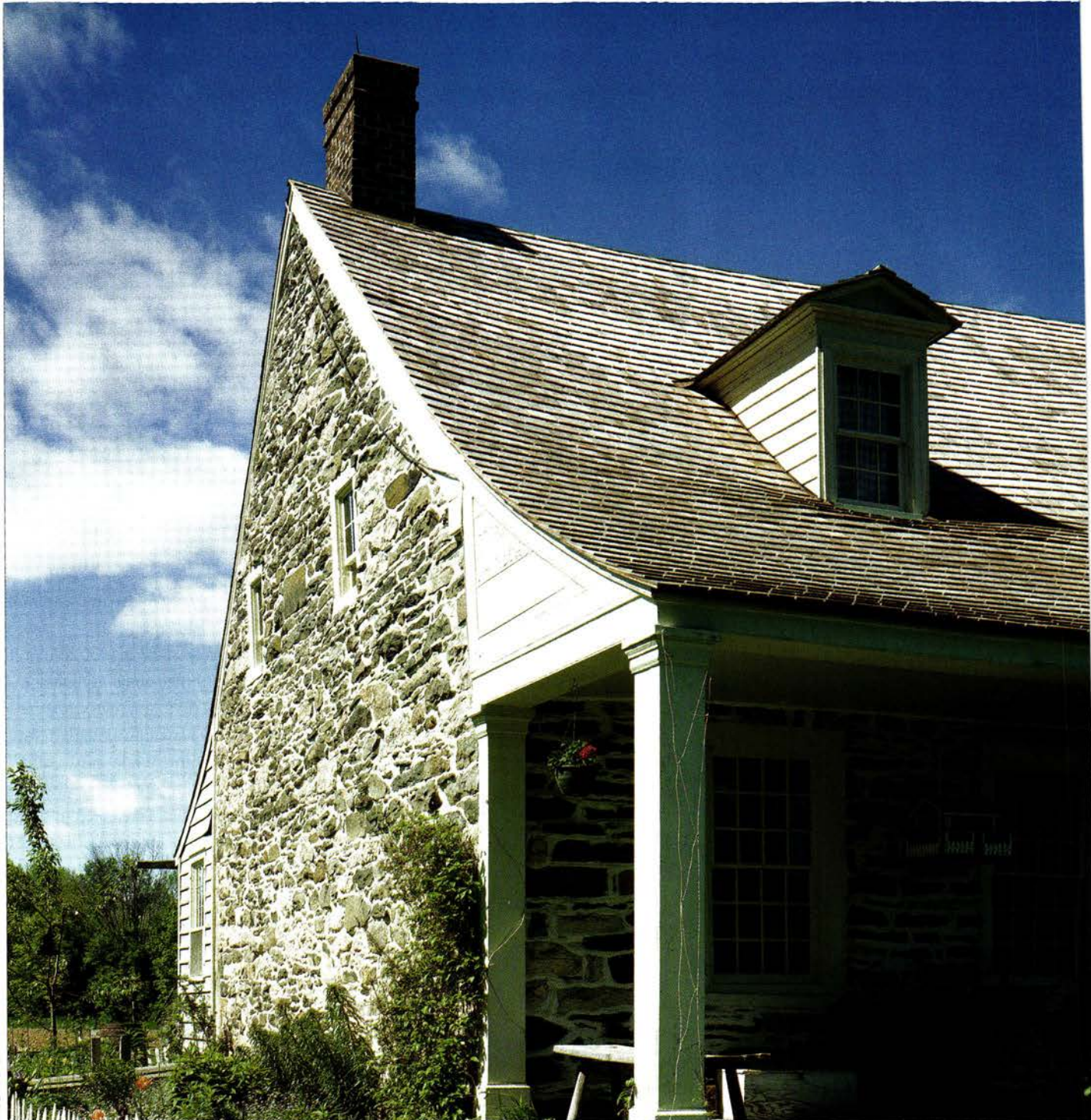
**Q** I just had a new slate roof installed, and I've noticed little flakes of slate in the gutter. Should I be concerned?

**A** Finding slate flakes in the gutter after a new roof is installed is normal and nothing to be concerned about.



This slate was cracked above the butt line and fell out nine months after the new roof was installed.





Copper flashings can be used on a cedar roof (above) provided that the butt ends of the shingles are raised. Otherwise, tannic acids from the shingles will corrode the copper along the butt line.



Flashing tapes were used to seal holes in the batten seam pans at far right until permanent repairs could be made.

worse, too much force. Needless to say, we prohibited the contractor from using a nail gun and required him to hand nail the shingles instead. Nailing asphalt shingles in the area designated by the manufacturer is critical for preventing shingles from blowing off in high winds. Nails set with too much force puncture or tear the shingle, thereby offering little or no holding power. Hand nailing costs a little more but pays off in the long run.

**Q** Can I use copper flashings with a new cedar shingle roof?



**A** You can as long as you avoid line corrosion, which tends to occur where the shingles overlap the copper flashings. You can avoid this problem by raising the butt ends of the shingles off of the copper slightly with a small cant or hump incorporated into the flashing. This tactic keeps the tannic acids that get washed out of the shingles from dwelling on the copper for too long and corroding it along the butt line of the shingles. Even so, unsightly bright spots will appear in the copper wherever water drips off of the shingles. The bright spots represent areas where a patina is unable to form on the copper and where it will wear at an accelerated rate.

There are better choices. Follansbee's stainless steel sheet coated with a zinc-tin alloy (TCS II and TCS Satin) and Revere's copper sheet also coated with a zinc-tin alloy (FreedomGray) are both appropriate



Mastics quickly become brittle, crack, and lose their adhesive properties when exposed to ultraviolet light.

for use with cedar shingles and will wear somewhat more consistently. The same is true of a lead-coated copper roof, although increasingly that option is becoming more difficult to find.

**Q** Can I use mastic (roof cement or muck) to repair holes in my copper roofing and flashings?

**A** It depends on what your goals are and how old the copper is. When

exposed to ultraviolet light, mastics quickly break down and lose their ability to seal holes or close open seams. Mastics also tend to prevent copper from forming a patina either around the patch or down-slope from it, eventually leading the copper to fail prematurely. If the goal is a short-term repair on an old roof, mastics can be effective. Covering the mastic with aluminum foil will help protect it from ultraviolet-light degradation. Flashing tapes and bronze-filled epoxies are also effective for temporary emergency repairs. But if the goal is a long-term repair on a relatively new roof, there is no substitute for soldering pin holes and copper patches over punctures and open seams.

**Q** Can my roof support the weight of clay tile?

**A** If your roof has clay tiles on it now, the answer is probably yes, as long as there is no evidence of sag in the roof or cracked rafters. If your roof doesn't currently have clay tiles on it, the answer is probably no. Clay roofing tiles are among the heaviest roofing materials available, weighing at least 10 to 20 pounds per square foot. But, if you are still interested in adding clay tiles, have a structural engineer evaluate your roof's framing system and determine its load-bearing capacity.

**Q** I have an old tile roof that needs repair. Where can I find replacement tile?

**A** Tile styles and colors have changed over the years. If you're lucky, your roof tile is still made. To identify it, check the back of the tile where the name and style number is sometimes stamped, or consult *Historic and Obsolete Roofing Tile* by Vincent H. Hobson. Even if your tile still is manufactured, there are often minimum-order requirements. Often, the tile in question has been discontinued, and your only choice is to try to obtain reclaimed tile from one of many salvage companies, such as Reclaimed Roofs, Inc.; The Tile Man, Inc.; or Tile Roofs, Inc. They will want photographs or samples to help identify the type of tile you have. 🏠



PAUL ROCHELEAU

Strainer baskets in the gutter's outlet tube keep debris out of downspouts, which tend to clog wherever there are elbows or miters.

*Jeffrey S. Levine is president of Levine & Co., Inc., and a roof consultant in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. He is an expert on maintaining, rehabilitating, and replacing steep-slope roofing systems. He can be reached at [jlevine@levineco.net](mailto:jlevine@levineco.net).*

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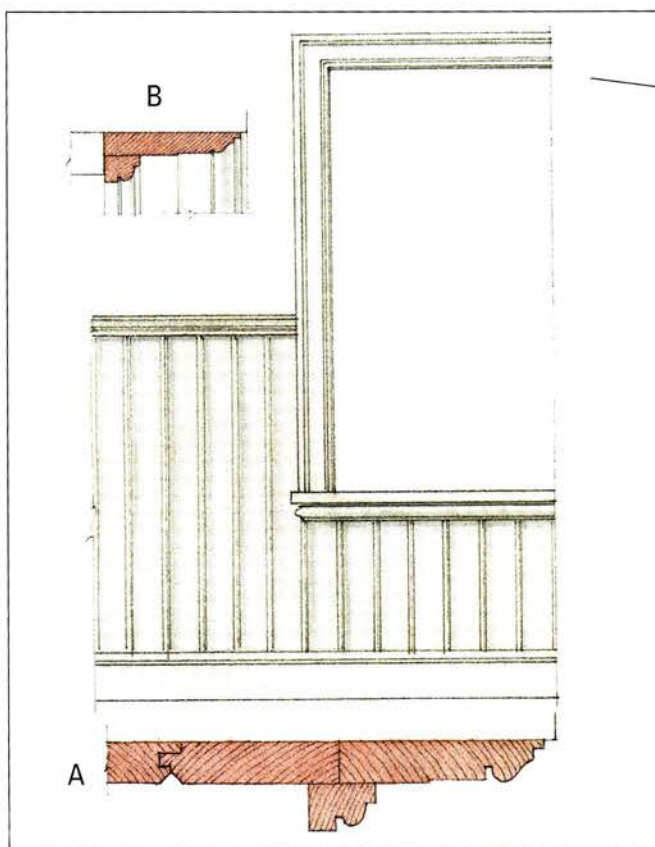
# IN STEP WITH

BY GORDON BOCK

# Wainscots

Wood wainscots are one of the most characteristic finishes in old houses and part of their period appeal. Though paneled wainscots have been used for centuries in high-end buildings, vertical boards shaped with beads or moulded profiles are what come to mind for wainscots in the broad range of houses built from the mid-19th century until well into the 20th.

Building such vertical-board wainscots would appear to be straightforward until it comes time to reckon with wall features such as windows and doors. The good news is that generations of clever carpenters and designers have worked out ways to integrate wainscots mechanically and aesthetically with other trimwork. Here then is a collection of common tricky wainscot situations, with a recipe for how each one can be solved. 🏠

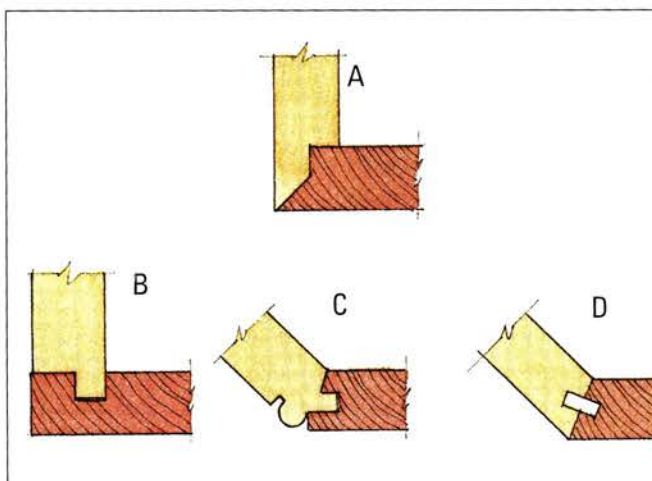


## ◀ Cap Stopping at Casing

Vertical beaded boards make a natural transition to window or door casing. A good way to design this installation is to use window mouldings the same thicknesses as the beaded boards, and then start the wainscot as a continuation of the casing (A). Adding a moulding over the joint (B) completes the casing profile.

## Board Angle Joints ▶

The areas where vertical-board wainscots meet other woodwork or change direction can't employ the usual tongue-and-groove system on the board for a good mechanical connection. In these cases, a variety of traditional angle joints come into play, such as rabbet versions (A and B) or splines (D).

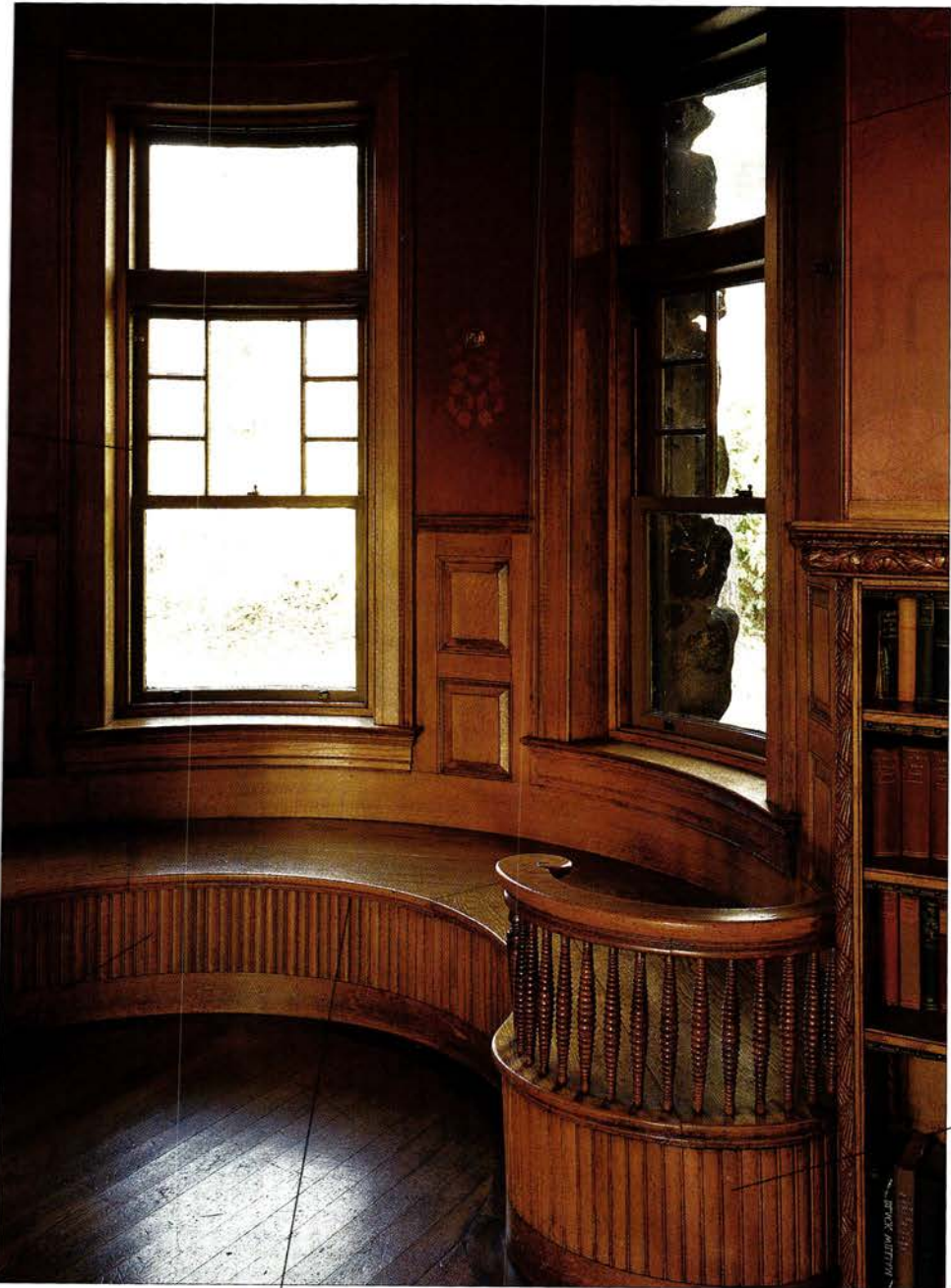


ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROB LEANNA

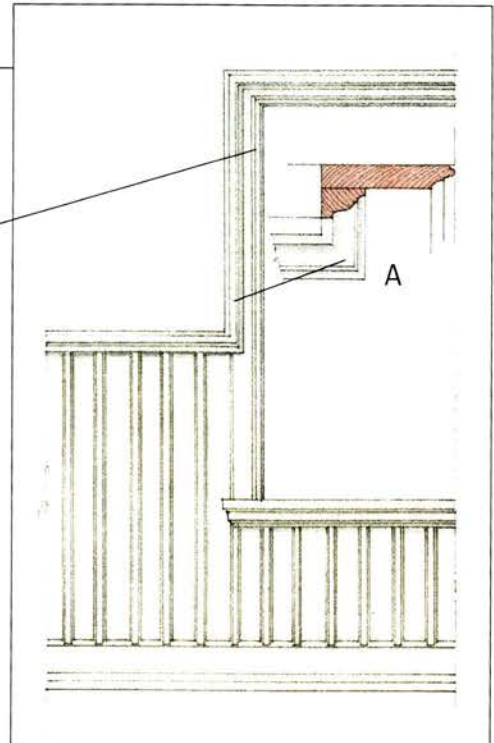
## Cap Details ▶

Wainscot caps need to secure as well as finish the top of vertical boards, either with a rabbet in the cap (A) or in a secondary board (B).



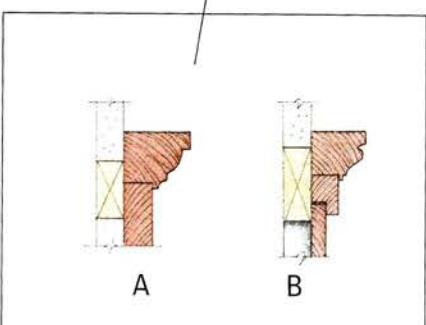
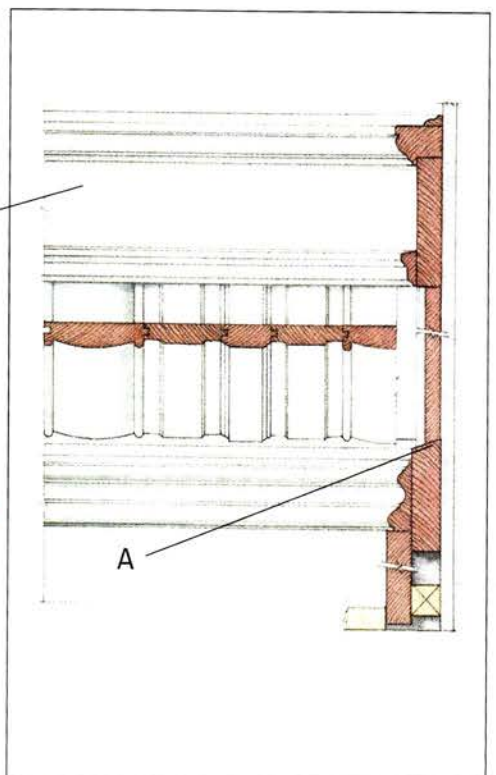


PAUL ROCHELEAU



### Cap Continuous ▲ with Casing

The wainscot cap can also blend into the casing. Whether or not the cap is milled with a rabbet, it turns in a miter where it meets the window (A) to become a back-band for the casing.



### Moulded Boards and Baseboards ▶

Boards milled with moulded profiles create a more sophisticated wainscot than beaded boards, without the cost of paneling. To avoid unsightly gaps, make the baseboard about  $\frac{1}{8}$ " thicker than the wainscoting, and bevel it at the top (A), a nuance that also sheds dirt and is practical for bathrooms, too.



# The Lustron Labyrinth

Those little 1950s prefab houses made of steel present preservation challenges all their own.

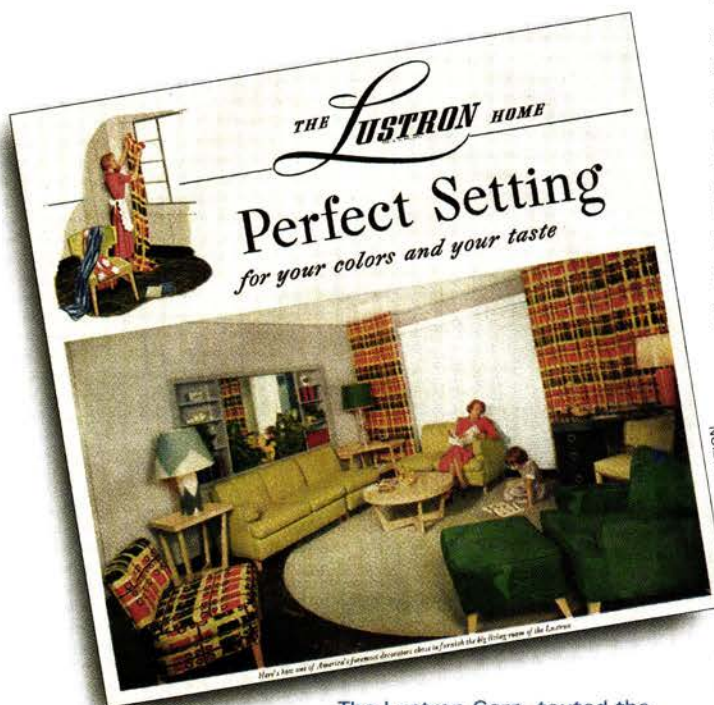
BY DEMETRA APOSPOROS

The first time Todd Zeiger heard of a Lustron house he was in college, where one of his historic-preservation classes focused on post-World War II homes designed to assuage housing shortages for returning GIs. “The idea of a prefabricated, all-steel house fascinated me,” says Zeiger. Little did he know then that he would have his own Lustron one day.

As a preservationist for Indiana’s Historic Landmarks Foundation, Zeiger oversees a unique program that pairs rundown historic properties with volunteers devoted to fixing them up. The volunteers are expected to pay careful attention to a property’s unique needs, have all work approved ahead of time, and follow exacting preservation standards. Oh yes, and they must pay for all of the work out of their own pockets. In return for this labor of love, they get a 30-year lease to live in the structures. Zeiger’s Lustron—located in the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, a state park—is one of these buildings.

Initially, Zeiger’s challenge was to find a leaser-savior for the house, a Westchester deluxe three-bedroom model in dove grey. The problem was that all of the interested parties wanted to alter it—move walls, remove drawers, and paint the interior. “Here was this little gem of a Lustron, original to the day it was constructed in 1949, and people couldn’t see its value,” says Zeiger. It didn’t take long before he felt the pull to preserve the under-appreciated Lustron himself. “It’s not like I needed another project,” he says, “but it was a great opportunity to learn more about a wonderful historic building. And Lustrons have such great personalities. When you’re inside one, you

The Zeiger family: Todd and Terri with kids, Jacob, Rachael, and Lindsey (left to right), beside their 1949 Lustron at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.



The Lustron Corp. touted the house’s modern style, ease of upkeep, and practical design through a series of magazine ads.







PHOTOS BY LEE BEY EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

really feel the '50s and that decade's progressive, new-solutions approach to the housing crunch."

Lustrons are made of porcelain-enameled steel—11 tons of it molded into 30,000 parts, all of which fit together like a giant, three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle (see "Steel Houses," November/December 1999). Although Zeiger had lectured on the houses for years and visited hundreds of them, restoring one has been a challenge.



KDW FILMS

A prototype three-bedroom Lustron in Hinsdale, Illinois, shows one of the six color combinations available.





Todd and Terri pore over the vintage owner's manual to get clues for repairing their living room, which boasts original built-in bookshelves.

## A Metal Mushroom Factor

That's because all those Lustron components were engineered to piece together in one specific sequence, and they only come apart the same way. In practical terms, this design means that for every house part that needs repairing, many more must be dismantled to reach it. During a recent, seemingly straightforward repair job on the gutters, Zeiger had to first remove the roof tiles. "For every project, you have to think about how the house was constructed and then work backwards," he says. "You end up having to take apart a bunch of things to get to where you need to be, so it always becomes a much bigger job than anticipated."

Zeiger compares working on a Lustron to the challenges facing old-house aficionados restoring more mainstream buildings 40 years ago. "Back then, people were trying to fix Victorian and Italianate porches before there were publications like *Historic Preservation Briefs* or *OHI*." It often takes some innovation to get the job done, which Zeiger says usually happens through a process of sleuthing, first figuring out how things work together and then finding a way to fix the problem without destroying the house's integrity.

## A Do-It-Yourself Project

A copy of the original construction manual has helped. The 207-page book, delivered to each house site along with a truckload of parts, is one of Zeiger's favorite aspects of Lustrons. "They were engineered so the average person could put them together. You'd just get your manual and a screwdriver and go to it." Of course, it's not entirely clear how long it might have taken an average homeowner to put up one of these houses. A 1948 *Consumer Reports* magazine naming Lustrons as the best buy pre-fab house reported that construction time averaged three to five days—and that was for a professional contractor.

Unfortunately, some of Zeiger's house parts aren't covered in the manual. A huge screened porch, original to his house but not standard to Lustrons, has been a real problem area, thanks to the unforgiving Indiana lakeshore winters. "The porch had



The kitchen pass-through, viewed from the dining room, was designed to make serving meals a little easier; the space is within reach of the stove.





Rare, authentic kitchen features include storage compartments, drawers, and shelves (left). Below, Todd secures the zigzag downspout decoration unique to Lustrons.



leaked for a long time," says Zeiger. Because the porch is considered historically significant, it must be restored to its original appearance, and Zeiger is still seeking out period-appropriate fiberglass panels to fix it. Another favorite item is the little oval tag that all Lustrons display in their utility areas, inscribed with a serial number and the advice: Call your authorized Lustron service person. "Wouldn't it be nice if there was one!" he jokes.

Overall, the house has held up remarkably well, especially considering the rough weather it has endured. The original roof tiles lasted 50 years without major repairs, just small fixes on areas damaged by fallen trees, and the whole house has proven easy to maintain, which is one of the things Zeiger's wife, Terri, appreciates the most. "Since everything's a smooth surface, you don't have to worry about getting it wet, you can pretty much just hose it down," she says.



Terri is also fond of another feature unique to Lustrons: metal walls inside and out. "Our kids have magnetic games they use on the walls, and it keeps them busy for hours." Not surprisingly, the whole house has a similar effect on Zeiger, but he's not complaining. "Lustrons are like a giant Erector Set, and I get to play with one all the time," he says. "How cool is that?" 🏠



Steel walls are great for magnetic tic-tac-toe (above left). Pristine porcelain-enamel exterior panels are visible behind Todd as he works on the porch.



# When Evening Shadows Fall

By John Crosby Freeman



Moe-Bridges Lighting used romanticism to sell lights in 1928.

## Old became new in light fixture designs for Romantic Revival interiors.

Ever wonder what turns us on about electric fixtures made for Romantic Revival houses built between the world wars, or what was called Early American, Colonial, English, and Spanish Manner? Then look at the 1920s illustration above. It is this elegant romanticism, the imagination and emotions evoked by an old-looking house festively lit from within, that rarely failed to captivate the eye back then or steal the heart even today.

What made Romantic Revival lighting intentionally old compared to other early 20th-century lighting? Consider the Arts & Crafts designers of the 1910s, who were among the first to enthusiastically embrace the flexibility of electric light-

ing—with its freedom from flame, heat, soot, and maintenance—for novel forms and locations. Though these designers sought to create new lighting by abstracting traditional shapes and eschewing applied ornament, they did pass on to Romantic Revival lighting the notion that fixtures should be sources of jewel-like pools of light in a room. In contrast, what made Art Deco and Art Moderne lighting new compared to “old” Romantic Revival lighting was not so much the fixtures but the way they bathed the entire room in light.

Romantic Revival fixtures can be divided into three categories: wall brackets or sconces, chandeliers, and lanterns. Of the three, wall brackets were the most delicate in design because the models for Romantic Revival lights were candle-powered; they were neither large nor large sources of light.

Wall brackets also have the lowest survival rate. Because they made Romantic Revival walls look old-fashioned when styles changed, it was a small matter to unscrew the fixture, cap the wires, and patch the hole in the plaster prior to updating the paint scheme. They may still be hiding in the dark recesses of your attic.

Romantic Revival chandeliers, often appearing as either a black iron hoop suspended by chains or a spider of spindly metal arms, were sometimes victims of changing tastes. What they lacked was lux, failing to fulfill the contemporary concept of a chandelier as a ponderous cascade of prisms. Lanterns, on the other hand, have

retained their appeal.

Romantic Revival lanterns are typically more European medieval than oriental in design, with rectangular or cylindrical bodies and lids with functional-looking vents. Lanterns were deemed especially appropriate for creating an Early English look and could be located singly in hallways or as pairs flanking entrances or fireplaces.

Romantic Revival lighting manufacturers relied in part on the Victorian approach: using applied ornament as a legible shorthand for the historic styles of light fixtures. In the 1935 Chase Brass & Copper catalog, for example, the polished-brass Georgian fixtures have prisms and ornaments of shells, urns, leaves, fretwork, swags, and flame finials. Federal-style silver-plated fixtures have patriotic symbols, such as neoclassical urns, eagles, stars of the newly designed flag, and arrows from the Great Seal of the United States.

A more subtle legacy of Arts & Crafts designers was the idea that each historic style of light fixture had an appropriate signature metal. Although Chase Brass & Copper was in business to sell brass, it took this concept to heart with Early English fixtures that had brass cores encased by black iron. Brass also went into hiding with its Early American tin-plated sconces.

Another aspect of Chase's ornamental vocabulary was painted color options. Some of the back plates of the tin-plated Early American sconces and shades of



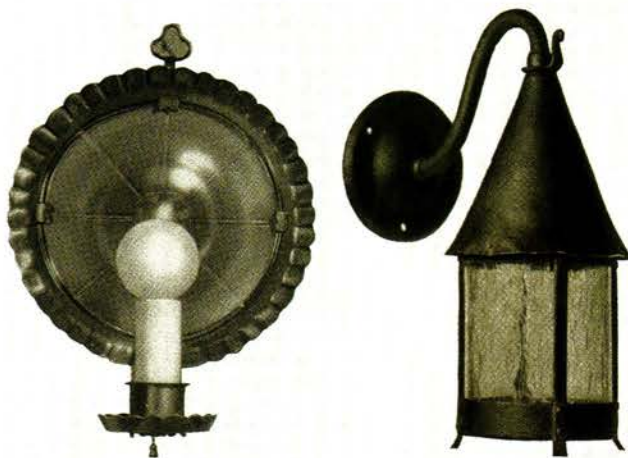
This Early American room from 1935 hits all the Romantic Revival lighting bases: hoop chandelier with scallop ornament, tin sconces, and shaded table lamps—all replete with electrified candles.

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF AMERICAN LIFE FOUNDATION


table lamps were available in barn red, corn yellow, or laurel green.

That brings us to the sensitive matter of electric candles sporting little shades. Though obvious anachronisms (shades would burn on a candle), they were essential to Romantic Revival lighting because wall sconces and hanging chandeliers were originally designed for candles. Take away their candles and Romantic Revival fixtures lose their vital connection to the past. Besides, shades soften and scatter light. Our old-house ancestors were comfortable with them, so why not us? 🏠

**John Crosby Freeman**, "the color doctor," can be reached at 1601 Sheridan Lane, Norristown, Pennsylvania 19403.



Sconces took cues from colonial tinware and symbolic ornament; lanterns aped English medieval models.

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For a list of  
**SUPPLIERS**,  
see page 74.



# The Changing Face of the Colonial Revival House

Starting with a few 18th-century relics, Americans have periodically reinterpreted their earliest dwellings into models for the ultimate, post-industrial, suburban home. **BY JAMES C. MASSEY AND SHIRLEY MAXWELL**

Started by the lumber industry in 1915, *The White Pine* series presented scholarly photos and measured drawings of 18th- and early 19th-century houses to aid architects designing colonial details—best built, of course, with white pine.

The Colonial Revival is by far the most enduring theme in the history of American domestic architecture. Yet, for more than a century, architectural historians and homeowners alike have puzzled over what, exactly, makes a Colonial Revival house, well, Colonial Revival. It's not a single style for the term encompasses prim little Cape Cods, large formal Georgians, elegantly restrained Federal townhouses, shingled cottages, and columned southern mansions. About the only thing these house types have in common is that all derive from early U.S. architecture—mostly British-inspired with an occasional German, French, or Dutch accent mixed in. Though it's easy to lump these influences together under the rubric of movement, dissecting them a bit helps explain how Colonial Revival houses changed over time and why they're still popular today.

## Centennial Seeds

America's reverence for its Colonial past dates back at least to the mid-19th century with the preservation of our first officially



GORDON BOCK COLLECTION INCLUDING INSET PHOTO!

PHOTOS BY JAMES C. MASSEY EXCEPT WHERE NOTED



Formal and symmetrical, the two-storey, brick Georgian house became the archetypal Colonial Revival home in the 1920s. Adding Federal details, such as the window lintels on this Richmond, Virginia, example, was common.





designated historic site, George Washington's Revolutionary War headquarters in Newburgh, New York. Only a few years later, an icon emerged when the Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union rescued Washington's home in Mount Vernon, Virginia, from near collapse. In 1876, the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia stirred the hearts and minds of millions of attendees, not just with American technology and industry, but also with its focus on America's beginnings. By the 1890s, a vigorous Colonial Revival movement was generating a great many brand-new "colonial" houses with footprints, layouts, and modern amenities that spoke more to the late-19th century than to early America.

Gradually, however, architects, historians, and a more sophisticated audience of enthusiasts worked their way toward a fuller understanding of 18th- and early 19th-century designs. New Englanders, especially, nurtured an interest in the region's late-medieval 17th-century houses. From just before World War I until the outbreak of World War II, painstaking study of Colonial, Federal, and Greek Revival buildings supported a much firmer grasp of correct proportions and accurate details.

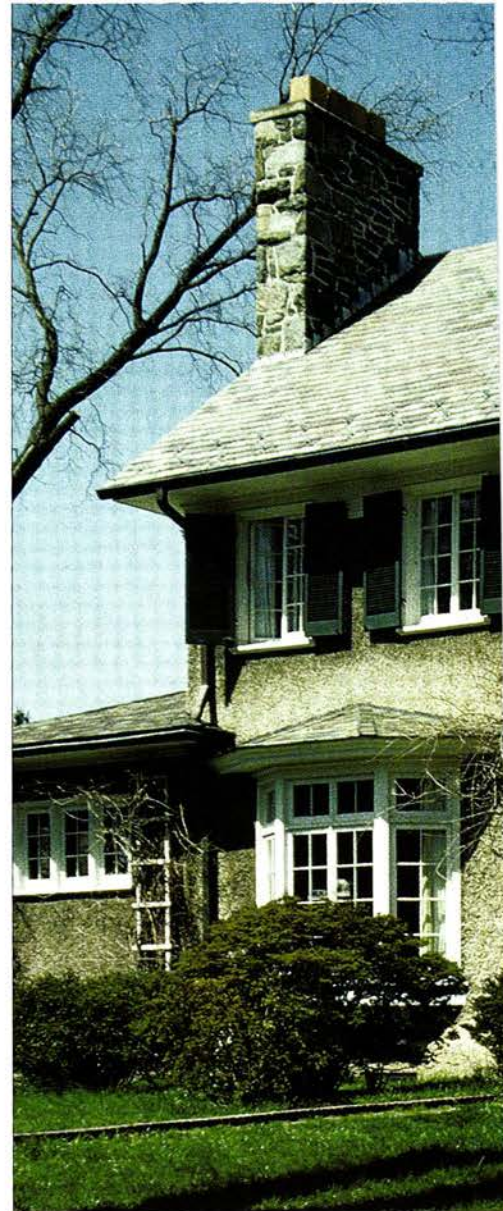
Still, it might all have come to naught if it hadn't been for two lavishly funded and highly publicized restoration efforts. The first was begun in 1926 by John D. Rockefeller in Williamsburg, the old colonial capital of Virginia; the second was Greenfield Village, an artfully assembled group of restored historic buildings that automobile mogul Henry Ford opened in 1929 in Dearborn, Michigan.

In the 1930s, the Colonial Revival movement gained even greater momentum from the enormous amount of press it enjoyed. In addition to being core material for professional journals, such as *Architectural Record* and the long-running *White Pine* monograph series, the Colonial Revival house was a favorite subject of magazines of the period, such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *House and Garden*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and *House Beautiful*. Hollywood got into the act in a big way with movies that gave stars such as Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant backdrops of old Connecticut farmhouses or new

suburban Colonials, feeding the housing fantasies of generations of moviegoers.

The books and photographic prints of staged colonial settings by Wallace Nutting were hugely popular, as were his reproduction colonial-style furniture. Architect Samuel Chamberlain's books and photographs also fed public interest in the colonial period. From 1933 forward, the measured drawings and photographs of Colonial buildings executed by the Historic American Buildings Survey provided a major source of authentic detail to architects and homeowners.

While many architects and their clients felt the pull of between-the-wars eclectic revivals or the Bauhaus aesthetic of Modernism, there was always a solid core of prominent designers who followed the Colonial Revival path and sometimes included Federal and Greek Revival designs in their colonial repertoires. Among them was Royal Barry Wills, a prolific designer and author (*Houses for Good Living*, 1940, and *Houses for Homemakers*, 1945), noted for his devotion to the Cape Cod house. William Lawrence Bottomley of Richmond, Virginia, built many formal Federal and Georgian houses, such as the 1916-18 H.L. Goslan House on Richmond's Monument Avenue. Philadelphia's R. Brognard Okie, who restored the Betsy Ross House



In fieldstone or brick, the boxy Pennsylvania farmhouse became the model for informal Colonial Revival, especially through architects like R. Brognard Okie.

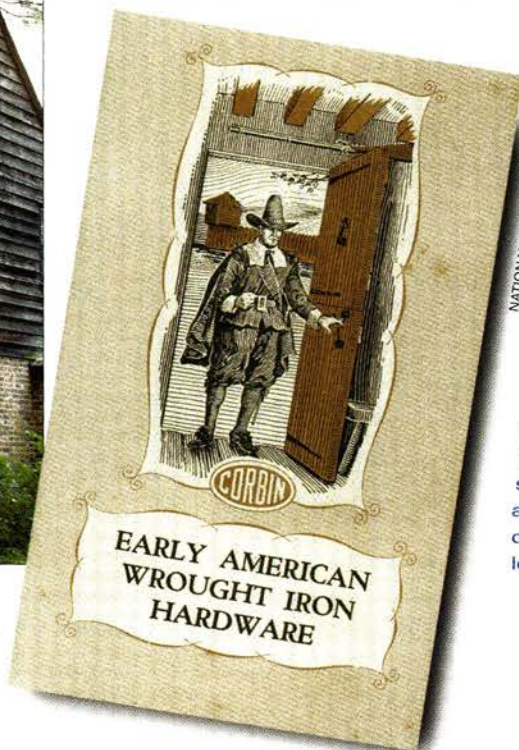




Though this Washington, D.C., house has a Georgian-style centered door and five-bay facade, the paired windows upstairs and bay windows below are strictly Colonial Revival.



This Garrison Colonial in Virginia looks 17th century down to its second-storey overhang and 8/8 windows.



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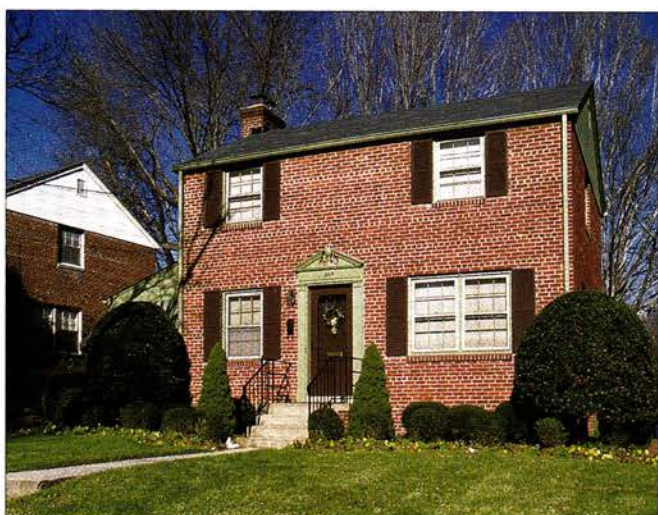
Colonial was a powerful and conveniently elastic concept by the 1920s that was stretched to market almost any manner of pre-industrial-looking design.



Barely recognizable amid the attached garage, side wing, and picture window, Garrison Colonials such as this became the denizens of countless mid-century subdivisions.



Constraints on materials and money reduced many World War II-era houses to the barest emblems of Colonial Revival: brick and a rudimentary pedimented entrance.




Beloved far beyond its New England roots, the Cape Cod is generally a one-and-a-half-storey cottage with clapboard siding; dormers are a 20th-century twist.

and oversaw the reconstruction of William Penn's Pennsbury Manor, specialized in designing stone country houses in the Pennsylvania vernacular style.

### Signs of the Times

Though the 1910s and 1920s can be viewed as the apex of the historically accurate Colonial Revival house, most architects practiced what was known in the trade as free rendering of historical detail. This approach allowed them to come up with designs that fit a contemporary lifestyle while staying true to the period. Within a decade, however, the image of Colonial Revival was morphing again, not just from changing tastes, but from economic and social conditions. For instance, a widespread shortage of personal funds during the Great Depression along with World War II restrictions on building ma-





Dutch Colonial Revival was—or at least appeared to be—a one-storey house, usually featuring a gambrel roof and a pent eave. One well-known architect of the type was Aymar Embury, but catalog versions abounded by the 1920s.

materials and labor in the 1940s each had a downsizing, simplifying effect. These conditions left their mark on Colonial Revival houses in ways that provide some subtle clues for dating buildings today.

**Size.** Colonial Revival houses in the 1930s are generally smaller than those built in the 1910s and '20s. Postwar tract houses, as well as those found in large wartime housing developments, are even smaller, and the layouts are simpler.

**Exterior Surface Decoration.** There is less to look at on postwar houses, and what's there tends to be flatter than in earlier houses. Decoration is restrained and modest except perhaps for the 1950s signature broken-pediment doorway.

**Eaves and Cornices.** Eave overhangs are shallower in later houses. Deep friezes and fancy cornices with modillions and dentils appear less frequently, and some-

times not at all, from the 1940s onward.

**Windows.** Steel casements often replaced wooden sash in the 1930s, to be superseded by aluminum sash in the 1950s. Horizontal panes often edged out vertical panes by mid-century. Without deep cornices to restrict their placement, wartime and postwar windows sometimes nestled under the eaves. Bay windows cropped up in the 1930s or later, and picture windows became an irresistible adjunct in the '50s.

**Garages.** Detached garages near the rear lot line often partnered with 1930s houses, while attached garages were built from the '30s onward and became standard after the war. Carports are mainly a postwar phenomenon.

By the 1930s, Americans preferred some version of the American Colonial, and that preference lasted into the 1940s and '50s, although in considerably altered

forms. The Colonial Revival style remained the hands-down favorite throughout the war, as many a wartime bride's wish book of house plans could attest. Postwar reality, however, often turned the two-storey Colonial into a one-storey ranch house. The first Levittown, a development begun for young families in Long Island, New York, in 1947, offered just two models: a (sort of) Cape Cod and a (sort of) ranch house. By the early 1960s, when Levitt built his third development in Willingboro, New Jersey, he offered a full-blown two-storey Colonial Revival house.

Although the ranch house may have ultimately won the day as a national single-family house, the appeal of the Colonial Revival remains and undoubtedly accounts for the frequent appearance of the "colonial ranch house" in today's real estate ads. 🏡



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### Cold Comparisons, page 44

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**Down to the Finish, page 31**  
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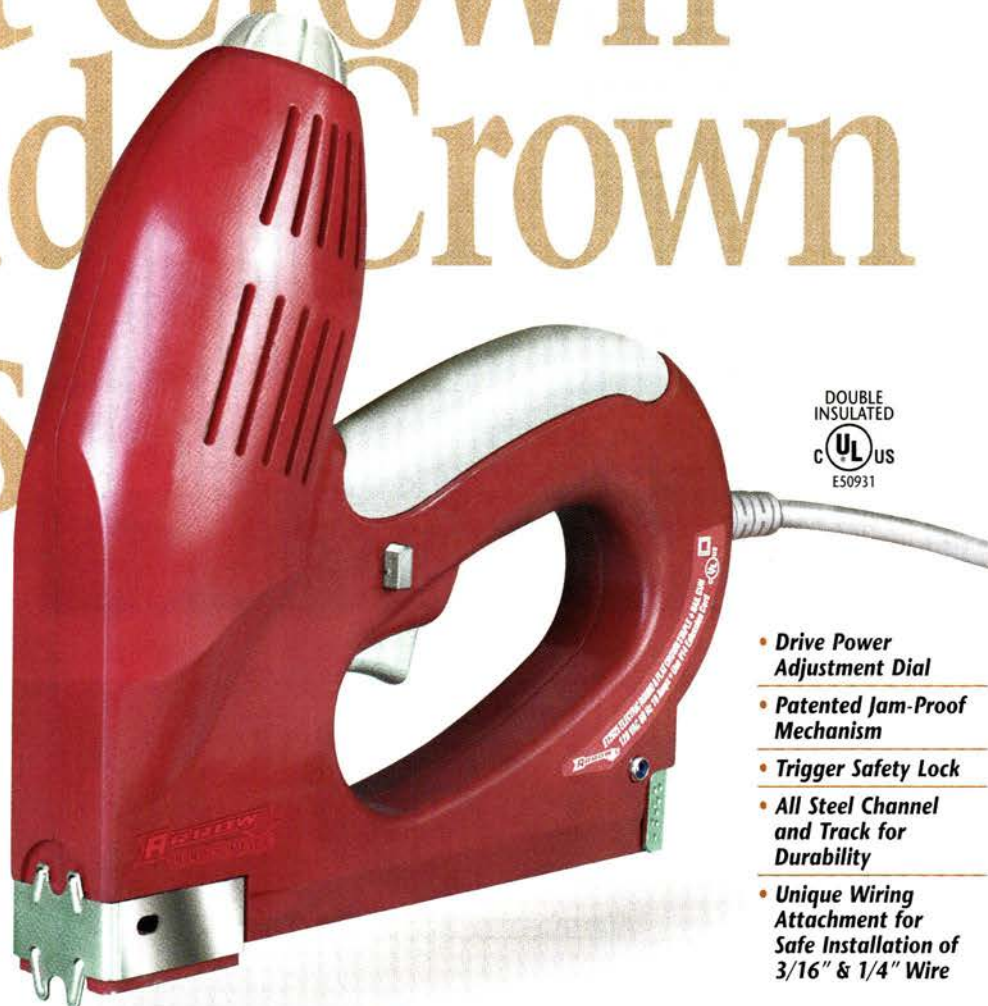
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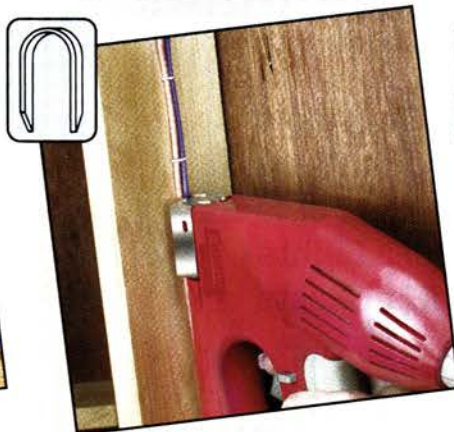
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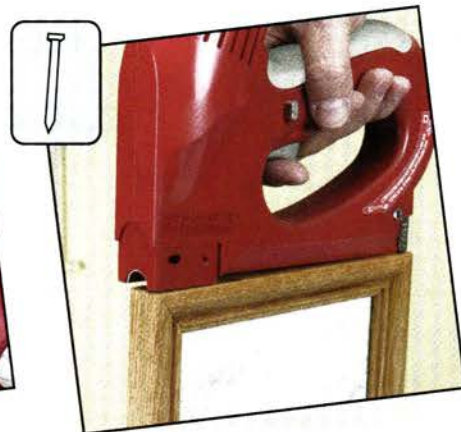
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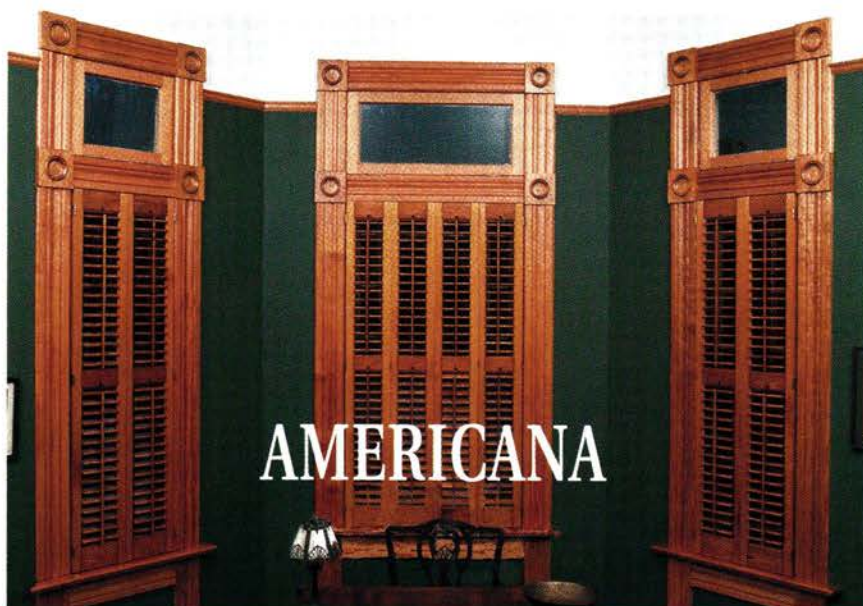
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(continued on page 78)





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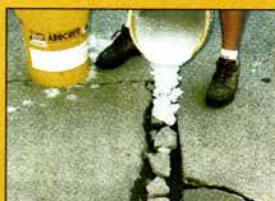
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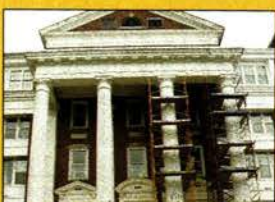
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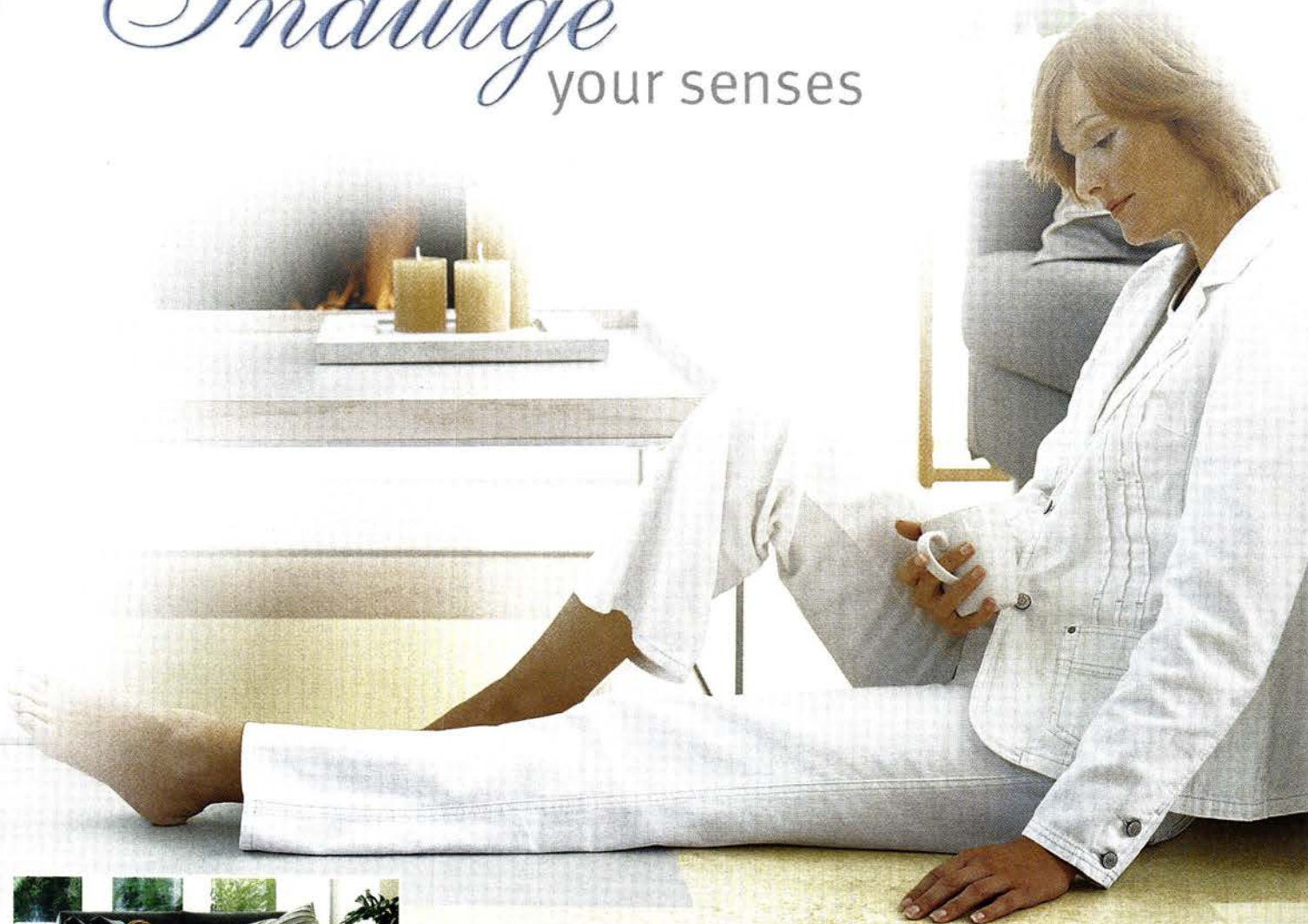
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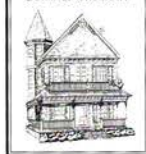
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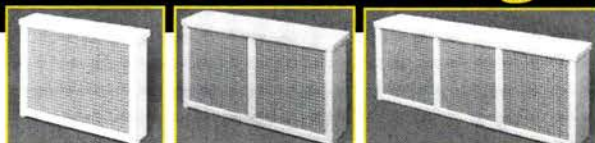
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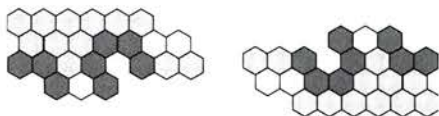
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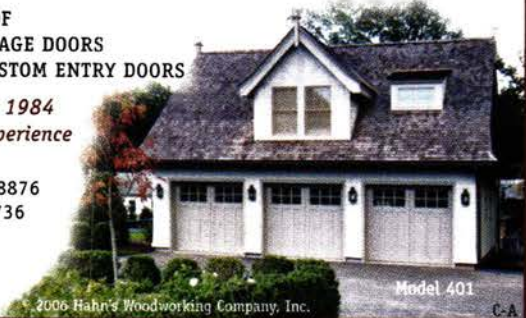
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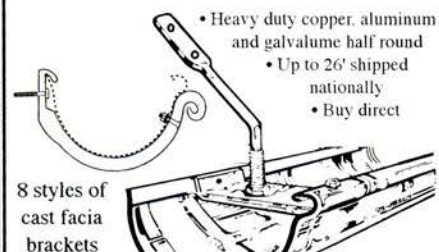
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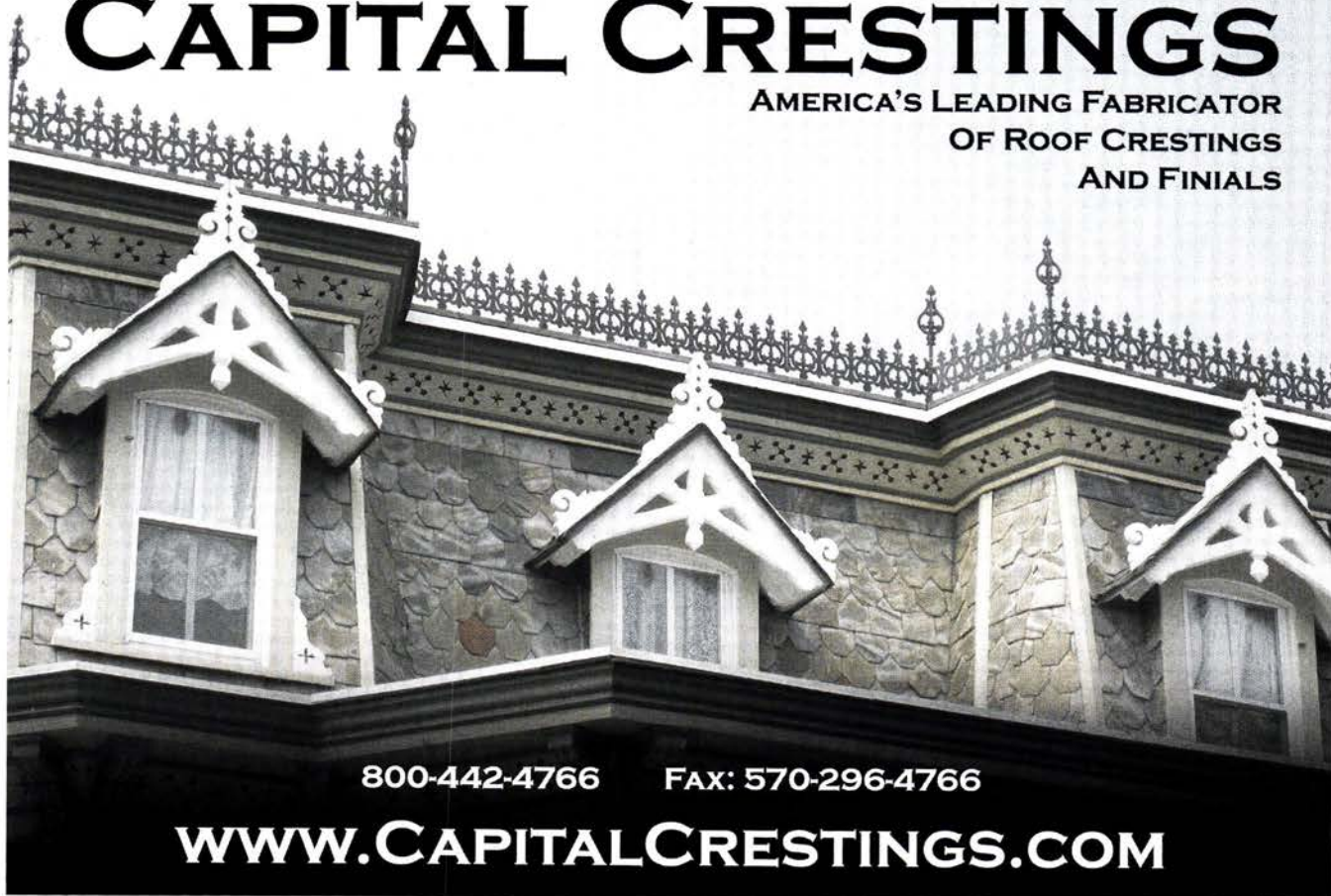
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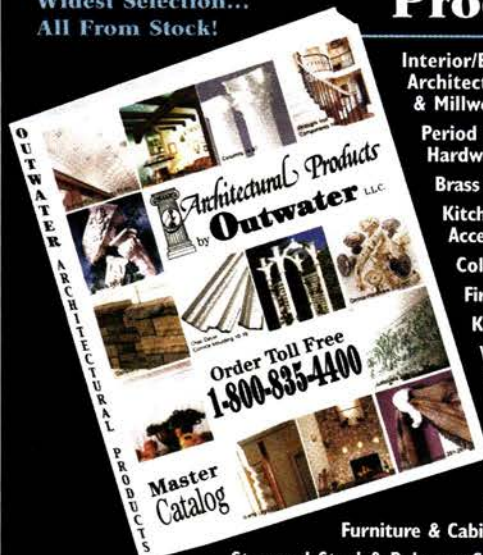
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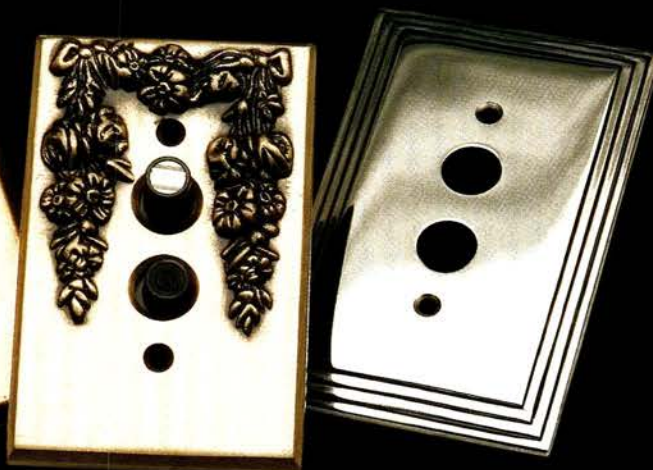
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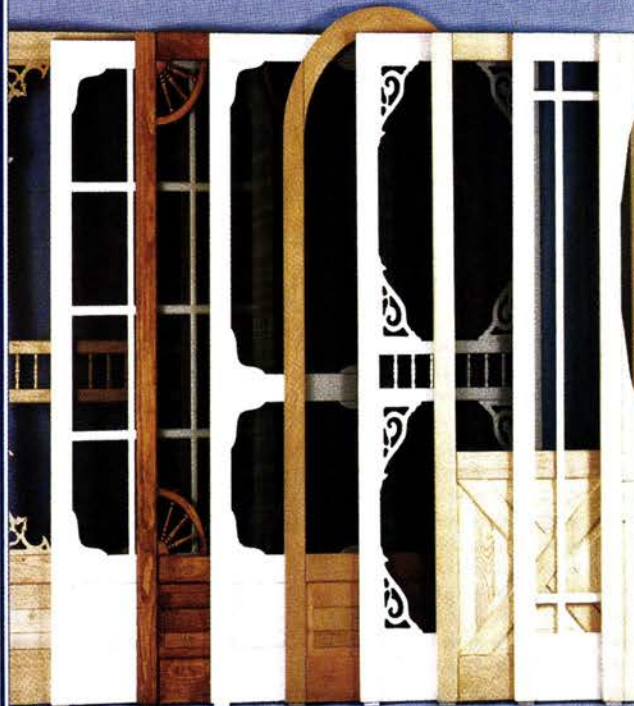
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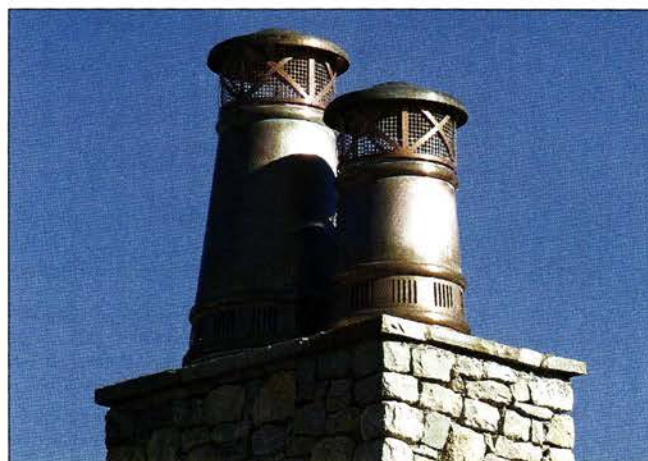


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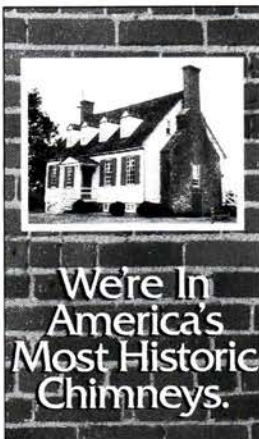
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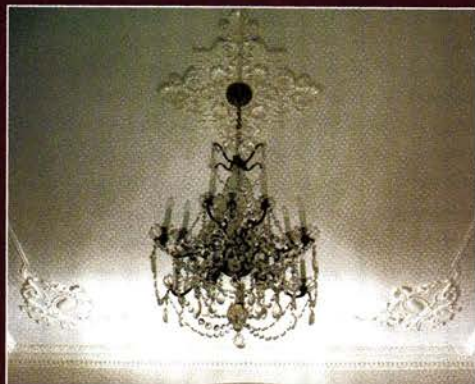
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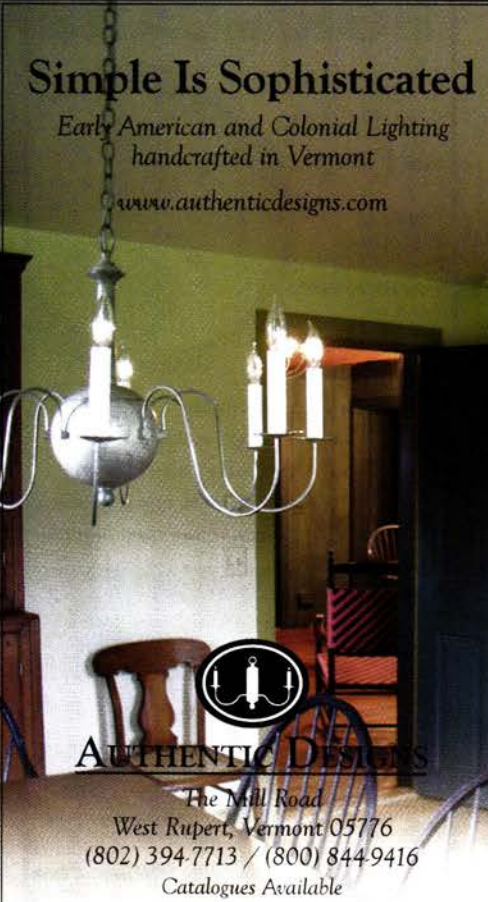
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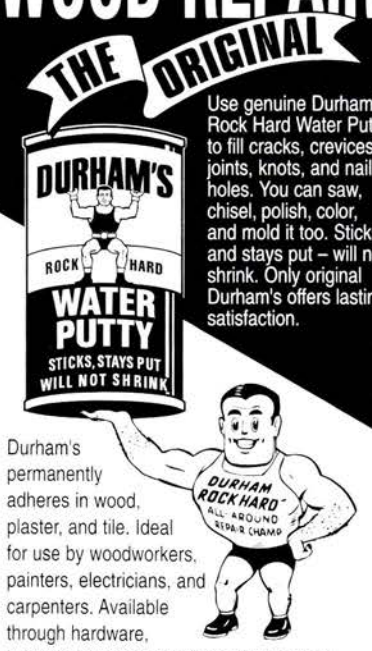
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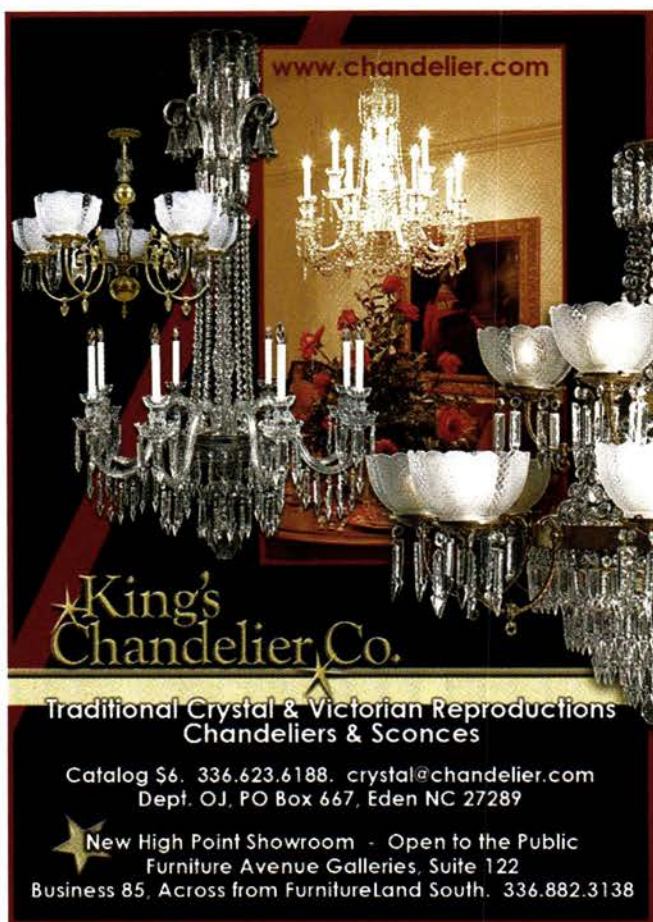
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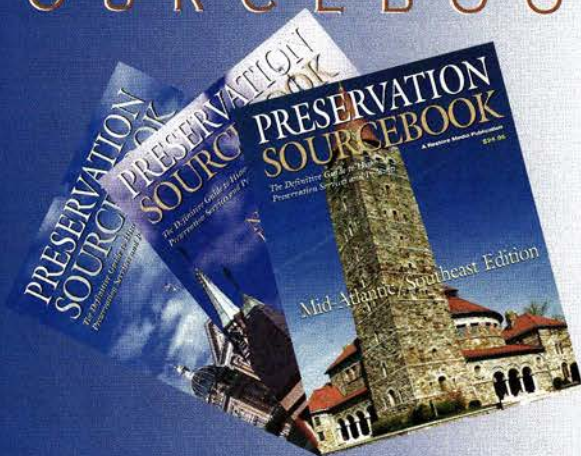
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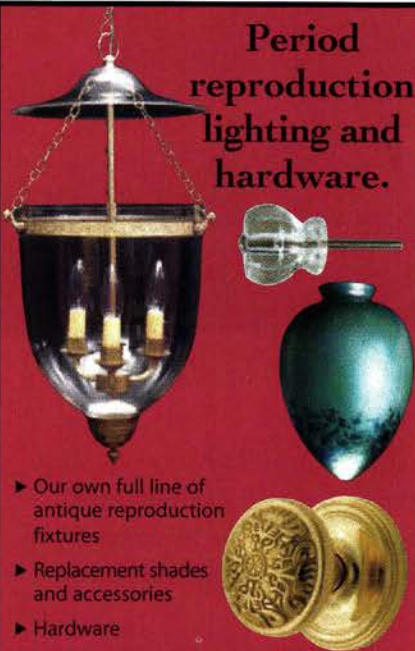


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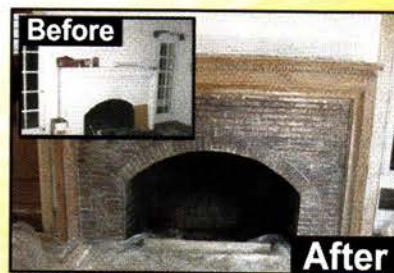
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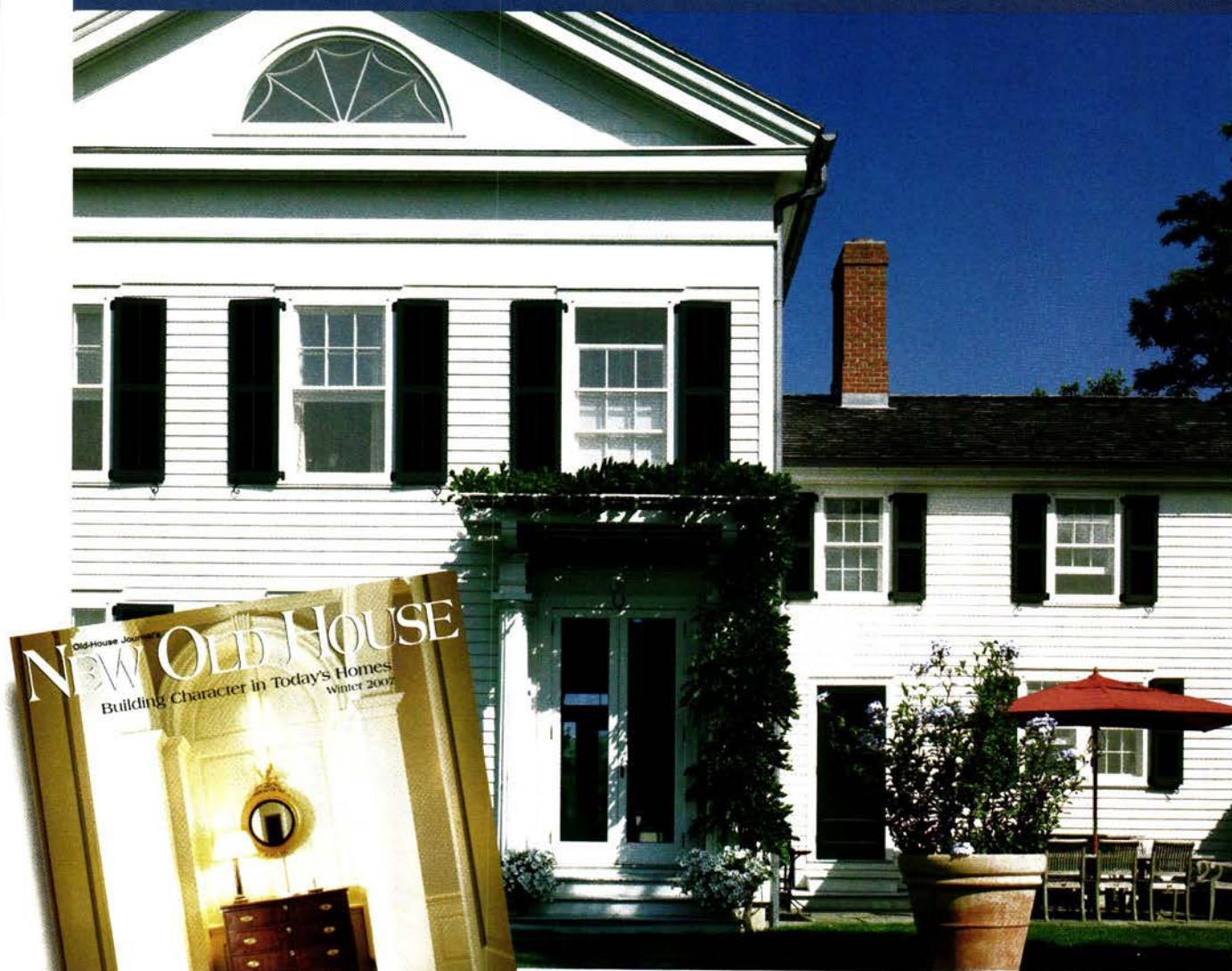
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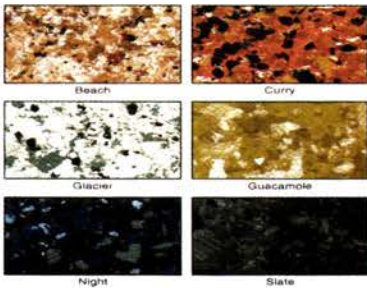
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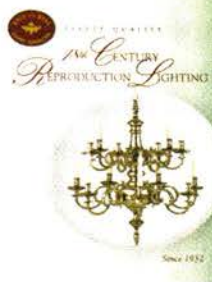
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## Sprouting like Weeds

Like so many overgrown gardens, expanded houses can shoot out in several different directions at once these days. Take this 1950s-era house (right), originally a simple, modest ranch resembling others in the neighborhood (left). An addition grows the building past the chimney at left, adding vertical siding and a bay window. On the shoot of a second-storey pop-up, gabled bay dormers blossom in different dimensions; like weeds, their windows bear no symmetry in either size or detailing (some have muntins, some are plain). At the entry, a hexagonal addition resembling an oriel window juts forth like a clump of grass, changing the plane of the entire facade; it flowers with yet another variety and size of window. Even the roofs belong to different species: One is gabled, the other hipped. "The additions are done in a veritable jumble of styles," notes our contributor. It seems that sometimes, the seeds of renovation yield a varied crop. 🌱

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