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Old House JOURNAL

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Wood Fence Ideas
Matching Pickets that Match the House

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August 2007

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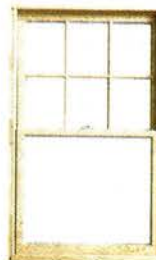
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Circle no. 3

Features

July/August 2007

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By Susan E. Schnare

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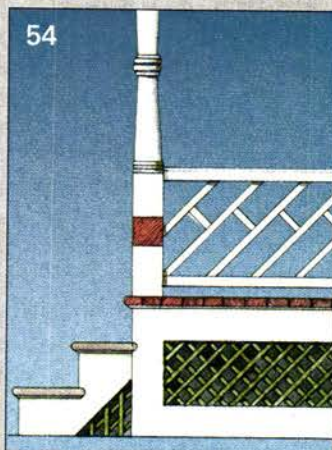
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66 Style: Those Amazing Aladdins

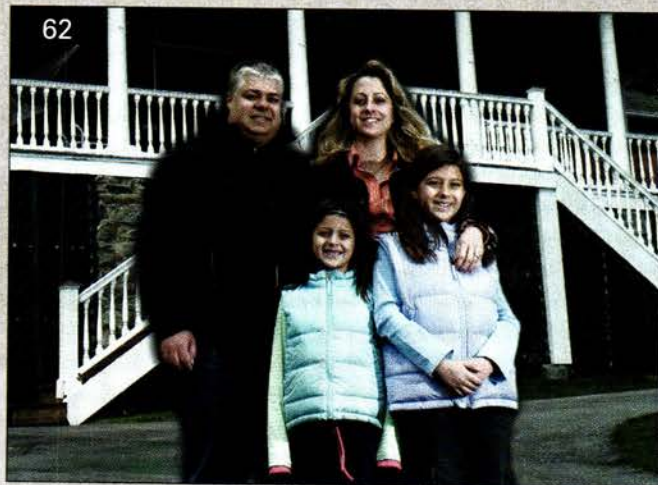
By James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell

Michigan-based Aladdin Houses was arguably the most successful kit house company, delivering bungalows and ranch houses decades after Sears quit the business. Yet most people have never heard of them—until now.



ON THE COVER:

Decorative gable details and porch posts adorn a Queen Anne house in Alameda, California. Photo by Linda Svendsen.



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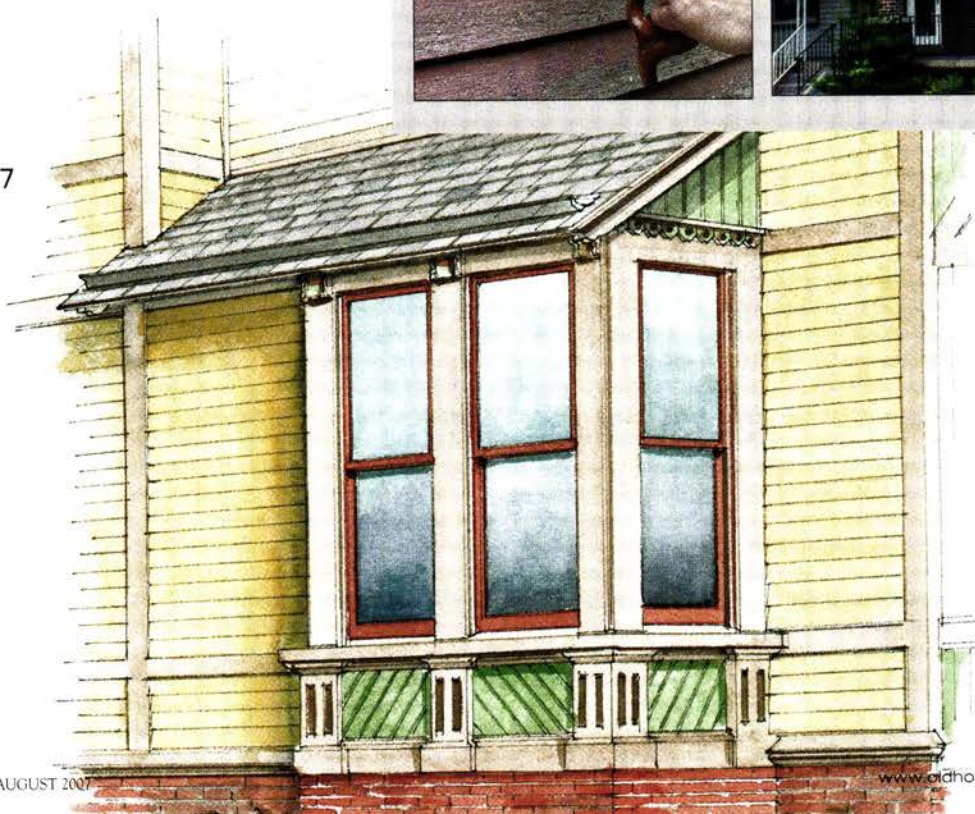
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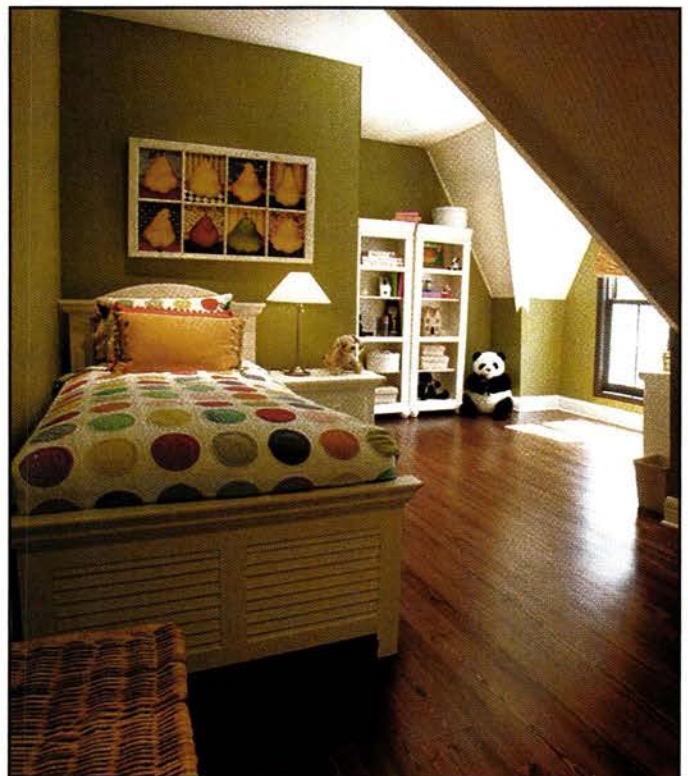
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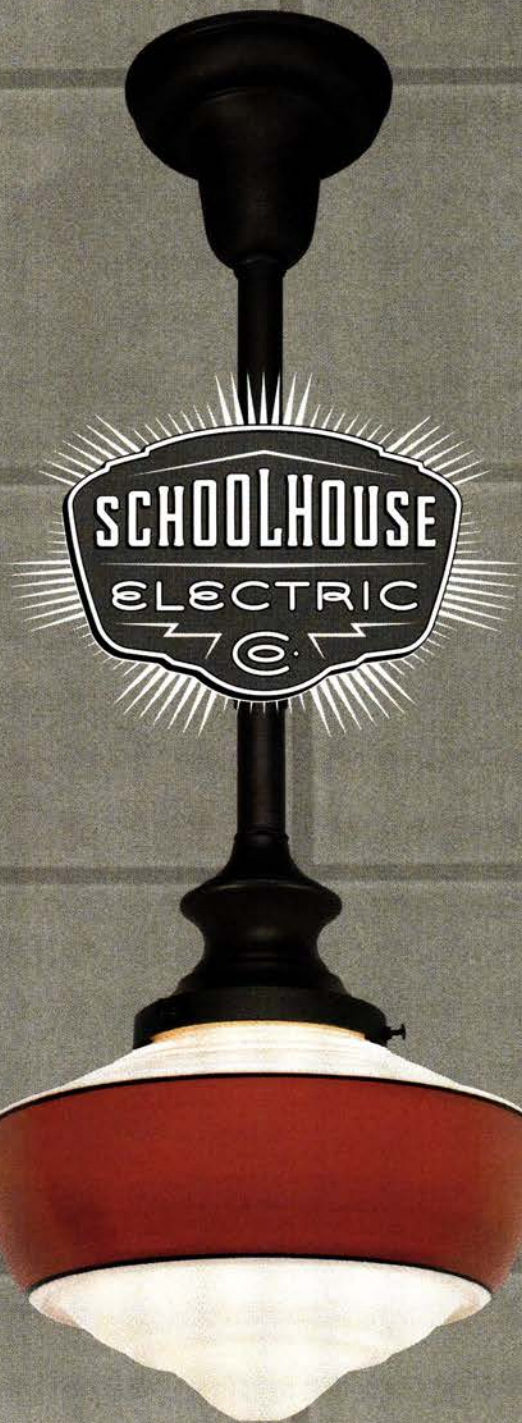
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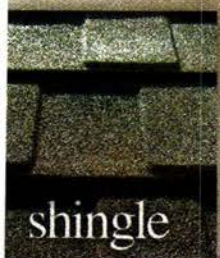
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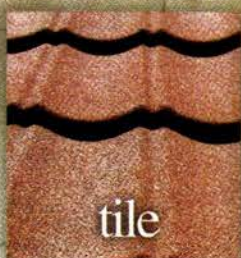


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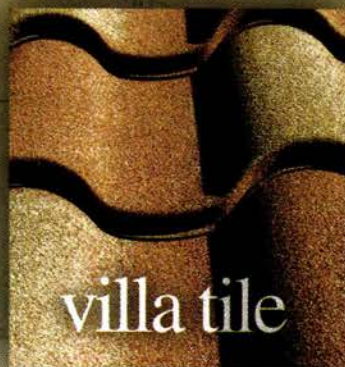
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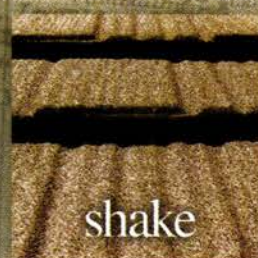
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Coming Spring
2007

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Summer Opening Day

Summer places don't have to be old houses, but they often are. For me, opening up a lakeside cottage or country farmhouse for the season is a special experience—a restoration all its own, even a rite. Warm weather brings life back to buildings that have been hibernating all winter, empty and inert, and in my mind the rebirth is as real and miraculous as a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis.

Pulling into a driveway barely more than a trail of gravel or crushed shells you cross a lawn that's shot up sweet and green with snowmelt and sun. Stepping up to the door, you try the key in the lock; it resists a bit as the brass moves over the hidden cylinders, audibly stiff. A couple of cautious twists in each direction brings no reaction—perhaps the wet and cold have been too much—but then suddenly, pop, the lock springs alive.

A turn of the knob and the door swings open to a room like a forgotten dream. Furniture and favorite decorations grow familiar again as they materialize in the dim light. On a wall, the hands of a clock rest quiet and motionless, waiting to catch up to the present time, while a nearby calendar, though hopelessly out of date, predicts the annual holidays and events that will repeat themselves in the weeks to come. A cool, musty draft steeped in the scents of last year's tanning lotions, barbecues, and grass clippings rushes up to the door to greet you.

Throwing a lever brings back the power through a grey box on the wall, and you can almost hear the energy flush through the lines as it blossoms in the odd lamp or two left on long months ago. Flipping a switch restarts the well with a distant hum as a pump deep in the ground awakens and goes to work. Empty pipes take on a subtle pulse while water fresh from the earth rises to fill them, first one at a time, then in twos and threes as it makes its way around the house. Idle faucets reanimate on their own with a hiss and a cough, trembling just before they erupt in a rusty splash.

Like old houses in general, there's always something that requires fixing around a summer old house, especially come opening day. Maybe it's a gutter that got damaged in a storm, the impact of ice or tree limbs still evident in the trough. It might be a window that won't open or door that won't stay shut thanks to hinges ready, once again, for their yearly dose of oil.

Then there's the porch that forever needs painting—but not right away. After all it's summer once again at the summer house, and for a short, warm while the cold and cares of the must-do world will be a long way off.



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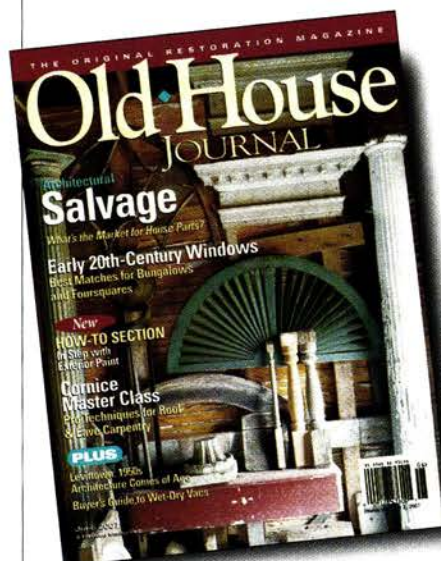
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Levitt or Leave it

I enjoyed the article "A Tale of Three Levittowns" in the May/June 2007 issue, as well as the background information from the archives of James C. Massey. However, page 74 of the article shows a photo of a house which is the Rancher model—not the Jubilee as noted in the caption. Besides being the smaller of the two models with just two bedrooms, the Rancher has only a carport. In contrast, the Jubilee was designed for larger families and featured a finished upstairs plus an enclosed attached garage with storage space above it, as seen in this promotional photo.

Readers may be interested to know that the real Jubilee is a model with special meaning. Alfred S. Levitt created



the Jubilee in several versions to celebrate his father Abraham's 25 years in real estate law, beginning in 1929 after graduating from New York University. Simeon-David Marable, Historian

Levittown Internationally Known Communities (www.levittownexhibit-centernorth.com)

Fencing Lessons

After reading the suggestions included in "In Step with Trim Painting" (May/June OHJ), I have some questions about painting our new wood picket fence. The fence rails and pickets will be cedar while the posts will be pressure-treated lumber. We are planning to apply a solid color white stain as a final top coat. These days it seems that most manufacturers recommend water-based stains as a top coat over an oil-based primer. Now that you have all



of the exciting details (perhaps knowing that someone is choosing a wood picket fence over PVC will make your day), would you recommend that the fence be "pre-prepped" with varnish or some other sealer prior to being primed?

Greg Bachmann
Manhasset, New York

Your fence is new work—not the weathered trim that was the subject of last issue's "In Step"—so consider these recommendations from the Forest Products Laboratory publication Exterior Wood in the South by Daniel L. Cassens and William C. Feist.

● Fences are fully exposed to the weather, and very prone to wood decay and insect attack. So whether the woods are pressure-treated or naturally decay-resistant, they should be first treated with a water repellent or water-repellent preservative,

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Letters

giving liberal attention to ends and where wood pieces are in contact with each other.

● Semitransparent penetrating stains are a good choice for fences because they soak into the wood without forming a film, and therefore do not crack or peel as they age. Generally, though, they require two coats for a solid-looking coverage, and more frequent recoating than paint to maintain that appearance. —Eds.

Virginia Soapstone

I'm writing in response to the article "One Hot Rock" by Regina Cole in your March/April 2007 issue to tell your readers about another source for soapstone: The Alberene Soapstone Co. In 1887, a young entrepreneur from Vermont named James Serene established the company in the foothills of central Virginia. This company sat on the largest deposit of structural



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Fred Pevey, president
Alberene Soapstone Co.
Schuyler, Virginia

Kitchens, Then and Now

I found the article on the evolution of the kitchen ("Kitchen Cabinet Revolution" March/April OHJ) very interesting. Both of my grandmothers'

kitchens featured a Hoosier cabinet, and as children we loved playing with the flour sifter. During World War II, when my father was in the navy, he sent \$15 to his sister to buy his mother the kitchen cabinet she wanted. For the \$15 she got the cabinet and five pounds of flour to fill the bin. When my sister bought the house several years ago, the kitchen was the same as

Wood Screen Doors



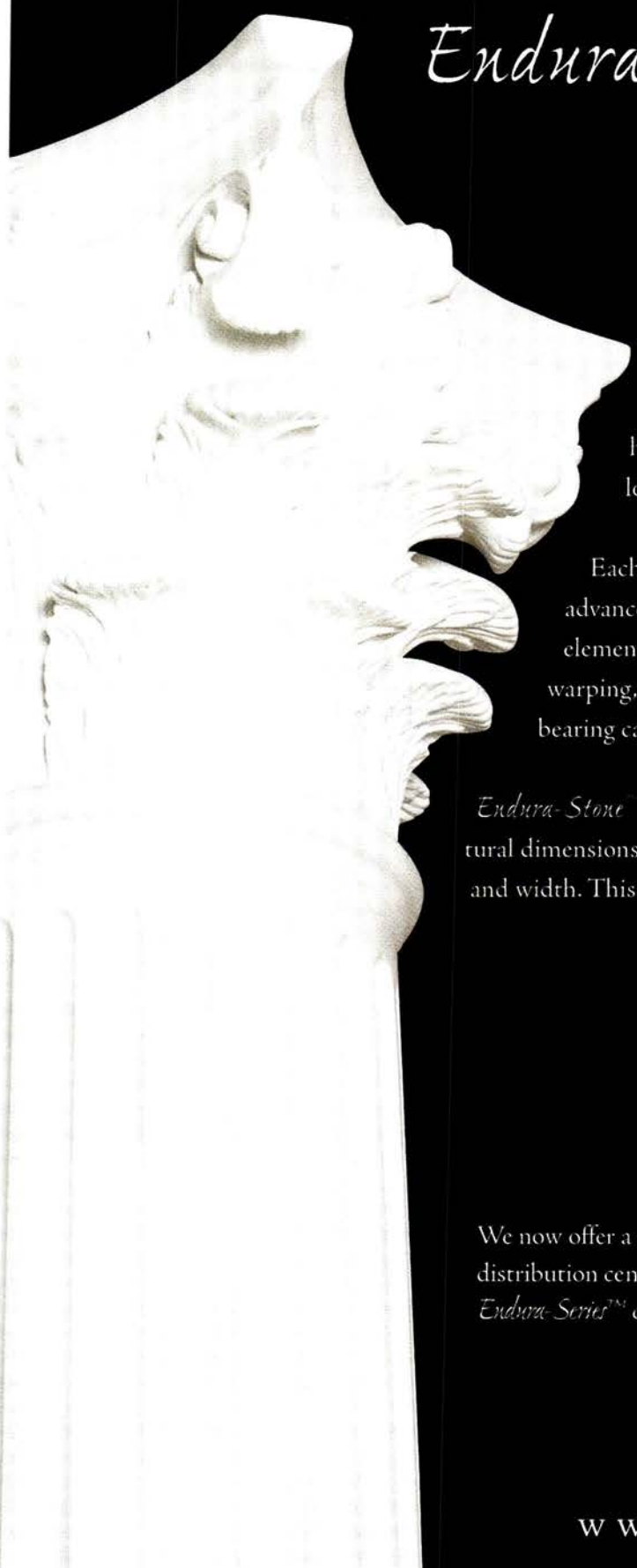
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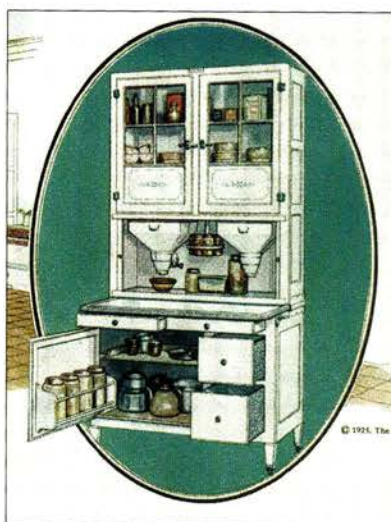
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when my grandmother used it. It is interesting to note how the fabulous meals that were turned out of those tiny kitchens compare to the fast food junk coming from the huge showy kitchens of today.

*Vanessa Simmons
Great Falls, Montana*

Freezing Points

I wanted to clear up some confusion about the zero point on the Fahrenheit scale ("Preservation Perspectives" January/ February 2007 OHJ). It is the point at which a mixture of pure calcium chloride and pure distilled fresh water freezes. This is a determinate point; it does not change with conditions, unlike the nominal freezing point of water (32 degrees Fahrenheit or 0 degrees Celsius), which changes depending on the mineral



content of the water. Also, once water reaches 32 degrees Fahrenheit, you must remove BTU's (British thermal units) of heat before the water will actually freeze,

and conversely when the temperature is rising, you must add BTU's before the ice will start to melt. That is the problem with the Celsius scale using the freezing point of water as the zero point; it makes the entire scale indeterminate.

As an engineering officer in the Merchant Marine, I have used both systems, and I prefer Fahrenheit for temperature and PSI for air pressure, because together, they are more precise. Also, in industry, salt is not NaCl (table salt) but CaCl or calcium chloride (also known as brine). I have read your magazine for years, both as a subscriber and off the newsstands. I have always enjoyed it and will continue to do so.

*N.M. Sherwood, chief engineering officer
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Historic Hotels That Welcome Four-Legged Guests

With their antiques and often luxurious accommodations, you might think historic hotels would be the last place to welcome guests with pets. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, however, counts no fewer than 60 pet-friendly historic hotels across the United States, and that list (see www.historichotels.org/vacations_leisure/22) is far from comprehensive.

Still, the globe-trotting cat or dog (or even ferret, parrot, or hamster) can expect some house rules. Pets can't be left alone for long periods in a room and aren't allowed on the furniture. Some hotels restrict Rover's size by imposing weight limits of 40

pounds or less, and a \$25 daily fee for each pet is common, although occasionally a deposit of \$50 or more, often refundable, is charged instead. And even though guests with pets can only stay in designated rooms, "they're just as nice as the other rooms," says Eileen Barish, author of *Vacationing with Your Pet*, who has stayed in historic hotels with her two golden retrievers.

In fact, many hotels go the extra mile to ensure a comfy stay for their four-legged guests. The Beaux Arts Hermitage Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee, supplies pet beds with wrought-iron frames and velvet cushions in small,



medium, and large sizes. There's even a room service pet menu prepared by the hotel's chefs, and at California's historic Napa River Inn, dog biscuits made with real wine are handed out as a canine version of an afternoon aperitif. Many hotels also provide lists of pet-friendly places to visit. Because policies sometimes change, Barish recommends that you always confirm that the hotel still allows pets before you bring your menagerie along.

In New Orleans, a Show and the Historic Buildings It Celebrates Make a Comeback

The last time the Traditional Building Exhibition and Conference was supposed to be held in New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina struck and put an end to those plans. More than two years later, Restore Media's show returns to the Big Easy with the city's reconstruction as its central theme.

Scheduled for October 17-20, the show will address the two ways in which New Orleans continues to rebuild: by restoring its beloved historic buildings and, where some of those buildings were destroyed beyond repair, by erecting new structures in a traditional style that retains the city's historic appearance. A key project of the show is the Operation Comeback Demonstration House, featuring the restoration of a circa-1870 double shotgun house that was nearly destroyed in the hurricane when a 60-ton pecan tree fell, crushing a large section of the roof. A design competition takes on the city's other rebuilding challenge, with eight of the nation's best architects competing to design a new "old" house that would fit into any of the city's historic districts. For details about the show—including its hundreds of exhibitors, 70 seminars, workshops, and tours—call (800) 982-6247, or visit www.traditionalbuildingshow.com.



Restoring this circa-1870 shotgun house is a key project of the show.

Be Inspired by Kitchens from Different Eras

Sometimes getting ideas for restoring an old home is as simple as checking out someone else's old house. This summer, Historic New England offers a tour of the one room in historic houses that often presents the greatest challenge for preservationists and old-house owners alike: the kitchen.

On July 28 the Newburyport Kitchen Tour in Massachusetts will feature at least eight kitchens in privately owned old houses and three

at two house museums, all in the greater Newburyport area, to represent a broad range of architectural styles and eras from the mid-17th through the mid-20th centuries.

At one end of the spectrum are museum kitchens at the Coffin and Swett-Ilsley houses, accurately restored to the period between 1670 and 1712, capturing how families lived, worked, and ate in kitchens back then. At the other end are privately owned



PETER HARHOLDT/ COURTESY HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND

historic homes with fully functioning, modern kitchens that were renovated in a period-sensitive way, such as the updated kitchen in a Federal-

Part of an addition, this 1712 kitchen is one of two in the Coffin House. The second kitchen is in the house's original wing and dates to 1678.

style mansion. Tickets are \$12 if purchased in advance and \$15 on the day of the tour. For details or to order tickets, call (978) 462-2634.

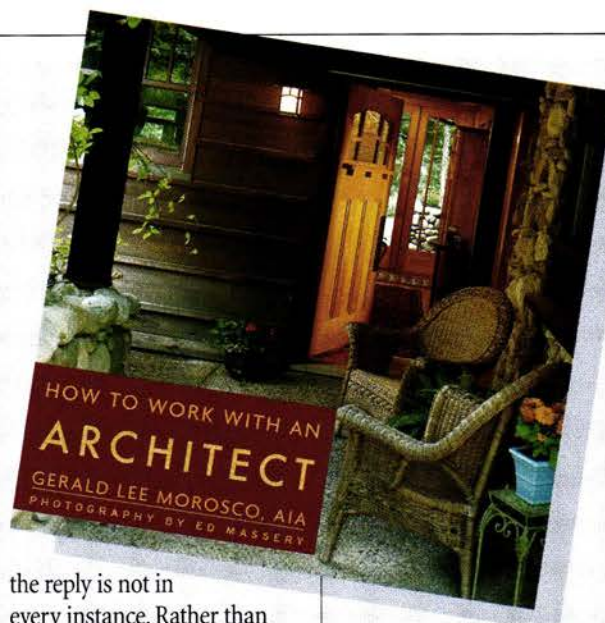
Books in Brief

Each February at the annual Grove Park Inn Arts & Crafts Conference in Asheville, North Carolina, Gerald Lee Morosco, an architect based in Pittsburgh, fills the room of a popular discussion group with folks looking to build or expand a house and do it right. After more than a decade of fielding questions about his profession, as well as listening to hundreds of ideas and needs, Morosco decided to bring some of his insights and answers to a wider audience in the form of a book. Presented in 100 reader-friendly pages with copious color photos and illustrations, *How to Work with an Architect* makes good on the title's promise while also delivering much more.

An example of the thorough thought process that is the book's theme, in an early chapter Morosco brings the reader up to speed on a fundamental question: What, exactly,

is an architect? It's worth asking because, depending upon the part of the country you're in and what kind of building regulations apply, a single-family house under two stories can be designed and constructed by a builder or homeowner. Moreover, even though all states require architects to successfully complete an examination, the criteria required to take that exam still vary widely in the mix of academic training and work experience. Morosco helps make sense of the profession by explaining the breadth of the design industry, as well as the meaning of all those acronyms attached to the names of practitioners and firms.

To many minds, the next question is do you need an architect? If that means design experience beyond your own ability, a perspective beyond your own project, and an objective view of your lifestyle,



the reply is not in every instance. Rather than dwell in the subjective world of perception and aesthetics, though, Morosco makes a strong case for paying for professional design help based on the numbers. A good architect can not only save the client money and time by recommending materials and equipment, he or she can also help focus the choices to stay within budget and code requirements. Building projects do not spring instantly from concept to

completion either, and architects often act as valuable coordinators between other design professionals, regulatory authorities, and the construction trades. As the saying goes, it takes three things to make a good building—a good contractor, a good architect, and a good client—and Morosco's book is a valuable guide to making part of that relationship work at its best. 🏠

—Gordon Bock



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Bamboozling Bungalow

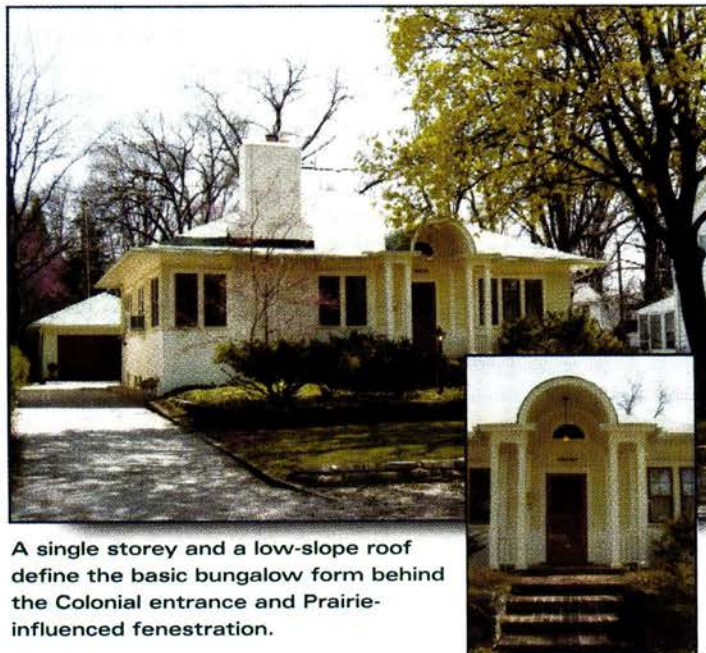
Though we believe we have just bought a 1926 Prairie style old house, we also have 4/1 windows, French doors, and a Colonial arched entry. What the heck is it?

Penny Petersen Wilson

Toledo, Ohio

It's easy to be perplexed by unexpected details when you attempt to get a handle on the architecture of an old house, so instead of looking at an assortment of small clues, first stand back and study the big picture. Here, we're looking at a one-storey house with a low-slope roof (a pyramid in this case), and deep eaves—the basic definition of a bungalow. Looking for corroborating evidence, we start to see some of the features the house has in common with other bungalows, for example, a prominent chimney and fireplace and the multi-paned top sash of those 4/1 windows.

Now, because a bungalow is not a style but a fundamental house form that can come in more than one style or idiom, we can start to see some of the influences behind this particular bungalow.



A single storey and a low-slope roof define the basic bungalow form behind the Colonial entrance and Prairie-influenced fenestration.

low. The way those windows are ganged together in twos and threes was, indeed, a favorite practice of Prairie School architects. While popular for many kinds of early 20th-century houses, it does add to the horizontal, ground-hugging Prairie feel of your house, especially in combination with the pyramidal roof and front-facing

mass of the chimney. We'd agree the entrance shows signs of the Colonial Revival movement by virtue of its columns. This could be a later addition, or an original, transitional element. After all, 1926 was just about the time Arts & Crafts bungalow details of the 1910s were fading out in favor of all things Colonial.

Reborn Cork

To our surprise, pulling up the wall-to-wall carpet in our 200-year-old house revealed a beautiful cork tile floor in excellent condition. How can I clean it safely?

Diane Peck

St. Louis, Missouri

Your cork floor is a pleasant surprise, given that cork tiles didn't really become common until the 1920s. Light and resilient, cork became an ingredient in linoleum in the 1870s, but when American John T. Smith invented a method for heating and fusing cork particles together with their own resin in 1892, he unlocked the key to making floor tiles. After World War II, manufacturers added



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By 1929, the Cork Import Corp. was one of several manufacturers making tile in three typical shades: light, medium, and dark.

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resins that produced more resilient tiles in more uniform colors.

Cork tiles of the past were often sanded smooth after installation, and then waxed or coated with a lacquer-based sealer or tung-oil sealer, a coating that can aid with reviving your floor.

Conservators generally do not recommend water and detergents for early cork tiles, but damp-mopping with a diluted

solution of linseed oil-based liquid cleaner or mild phosphate detergent is acceptable for removing ground-in dirt if the surface is rinsed and then mopped free of all water. Later resin-reinforced tiles can take occasional light washing with a neutral pH detergent and a damp mop, before they are mopped dry. Once clean, the floors can be waxed and buffed for a protective finish.

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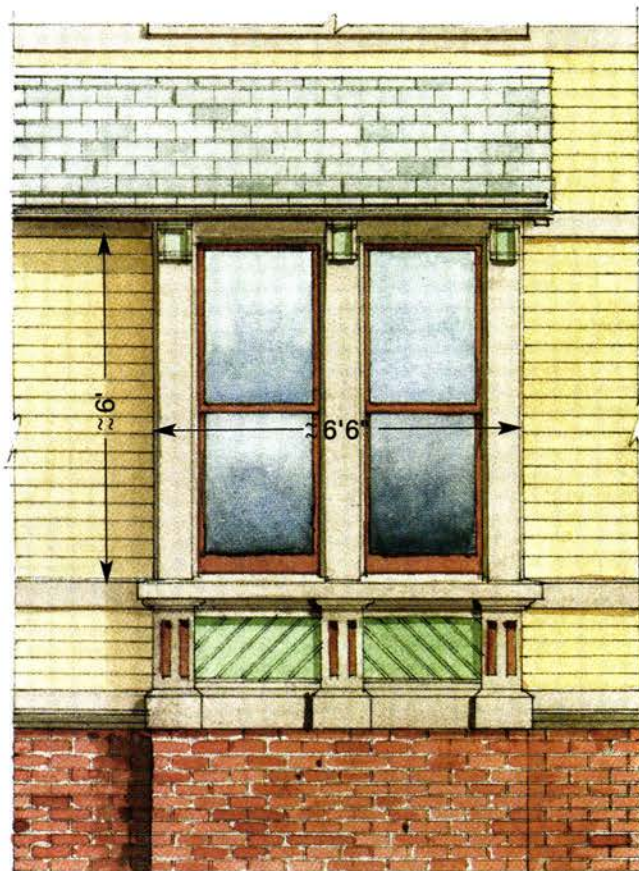
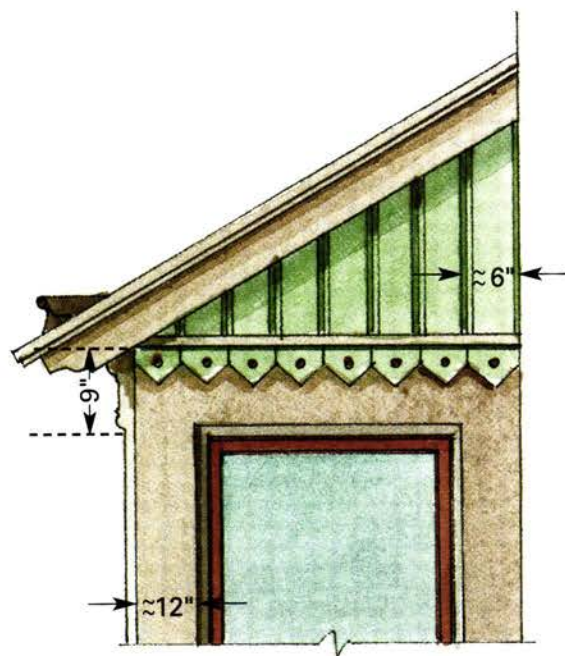
Victorian Bay Window

DRAWINGS BY ROBERT LEANNA

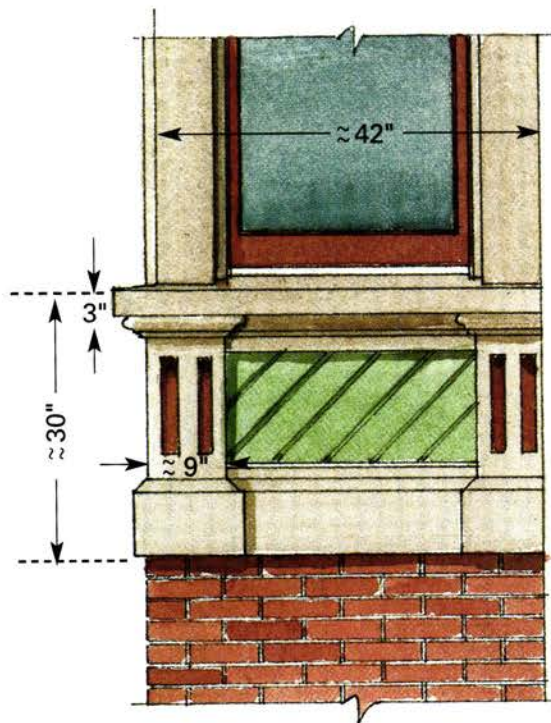


One of the characteristics that separates houses in the Stick, Second Empire, Queen Anne, and other Victorian-era styles from earlier houses is the way their facades protrude and pop at points beyond a simple rectangular footprint. To achieve such “bump-outs,” designers of the era made much use of bay windows in all their geometric forms, from bows and semicircles to hexagons and octagons. For simple houses or secondary facades, a square-sided bay would be easier to construct but just as interesting when detailed like the 1870s example presented here.


Typical for many Victorian houses, the transoms below the windows are V-jointed boards or bead-board laid up to make book-matched panels. In this design the corner posts and mullions that divide the windows are highlighted by brackets under the eaves and pilasters below the sills—a clever idea. More matched boarding covers the half-gables on either side of the bay and adds a flourish to the simple shed roof. All dimensions are for relative scale only and subject to the needs of the project and the materials available. 🏠



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Circle no. 182

Rehabbing Clapboards

A plug, Dutchman patch, or smear of well-placed glue is all that's often needed to put a stretch of siding back in service.

By GORDON BOCK
AND JOHN LEEKE

Clapboards are the original, indigenous siding of North America and the great-grand-daddy of all horizontal wood siding, be it a modern look-alike, such as tongue-and-groove bevel siding, or decoratively milled variations like drop or novelty siding. Because they're made from wood, over time clapboards and their siding relatives can suffer the effects of aging, such as cracks and splits (often the result of weak spots along the grain), injury from storms, or holes and cuts from alterations. Left alone, splits and holes are not only unsightly and difficult to paint, they also allow drafts, water, and insects to intrude. Whatever the cause, it's usually possible and more practical to avoid residing major areas of the wall by repairing individual siding boards with some traditional methods.

Small Repairs

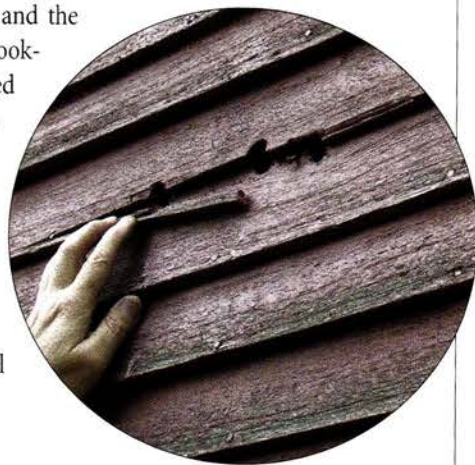
Cracks and splits repair well and with ease because there's still sound wood to work with; it's just displaced from its proper position. Start by carefully prying the split open a few fractions of an inch using stiff putty knives and wood wedges. Next, clean out any debris (dirt, paint, or stray splinters from the siding itself), remove the wedges and putty knives, and check to see that the split halves fit back together neatly in a dry fit. Now, wedge the split open again and coat both edges with a weather-resistant glue (carpenter's glue or polyurethane glue) or epoxy adhesive, using an artist's palette knife or a glue syringe. Then, remove the wedges and squeeze the split closed until it's snug. Hold it in place until the adhesive dries by temporarily attaching a few wood blocks under the butt of the clapboard. Use slim-shank screws, not nails, and be careful not to split the clapboard into which you are driving the screws.

If a clapboard suffers from a gouge or hole—the result, say, of a long-gone telephone or gas line installation—you can make an efficient repair with a plug. For holes smaller than $\frac{3}{8}$ " in diameter, buy a plug cutter at a good hardware store or wood-working supplier, and then cut a plug from a piece of scrap siding. Next, bore out the damaged area to the diameter of the plug, and test-fit the plug in the hole. Finally, coat the plug and hole with adhesive, and insert the plug, orienting its grain in the same direction of the clapboard grain so that if the plug gets wet,

These old utility holes could have been repaired with plugs, but since the damage has grown into a split, they call for a Dutchman patch.



The first step is to cut the patch material, then lay it over the damage and trace the outline. Right: Next saw to the end lines with a cross-cut saw.





Then split out the damaged wood with a hammer and chisel, working evenly to the top line.

it will not split the siding as it expands. Once the adhesive is cured, plane and sand the plug flush with the clapboard surface. For large holes, follow the same procedure using a hole saw to bore out the damaged area with, say, a 2"-diameter hole saw and then cut a mating plug with a 2 1/8" hole saw.

Larger Repairs

When the damage is a large surface split or a missing sliver—a significant loss of material, but not the full width of the board—you can switch to Dutchman repair or wood splice. First, cut a replacement piece out of an old or new clapboard of matching thickness, slightly larger than the damaged part. Next, lay the patch piece over the

damaged area, and trace its outline on the board with a sharp pencil. Then, using a fine-toothed cross-cut saw, cut across the wood grain to the end lines taking care to avoid making kerf marks in the board below. Finally, split out the damaged wood with a mallet and chisel. Chisel evenly to the top line, working off the grain—the direction in which the grain runs away from the line—and the chisel won't start an unintentional split.

When you have the repair cavity squared up to your lines, test-fit the new patch. Afterwards, create a clamping system by tacking two nails below the replacement patch, and make two slim wedges out of sawn



Below: Test-fit the patch in the new hole, and create a clamp with slim wedges supported by a couple of nails.



Left: Remove the patch, apply waterproof glue to all edges, then clamp in place with slim wedges.

When the adhesive has cured, remove the wedges and nails and the repair is done. Dressing the surface with sandpaper or epoxy filler helps blend the Dutchman into the surrounding clapboard.



shingles to slide between the nails and the bottom edge of the patch. This system will force the patch up into place against the surrounding clapboard. Remove the patch and coat all edges with waterproof adhesive. Then replace the adhesive and slide in the wedges to clamp the part in place. When the adhesive has cured, remove the wedges and nails, clean up the surface, and the repair is complete.

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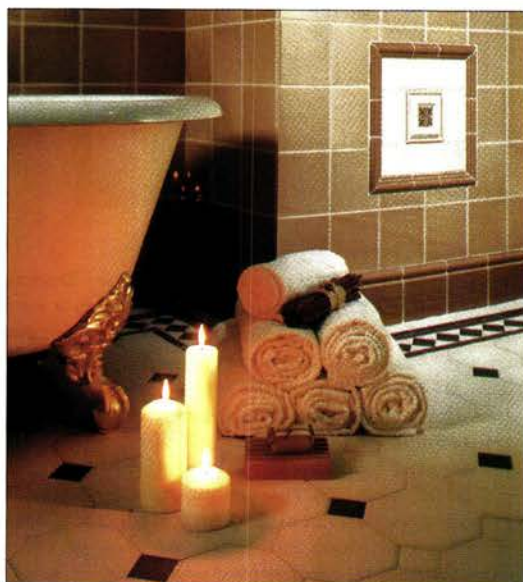


Keep Cool with a Fan de Siecle

The filigreed stem base of the Americana ceiling fan makes it a dead ringer for one that cooled patrons of Kolb's, a famous German restaurant in New Orleans, around the turn of the 20th century. Fanimation's Americana, however, is powered by a modern 220-volt motor and has three forward and three reverse speeds. Pictured here in antique brass with oak blades and tulip-shaped glass lights, the fan also comes in a black finish and assorted styles for blades and light fixtures. Prices range between \$1,699 and \$1,999 depending on store location; the set of five blades is sold separately. To find the nearest store, visit www.fanimation.com, or call (888) 567-2055. Circle 10 on the resource card.

Seating with a Twist

Even the 19th century had its paper pushers, and the more successful British bureaucrats sat on unupholstered wooden desk chairs much like this one. Made from solid oak and containing a swivel seat, the \$565 Swivel Desk Chair from Source Perrier measures 24" x 24" x 34" high and lends a little period authenticity to a home office. To order, call (888) 543-2804, or visit www.sourceperrier.com. Circle 11 on the resource card.



Diamonds in the Buff

These ceramic floor tiles replicate a Victorian pattern of white octagons punctuated with colored diamonds, in this case buff. Choose from eight different colors, including the traditional white tiles with black diamonds, a combination that dominated bathroom and hallway floors from the Victorian era into the 20th century. Several options for borders are also available. Shown here with a Keats border, the York tiles from Tile Source are made in England and cost around \$15 per square foot. For details, call (843) 689-9151, or visit www.tile-source.com. Circle 12 on the resource card.



Bella Handiwork

Like arbors and pergolas, trellises have a long history of gracing European gardens, with iron trellises first appearing in the 1600s and remaining popular for centuries more. Handmade of heavy-gauge iron, the \$150 Italian Iron Trellis from the Winterthur Home collection was inspired by the ornate iron trellises on the grounds of Henry du Pont's renowned Delaware estate. The trellis has a series of tiered scrollwork crowned with a fleur-de-lis finial and coated in a charcoal-brown, weather-resistant finish. To order, call (800) 223-1956, or visit www.winterthurhome.com. Circle 13 on the resource card.

Pipe Dreams

Bathroom showers first began gaining widespread acceptance in the 1890s, when ironworks giant J.L. Mott featured these "plumbing appliances" in its catalogs. Like those early showers, the \$849 Victorian Thermostatic Shower with Hand Sprayer from Signature Hardware has the exposed main pipe and large 10"-diameter sunflower showerhead, which in the original models produced a spray that simulated rainfall. The accompanying hand sprayer has a porcelain handle and 60" spiral hose. For details, call (866) 855-2284, or visit www.signaturehardware.com. Circle 14 on the resource card.



Tiptoe through the Tulips

The rose and tulip design of the Donnemara carpet appeared in a 1903 catalog for Liberty's of London and is attributed to Charles Voysey, a prominent British architect of the Arts & Crafts movement. Made from 100% New Zealand wool, the Donnemara from Persian Carpet, Inc., has flowers in multiple colors surrounded by a red border containing green foliage. Choose from eight sizes; the smallest measures 2' x 3' and the largest 10' x 14', priced at \$200 and \$4,750 respectively. Matching 2'6"-wide runners, which come in various lengths, are also sold. For details, call (800) 333-1801, or visit www.persiancarpet.com. Circle 15 on the resource card.

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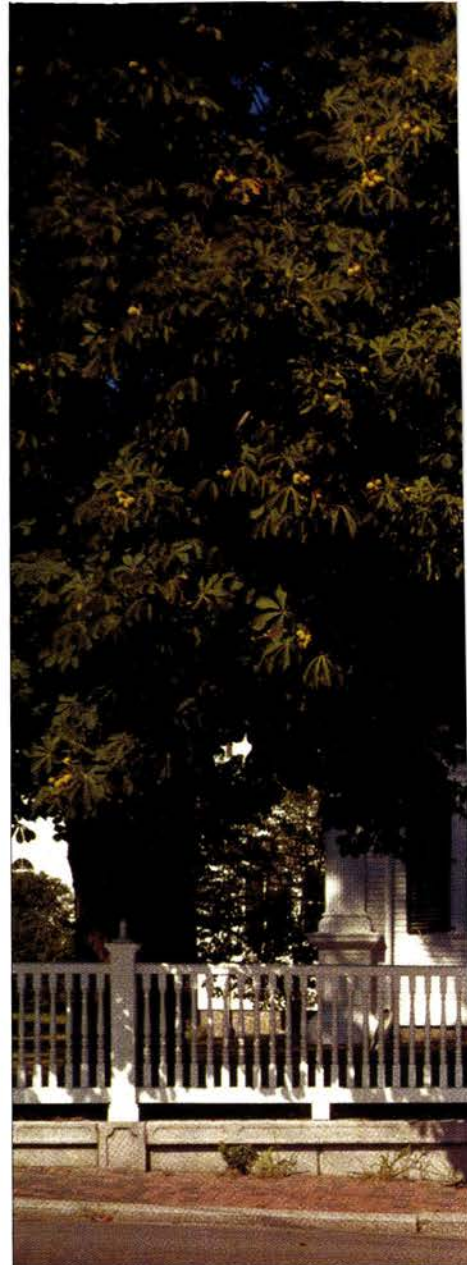
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Aside a New England house, wide pickets closely spaced provide privacy while tops cut to make a swoop between posts add visual interest.

SUSAN E. SCHNARE



A Primer on Pickets

BY SUSAN E. SCHNARE

By studying the building and applying a bit of common sense, you can infuse a new fence with the essence of a house's particular style and period.

Considered one of the finest Georgian houses, the 1784 Langdon house in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, boasts a textbook Colonial fence—with turned pickets, stepped rails, and posts capped by classical urns.

COURTESY HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND

Building a fence for an old house is seldom an inexpensive proposition. Nonetheless, first investing a little thought into the best fence design can pay big dividends in an attractive feature that unites the building and landscape while enhancing privacy, establishing property boundaries, and protecting children and pets. Old-house fences do not have to be historical re-creations, but they do look best when their scale, design, and materials harmonize with the size, style, and period of the house, as well as suit its practical purpose.

Fence Styles

Because traditionally wood has been the most common fencing material, understanding how fences evolved from logs to pickets and then changed with the ebb and

flow of architectural styles can help you choose a successful design.

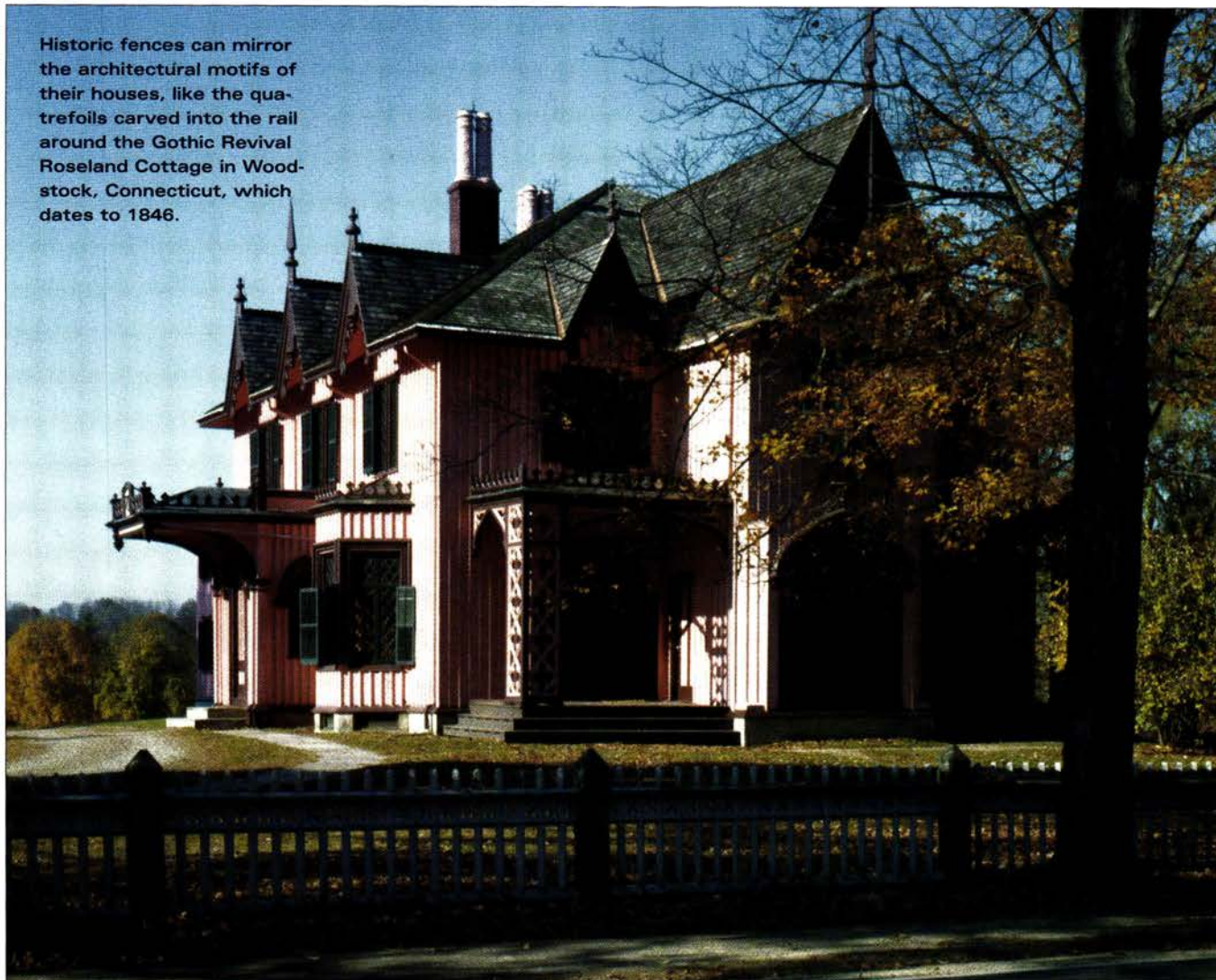
Early. The harsh conditions of the colonial and post-revolutionary eras called for sturdy, utilitarian fences of simple design. The earliest wood fences were generally owner-built of local materials—stockades of logs planted vertically in the earth or, later, logs split and laid horizontally to make the zigzag, split-rail or worm fences of the frontier. Spit rail fences were largely agricultural, but may have precedents for the oldest houses and even for simple or rural houses up to the late-19th century.

The medieval paling, a flat strip or round stake of wood brought to North America by European settlers, evolved into the picket fence—the all-purpose choice for residential fencing since the late-18th century. Picket fences can be dressed down



Picket fences evolved from medieval palings used to protect and mark territory, as shown in this 15th century illustration.

Historic fences can mirror the architectural motifs of their houses, like the quatrefoils carved into the rail around the Gothic Revival Roseland Cottage in Woodstock, Connecticut, which dates to 1846.



COURTESY HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND



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Historic photos show elaborate Victorian houses with understated, alternating-height picket fences.

For a list of
SUPPLIERS,
see page 74.

by remaining unpainted and built from materials at hand. The pickets can be flat on top and narrow, wide, or both to suit the house and situation.

Classical. Classically inspired houses built in the Georgian (1714–1810), Federal (1790–1830) and Greek Revival (1830–1850) styles call for fences that mirror their balanced proportions and architectural motifs. The finest of these fences have a top rail covering the pickets and carved finials on the gate posts. Look to the house for details to incorporate into the fence design and for classical symbols to grace the post tops. Popular motifs were flames, urns, fruit, and, in the Federal period, eagles. The fence of a classical house would most likely have been painted to coordinate with the house, often white and ochre.

Romantic and Rustic. Like the mid-19th-century's romantic movements in music and literature, houses in romantic

styles evoke impressions of the past or an idealized setting. Fencing for a Gothic Revival house (1830–1860) can reflect medieval influences with pointed-arch pickets and posts, or with palings and rails carved to resemble open tracery. For a more elaborate touch, finials might be carved like spires, and the gate could mimic a pointed arch with quatrefoil and trefoil patterns carved into its posts. Finishing with a dark-color paint or stain and ornate ironwork would also be appropriate.

The Italianate style (1840–1890) was aligned with the picturesque landscape movement that considered fences a necessary evil, so ideally they were as inconspicuous as possible. Writing in 1850, Andrew Jackson Downing suggested that a “slight paling fence, rendered inconspicuous by painting it dark green” was the least offensive option. In 1870, Frank Scott proclaimed in *The Art of Beautifying Suburban*



Two of the many fence faces evident in Colonial Williamsburg, include a Chinese Chippendale (top) and a picket with pommel-topped posts painted burgandy.



BOTH PHOTOS: SUSAN E. SCHNARE

Home Grounds that while “fences must harmonize with the architecture and more elegant finish of the street,” they should be virtually transparent: “That kind of fence is best which is least seen, and best seen through.” Italianate fences may borrow details from the corbels, cornices, or brackets on the house and should be painted a neutral earth color, not the bright white that Andrew Jackson Downing detested. The picturesque landscape movement also

avored rustic designs such as fences partially or wholly made from logs that took advantage of natural shapes and surfaces.

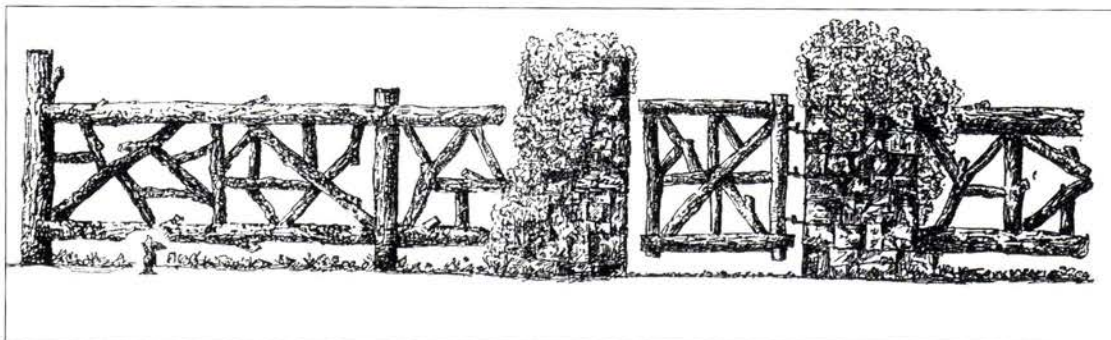
Victorian. Builders of the Victorian era (1840-1910) ornamented their houses and porches with carved brackets, corbels, fretwork, and turned wood painted in multiple, contrasting colors, but often wood fences were sedate and understated. Period photos of Victorian houses often show smoothly carved, pointed, stone, or wood

posts holding panels of square pickets painted in a neutral tone, so as not to upstage the house and grounds.

Even in 1870, Frank Scott recognized that cast-iron fencing was beyond most pocketbooks and that wood would continue to be the main fence material. He found only one old form of picket fence acceptable for enclosing the grounds: three horizontal rails equally spaced, with short, pointed pickets that rise just above the middle rail, alternating with longer pickets that rise above the top rail. This double-paled design produces a fence that is more open on its upper half, and works nicely for side gardens.

Post-Victorian. Fencing tastes changed for early 20th-century houses of the new suburbs. With less need to fence out the neighbor’s livestock and more interest in integrating house and site, designers and homeowners gave up physical barriers to favor houses in open view of the public. Though shrubs became popular for privacy screening, traditional wood fences or stone walls still protected flower gardens. In the 1930s, designer Fletcher Steele noted in *Design in the Little Garden* that “in the old days every American home was set within a white fence—a sensible custom.” He recommended that “a low paling, over which one can see unobstructed, secludes and marks off an area to a [surprising] extent.”

During the first flush of the Colonial Revival movement in the late-19th and early 20th centuries, fences returned to neoclassical details and once again became elegant, white-painted, and symmetrical, reflecting Georgian and Federal styles. While plain picket fences might serve for the backyard, a more elaborate fence, perhaps with an arch over the gate, should grace the front and roadside.



Rustic fences, like this example from an 1887 design book, were a fashion all their own with influential advocates like A.J. Downing.

Further Fence Reading

Along with reprints of 19th-century house pattern books, which often include fence designs, add these modern references to your fence library:

Building Fences & Gates: How to Design and Build Them from the Ground Up by Richard Freudenberger (1997)

Handbook on Garden Construction by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (1954)

Fences: Authentic Details for Design and Restoration by Peter Joel Harrison (1998)

Between Fences by the National Building Museum (out of print)

Almost as popular during the same time were revival styles drawing on diverse sources, including French regency, Tudor, and Spanish or Mediterranean influences. The essence of these revivals can be captured in fences in much the same way as for other styles. A fence for a Tudor Revival house can reference Gothic features and details from that period, such as heavy construction and carved diamonds; Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean can recall the Old World with dark timbers.

Picket Fence Guidelines

A basic picket fence is a series of posts connected by horizontal rails and then filled with vertical slats along the rails. Typically, the slats or pickets are 2 1/4" to 3" wide and square-cut at the top. Although height is

customarily 3' to 3 1/2', the fence should be proportional to the structure it accompanies and the area it encloses. While a small cottage might look best with a fence only 2 1/2' high, a large house could require a 4'-high fence. Because the original functions of fences were protection and containment, they still look best when they either form (or appear to form) enclosures, or at least have logical terminals.

Avoid overbuilding by planning for the minimum fence that will do the job. Even when your goal is privacy screening, a height of 5'—the average eye level—is usually enough. Pickets are generally spaced one picket width apart, but closer spacing increases screening; wider spacing, on the other hand, allows greater visibility while still providing a physical barrier. Whenever possible, leave a space between picket bottoms and the ground so that you can mow grass without damaging the fence. Keeping the fence off the ground will add years to its useful life by reducing the conditions for wood rot.

There are many ways to dress up a picket fence for a more ornamental or architectural effect. The simplest approach is to cut the picket tops into points (acute angles or arches), semicircles, or historical decorative designs such as diamonds or spears. Narrow pickets, about 2" square, and spaced widely apart appear more elegant and are especially appropriate for late-Victorian homes. There are no hard rules that connect a particular decorative motif to a house period or style, but good taste and restraint is key. Mixing styles increases



A new fence with open panels of unpainted wood and stone posts complements the natural materials in the Arts & Crafts bungalow.

COURTESY CHARLES PROWELL WOODWORKS

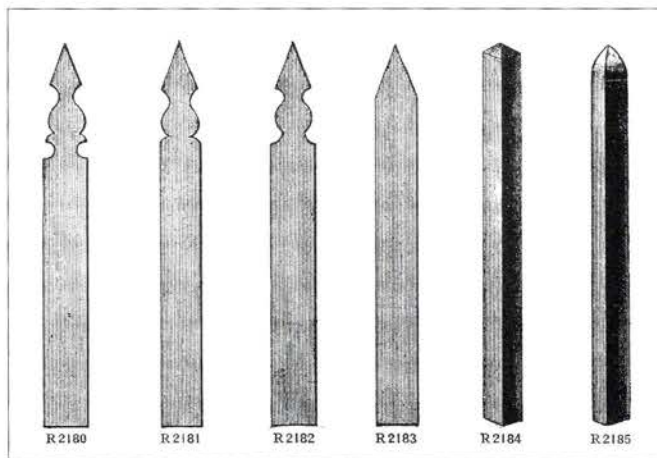
interest. It is quite acceptable to use a more decorative (and expensive) fence for the front of the house and only utilitarian fencing for the sides and back.

As well as being structurally essential, posts can mark gateways and contribute visual interest by making those entrances larger or by having distinctive finials. While stone is the ideal post material be-



SUSAN E. SCHNARE

The best entry gates can be identified at a glance, like this Williamsburg design bearing ogee-shaped post tops.



These picket top designs from an 1880s catalogue weren't pure ornament, they helped shed water to preserve wood.



cause of its beauty and permanence, 4" x 4" wood posts are more affordable and versatile. If the post tops extend above the bulk of the fence, they look best and last longest when finished with bevels, caps, or finials that also shed water. Gateposts do not need to be identical in size. Only the post that supports the gate and hinges needs to have maximum strength, so consider economizing by making one post heavier than the other. As Scott warned, "children will swing on gates in spite of all warnings, and the gates must be hung so that they will bear the strain."

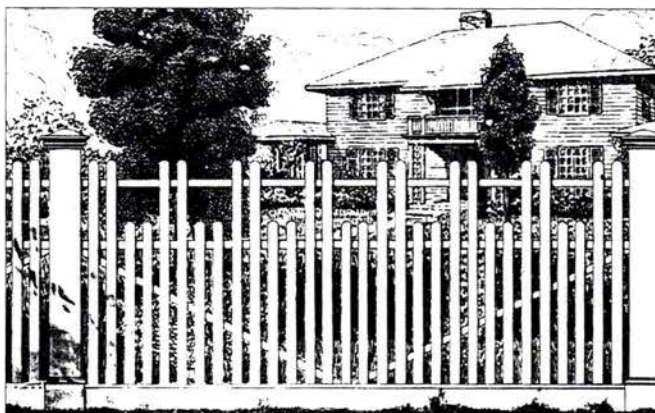
If you want visitors to use your gate, make it visible at a glance. Conversely, if you want the gate to be practically invisible, make it identical to the fence. The latter may be desirable for a private or infrequently used access, but it will frustrate guests if the gate spans the front walk. Gates should open and close easily and, except when you are expecting a snowstorm, rest in the closed position. This calls for either a latch and a properly bal-

anced gate or a closing mechanism, such as a chain and weight strung between the gate and a small post inside the enclosure. Choose latches and hinges that are appropriate to your property's style and period and make them rugged enough to keep the gate from sagging, but not oversized and out of scale.

Although designing and building a fence is usually more than a weekend project, when done properly it will protect and contain your treasures with minimal care

for 20 or 30 years. Besides the practical benefits like deflecting noise, the right fence for an old house also becomes an architectural asset, an extension of the building's style or ethos into the site that creates a sympathetic space for gardens and relaxation, and a vantage point to view the world beyond the palings. 🏡

Susan E. Schnare is principal of Mountain Brook Consulting, a landscape and preservation design firm (www.mtnbrook.com).



An early-20th century spin on the picket fence, a 1920s millwork catalogue design uses round-top pickets in pairs and diagonal braces for a geometrical, almost Prairie effect.

SCREEN SAVERS

Wood-frame screen doors are a part of our collective summer subconscious. They mark the return of warm weather with their veil-like forms and announce every visitor as they spring shut with a slap. Unbelievably light, open, and nearly two-dimensional, screen doors are workhorses that still take a beating from over-eager children, anxious pets, and errant softballs. Screens, especially, don't hold up forever, eventually needing either a patch job or complete replacement. Fortunately, traditional wood screen doors are designed to be repaired, and when hardware or frames are missing or beyond repair, there's a bounty of reproductions available to fit the screen door look from any era.

Enmeshed in History

Screen doors have been so omnipresent on old houses over the last century that it may be a surprise to learn they were rare before 1870. Though it was a common practice to tack gauze over window openings to thwart insects, wire screening wasn't even commercially available until about 1830. To improve on the horsehair historically used to make sieves for sifting flour and grains, the Gilbert and Bennett Manufacturing Co. in Connecticut, experimented with mechanically weaving wire screen on

Nothing says "old house" like traditional screen doors, which are easy to maintain or even replace with today's wealth of reproduction parts.

BY DEMETRA APOSPOROS



GREY CRAWFORD

looms designed for making carpets. The result was an affordable fine metal cloth that could be stretched on a wood frame.

The improved sifting screens sold well for decades until the Civil War cut off the southern market and business tanked, leaving the company swimming with screening and frames. Then, according to company lore, an enterprising employee coated some sieves with paint, sold them as insect barriers, and a new market was born. The happy accident came at a time when medical science was beginning to connect insects with diseases, and by the turn of the 20th century no house was considered complete without screens on both windows and doors. "Flies and mosquitoes are a menace to health, and must be kept out of the home," screams text advertising screen doors in a turn-of-the-century catalog. "These doors provide ample protection and will give years of service."

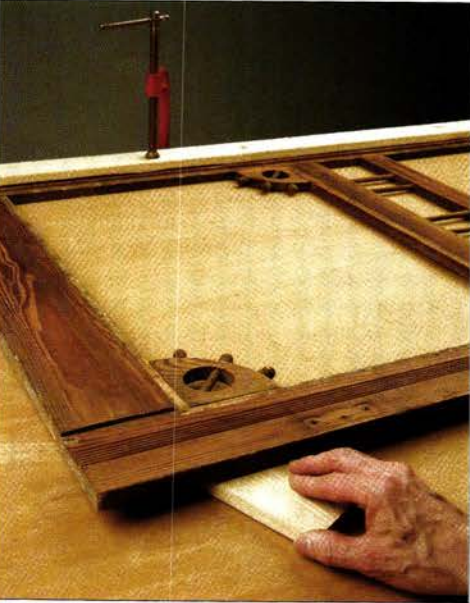
Though often homemade well into the 20th century, by the 1870s screen doors were also a natural product for mill-work suppliers and an ideal medium for

Three-panel screen doors (left), such as the one on this Georgian house, were typical of the "Plain Style" sold in the 1910s and later. In contrast, Victorian-era doors (opposite page, top) could be decked with spandrels, brackets, and gingerbread trim.



THE QUEEN ANNE HOUSE/ABRAMS/RADEK KURZAJ

INSTALLING NEW SCREENING



1: The trick to attractive re-screening is to attach the metal mesh with just enough tension to hold it flat and even across the frame. One method is to first arrange two boards and a pair of clamps along the side of the door, then lift the other side about 1" on two blocks. Next, slide the screening between the two boards and across the door to the blocked side.



2. Using tacks or staples made of the same metal as the screening to prevent a galvanic reaction, fasten the edges along the blocked side. Place tacks about 1" apart and work from the middle out, in both directions



3: Next pull the screening through the two boards until it is taught and even, then tighten the clamps. Now remove the blocks on the tacked side and allow the door to swing down, tensioning the screening.



4: Now fasten screening to the board side and remaining sides. Using tin snips or shears, trim excess screening as close to the wood as possible; cutting straight avoids jogs in the weave that can form weak spots.

the fanciful machine woodwork of the Victorian era. Catalogs show door frames divided mid-way by turned spandrels (they serve the same structural purpose as the horizontal lock rail in a panel door) and brackets in corners, some with Eastlake-style complexity, that acted as gussets in what is essentially an empty frame in constant motion.

Such “fancy-style” screen doors remained in catalogs after 1900 along with other Victorian holdovers like steamboat Gothic porch trim, but designs without the fussy look were already appearing a decade earlier. Examples include straight-forward doors with large, open screens on their upper half and a series of differing designs at the bottom—from three narrow, horizontal, rectangular panels to a single rectangle sitting atop two wood panels. These simple patterns were suited to a wide range of house styles and could

be ordered in pine (for painting) or oak (for staining and clear finishing). A choice of screening metals was available by then, too—galvanized steel, black wire cloth (painted steel), and copper, which was the most expensive option.

Down to the Wire

The same screening options are readily available today, along with a few new ones including aluminum, bronze, and fiberglass. Before deciding which to use, it's helpful to know their strengths, literally. According to experts at TWP Inc., a modern supplier of screening materials, stainless steel is the most durable, especially in versions that incorporate the alloy molybdenum, which retards corrosion. Rated for marine use, stainless is the ultimate choice for screen doors at seaside settings, where the damp, salty air is notoriously tough on aluminum and steel. Bronze is the next

Today's screens come in six different materials and offer an array of looks. A few examples are, clockwise from left: light gray fiberglass; dark gray fiberglass; light gray aluminum; dark gray aluminum; bronze.



Hardware Handbook

Screen doors are only effective if they close quickly and stay shut, and by the 1880s this reality had spawned an industry of screen-specific hardware—as practical today as it is historically appropriate.

Spring Hinges—Recommended for doors in constant use, spring hinges incorporate a coil spring mounted to the hinge pin that spreads the leaves back to the closed-door position. Spring hinges could have exposed or enclosed coils, and be made of cast iron, steel, or brass. Some models featured adjustable springs that ratchet up the tension to close doors more quickly. The only other hardware usually required with spring hinges was a pull handle and a hook-and-eye for locking.

Spring Closers—Screen doors mounted on butt hinges could still be self-closing by attaching a thin coil spring about 17" long between door top and jamb, or a shorter, heavier coil on the outside of the door.

Catches—To keep screen doors shut, manufacturers devised catches with self-closing beveled bolts that featured a knob on the door's exterior, and a locking lever handle on the inside. Though mortise versions were on the market by 1900, the average catch was surface mounted since screen doors are typically less than 1 1/4" thick.



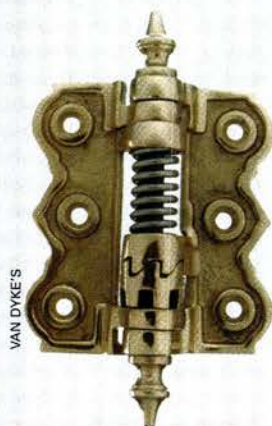
PATCHING A HOLE



5: Place mouldings strips into corners and nail them into place at 3" intervals; use weather resistant brads or escutcheon pins.

Cut a rectangle of identical screening roughly twice the hole's size. Next, unravel three wires from the patch edge; bend ends at 90-degrees, close to the weave. Center the patch, then thread angled wires through the screen and push them flat to secure patch to screen.

For a list of
SUPPLIERS,
see page 74.



Adjustable-tension, solid brass spring hinge.



Offset spring hinge in cast iron.



Antiqued brass adjustable spring hinge.



Victorian detailed cast iron locking catch.




Door spring in cast iron finish.



Eastlake-style catch in a brass finish.

strongest and, in terms of being conspicuous, also provides the best visibility, particularly as it darkens with age. Some consider copper screening the most appropriate fit for historic houses, but while it acquires a lovely green patina over time, it is soft and will need replacing more frequently. The weakest screening material of all is fiberglass, but it is also the most affordable and workable, which many find a benefit. In terms of cost, bronze is usually the most expensive, but it can pay to shop around. Many online companies offer screening for less money per square foot than can be found at the local hardware store.

All of the modern screen types are easy to work with and can be cut with lightweight tin snips. The most important thing to remember when replacing screens is to choose fasteners (tacks or staples) of a metal compatible with the screening to prevent galvanic corrosion in which dissimilar metals eat away at each other. Bronze tacks can be difficult to locate but well worth the effort in added years of life to your screen door. Whichever material you choose, install it carefully to make it more durable over time. 

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Getting Under

If you apply tools and materials with a production-minded approach, it's possible

Back in 1997, when I bought some woodlands on the southern Atlantic shore of Nova Scotia, I also became the owner of a small 1916 farmhouse and its little outbuildings. Though the balloon-framed house was structurally stable, it had been covered in the late 1970s with vinyl siding and aluminum storm sashes, and like many preservation-minded folks might do, I discounted it at first. Surely, the historic siding was decaying from the inside out because of the moisture trapped behind the vinyl veneer and, no doubt, any decorative details had been ruined beyond repair by the installers. In fact, I was so positive that the building was secretly self-destructing that I ordered two pallets of replacement wood shingles and proceeded to peel off the siding before it could do any more damage.

To my surprise, many of my assumptions proved largely untrue. I found no rot under the plastic second skin, just the reason for the installation in the first place: a shingled exterior in need of a thorough prep-and-paint job. What's more, the damage from the siding installers was substantially less than I expected (after all, they do no more than what's needed to flatten walls for speedy residing). Ultimately, restoring the shingles, windows, and other parts of the farmhouse became a six-year preservation experiment and a source of techniques and ideas that can be applied to many old-house exteriors.

Stripping Decades of Paint

Removing paint from shingles is tricky. If you eliminate power washing, sandblasting, and open flame, all of which are inappropriate for stripping shingles, you're left with four paint-removal methods: hand-scraping, chemical strippers, power paint shavers, and infrared heating technology. I find that power paint shavers combined with hand scraping can do the vast proportion of the job.

Traditionally, shingles installed with a 4 1/2" exposure are scraped by hand. Considering that the most natural stroke for hand-scraping is 12" to 18", scraping a third of this distance—the traditional amount of shingle "to the weather"—is laborious, time-consuming, and inefficient. If you try to improve efficiency by scraping wood shingles horizontally across their grain, you risk tearing the shingle faces and edges, or even splitting the shingles, especially if they're old and fragile.



Removing the vinyl siding revealed wood shingles—surprisingly intact, but still due for repainting.



The siding installers' legacy included window sill ends cut back to the casings (above) and headers completely lost but for their paint ghosts (below).



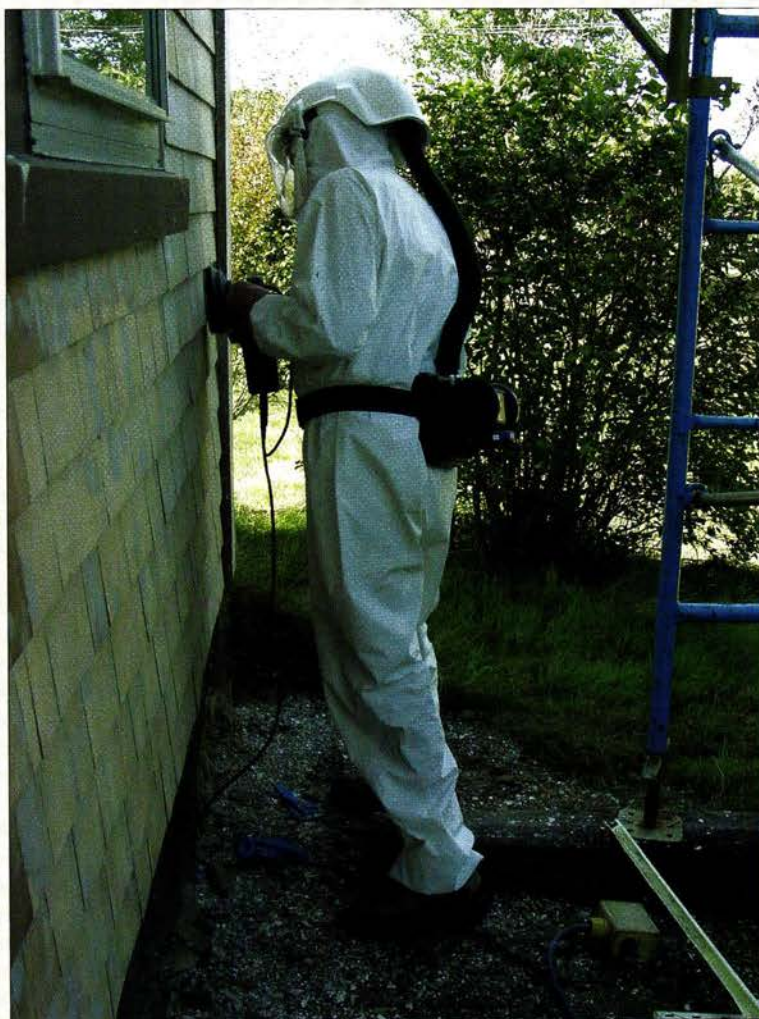
PHOTOS BY GREGORY MACNEIL

Second Skins

to restore exterior paint and woodwork with like-new results. BY GREGORY MACNEIL

Before removing vinyl or aluminum siding, assess what's underneath. While ovecladdings can stabilize historic exteriors, when they're gone there's still the effects of their installation to deal with, as well as any original paint problems.





Positive-pressure, HEPA-filtered gear was more comfortable than a half-face respirator and provided better lead dust protection, too.



Paint shavers with narrow cutters and long soles allowed horizontal stripping on 4 1/2" shingles. Two tools with different cutter depths speeded work.



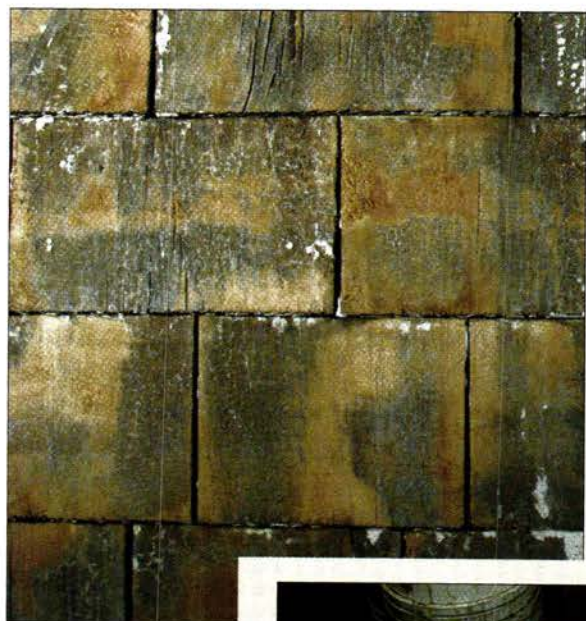
A sash chisel made for removing putty worked well for stripping butts.

If handled correctly, power paint shavers can be very productive tools for removing decades of paint with minimal damage to the surface. Though some models are best designed for working on surfaces 6" or wider, such as clapboards, others are well-adapted to the smaller widths of shingles. Then, by working horizontally, you can remove a full 24" of paint from the shingles with a single, efficient pass. In fact, using two or three tools, with each adjusted for progressively less aggressive cuts, speeds production while remaining sensitive to the wood.

For instance, we used two Metabo 724S shavers—one adjusted for an initial rough cut and the other for a shallow, cleaner cut—with the tool operators following each other along the façade. The objective was to remove only the bulk of the paint with a pass of the first tool, and then return for a pass with a second tool to strip most of the remaining paint. Although these tools are readily adjusted, the cutting head depth marks become harder to see as you use the tool, so we set the depth once and labeled the tools accordingly.

We practiced our technique first on a nearby barn and found it was best to hold the first tool horizontally and the second tool either vertically or horizontally as the undulations in the shingle surfaces demanded. With a two-person crew, production rates can exceed 450 square feet per day. However, if you attempt to remove all of the paint with these tools, you'll invariably remove an excessive amount of substrate. At this point we switched to hand scrapers for any paint left within concave surfaces, followed by a sash chisel and specialty scraper to address shingle butts.

Another paint-stripping method we employed was "wooding," an idea we borrowed from the shipbuilding and repair industry. Traditionally, a wooding tool is made from a worn-out 10" or 12" mill file that is heated, bent, tempered, and sharpened to form a heavy ship scraper. The tool is struck or tapped along the paint surface to either scar or chip off multiple layers at a time. We assembled our wooding tool by attaching a common plane iron to the handle of a carpenter's bench axe, thereby



Above left: After removing the bulk of the paint with an aggressive cut, follow up with a finer cut produced bare shingles with minimal wood loss.

Above right: Light orbital sanding readied the surface for paint.



Wooding tools made with plane irons (left) helped strip tricky surfaces like sills (above).

improving balance and scraping power. The key to the tool's success in both its traditional form and our design was that its weight dampened vibration and aided in cutting and chipping. The tool excelled at removing thick paint films from dense wood substrates. In addition, because a wooding tool can be used with only one hand, your free hand can hold a cordless vacuum next to the surface to easily move around a building for small-scale, localized paint removal.

After removing the paint, we finish-sanded the shingles using a random-orbit sander equipped with soft contour hook-and-loop backer pads. Though the edges of these soft pads degrade if you allow them to touch the shingle butts, their advantage is they conform well to the shingle surface. (It's better to lose a few easily replaceable pads than the shingles themselves.) When used with only light pres-

sure, 40-grit sandpaper leaves a good surface for paint adhesion. For all our methods, we made sure any tool operated with two hands had built-in dust collection. For single-handed tools, the user held a vacuum hose with his free hand.

If you are removing vinyl or aluminum siding from a building constructed before 1978, you must assume that you'll be dealing with lead-based paint underneath until tests prove otherwise. With that in mind, we worked with Tyvek suits, nitrile gloves worn under standard work gloves, and other personal safety equipment. The latter included a positive-pressure, air-supplied breathing apparatus equipped with HEPA filtration, protection that is the next step up from a half-face respirator.

Making Missing Parts

We initially expected that reconstructing damaged or missing stylistic elements

would require a large volume of material, especially given the appearance of the house once we removed the vinyl siding. To our surprise, the new material for missing bed moulds, soffit brackets, window caps, and the ends of window sills amounted to less than half the payload of a compact pickup truck. In fact, we restored all exterior façades with lumber from a single tree felled on the property, sawed on site with a chainsaw mill, and then air-dried for a year before use.

Like many vinyl-clad houses, the ends of the 40 window sills on my house were knocked off years ago so that siding could be placed right over the window casing. Rather than restore each end individually with a hand-fit Dutchman patch, we developed a jig that clamped to the sill face so we could cut back the sill to a uniform shape with a $\frac{1}{2}$ " plunge router. We set the plunge cut to a depth just behind the win-



A jig built to fit all window sizes allowed the $\frac{1}{2}$ " plunge router to cut back sill ends to uniform dimensions.



The sill Dutchmen needed to be anchored back to the framing; Spax screws had the required length and strength, as well as tips that start their own pilot holes.



The challenge of the sill ends (above) was to create a joint that would minimize weather exposure while making a good mechanical connection. The solution was to rout the sill back under the casing (to cover much of the joint), and into the middle of the window a couple of inches at a bevel.



Since the plunge router and jig created sill bevels and cavities that were all the same, the Dutchmen patches could be made ahead of time, then installed in an assembly line by bedding them in epoxy and anchoring with screws.

dow casing so that the joint was almost completely weather protected. We designed the jig to handle both left and right sill ends and sized it for the narrowest window in the house. We prepared in advance replacement side overhangs for the window sills to uniform dimensions. With a two-person crew, we were able to fit, install, and prime the 40 replacement window sill ends in less than 14 hours. We secured the precut replacement window sill ends with two countersunk Spax screws (fasteners that bore their own pilot holes and come in lengths up to 7"), and concealed the heads with epoxy plugs. One pass with an electric planer along the sill face and a few passes with a sanding block was all that was needed for final cleanup before priming and painting.

We documented many different examples of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "-wide window backband profiles, both contemporary and period, from nearby houses. However, finding consistent examples of backband moulding profiles on our house proved problematic. Unlike crown mould and soffit brackets that are full-bodied, backband mouldings are finely detailed and the examples were damaged from years of scraping and over-painting. So, opting for some conjectural restoration, we examined the shadows associated with the historic profiles we collected and then created a moulding profile with a historically compatible shadow line using an ogee raised-panel router bit along with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " core box bit.

Preparation and Paint

To ensure consistent paint color and compatibility between coats, it pays to choose a reputable manufacturer and supplier. When you purchase paint on an as-needed basis for a multi-year project, you can sometimes find minor color discrepancies over time. Where possible, we primed and top-coated the millwork made during the winter months. We used an alkyd oil-based primer with a 100 percent acrylic water-based top coat.

Because most substitute siding is installed with 3"-long nails, it leaves the original exterior peppered with nail holes 16" to 24" apart in horizontal courses about 8" above each other. We

A Good Perch Is Important

Substantial scaffolding is a must for optimum production in prep and painting. We combined standard 5'-wide frames with aluminum and plywood platforms, screw-jack base plates, and horizontal braces. Adding outrigger brackets to the platforms created a continuous surface that was a boon to painting. Scaffolds with 7'-long platforms are easier to erect than 10'-long platforms and more versatile around window bays and other façade protrusions. We kept enough frames on hand to assemble at least two scaffold bays so that we could "leap frog" the setup along the façade by disassembling and assembling adjoining bays. Although some people prefer pump-jack scaffolds that suspend planks from 4x4 posts, they're prone to swaying, movement that can drastically affect the quality of the final surface when working with paint shavers.



A continuous standing surface aids production, especially for two-man processes like roll-and-brush painting. Limiting scaffolds to 7'-long bays is more versatile around old houses and also a more convenient length for manipulating safety lanyards.

filled these holes with exterior-rated, two-part wood filler that sands and scrapes easily, takes paint well, and does not bleed through paint.

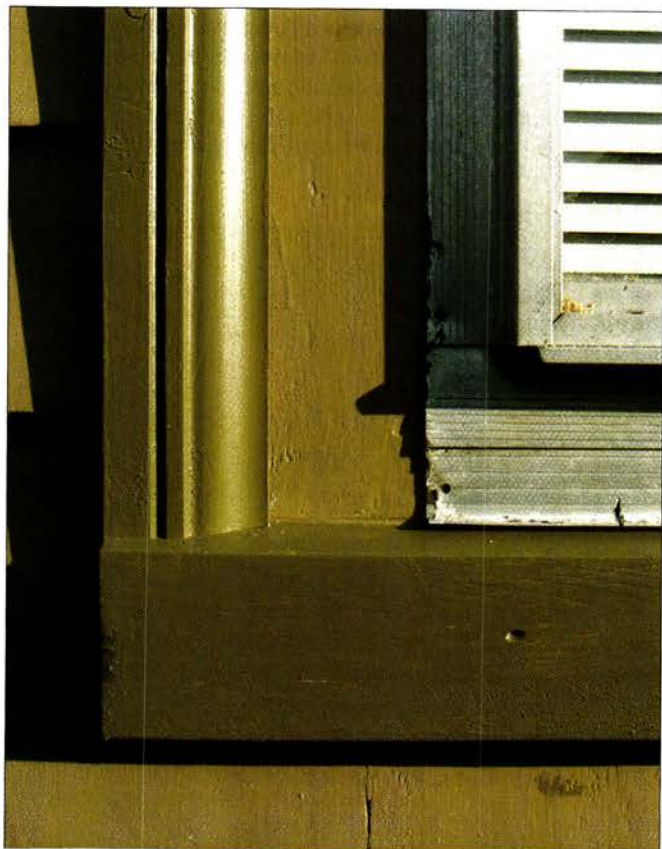
To paint the shingles we used a roll-and-brush method, first applying the paint with a 4"- or 6"-wide "hot dog" roller, before smoothing it out with a quality 4"-wide brush. The long, 27" handle of the roller reduces back strain, and the 1" diameter roller is ideal for wetting the butts and faces of the shingles. Plus, if you can find Whiz brand rollers (originally

made in Germany), they are fully covered on one end so that you can roll either vertically or horizontally and still provide good shingle butt coverage. We find that a 6" roller just about matches the output of a painter following up with a 4" brush, so that no member of a two-person team gets ahead of the other.

In historic restoration projects we like to date-stamp all new work with a branding iron. Although we manufacture our own branding irons, it's not hard to find electric- and torch-heated branding

irons from woodworking supply houses at reasonable prices. We typically brand the work before applying the top coat of paint. Though these branding marks are not visible at a distance, upon close examination they provide an in situ record of all the repairs that helped give an exterior a second life after being freed of its second skin. 🛠️

Gregory J. MacNeil is a partner in Jerry MacNeil Architects Ltd. in Halifax, Nova Scotia (902-445-3720).



Under fresh coats of paint (left), reproduction backband moulding meets a rebuilt sill to accurately and effectively restore the window's period details. New window headers (above) bear a subtle stamp noting the date of the work.

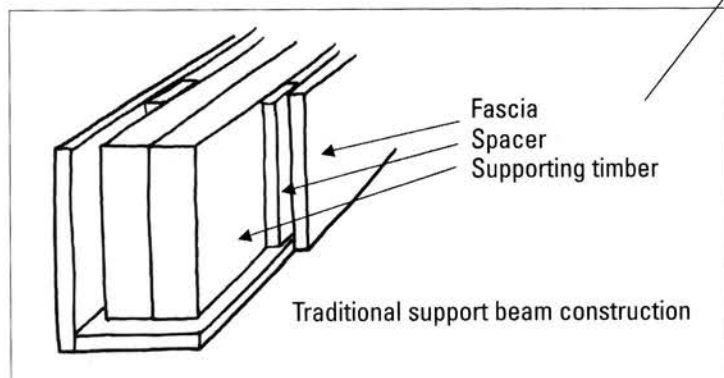
For a list of
SUPPLIERS,
see page 74.

To Build a Better Porch

BY RAY TSCHOEPE

Detailing parts so that water drains away from joints is the key to longer porch life.

The period design for a late-Victorian veranda, featured last year in OHJ's Plots & Plans, is surely a porch that would be the envy of many an old-house owner. However, after repairing and replacing dozens of historic porches over the past 20 years, I have found that because the traditional materials and finishes available to us today are considerably different from those a century ago, we need to give special consideration to how every porch element is designed and attached to ensure that the structure will last 25 to 50 years with routine maintenance. With these caveats in mind, I'd like to share a few design changes that can go a long way toward making that late-Victorian veranda last a long, long time. 🏠

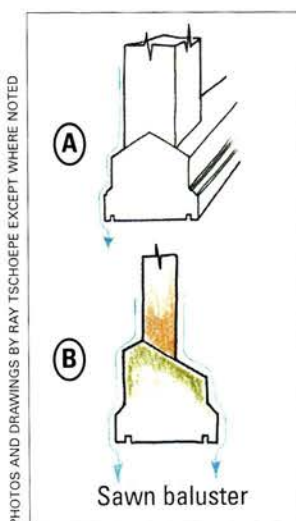


SUPPORT BEAM

Starting at the top, a box beam is usually a bad idea. The void inside inevitably traps moisture, thereby providing one of the conditions necessary for fungal growth. Instead of building a hollow beam, you're better off simply beefing up the wood a bit and leaving the top open. Adding a screen across the top will keep out the local fauna.

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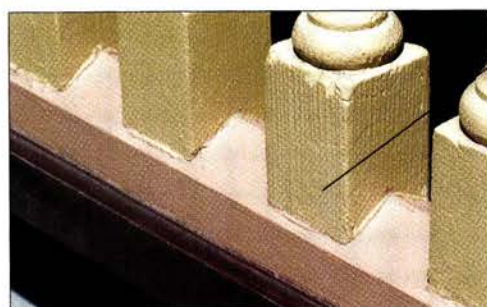
For a related story online, see "Porch Details by the Book." Just click to "The Magazine" section, and go to "Exteriors" in the list of recent features.

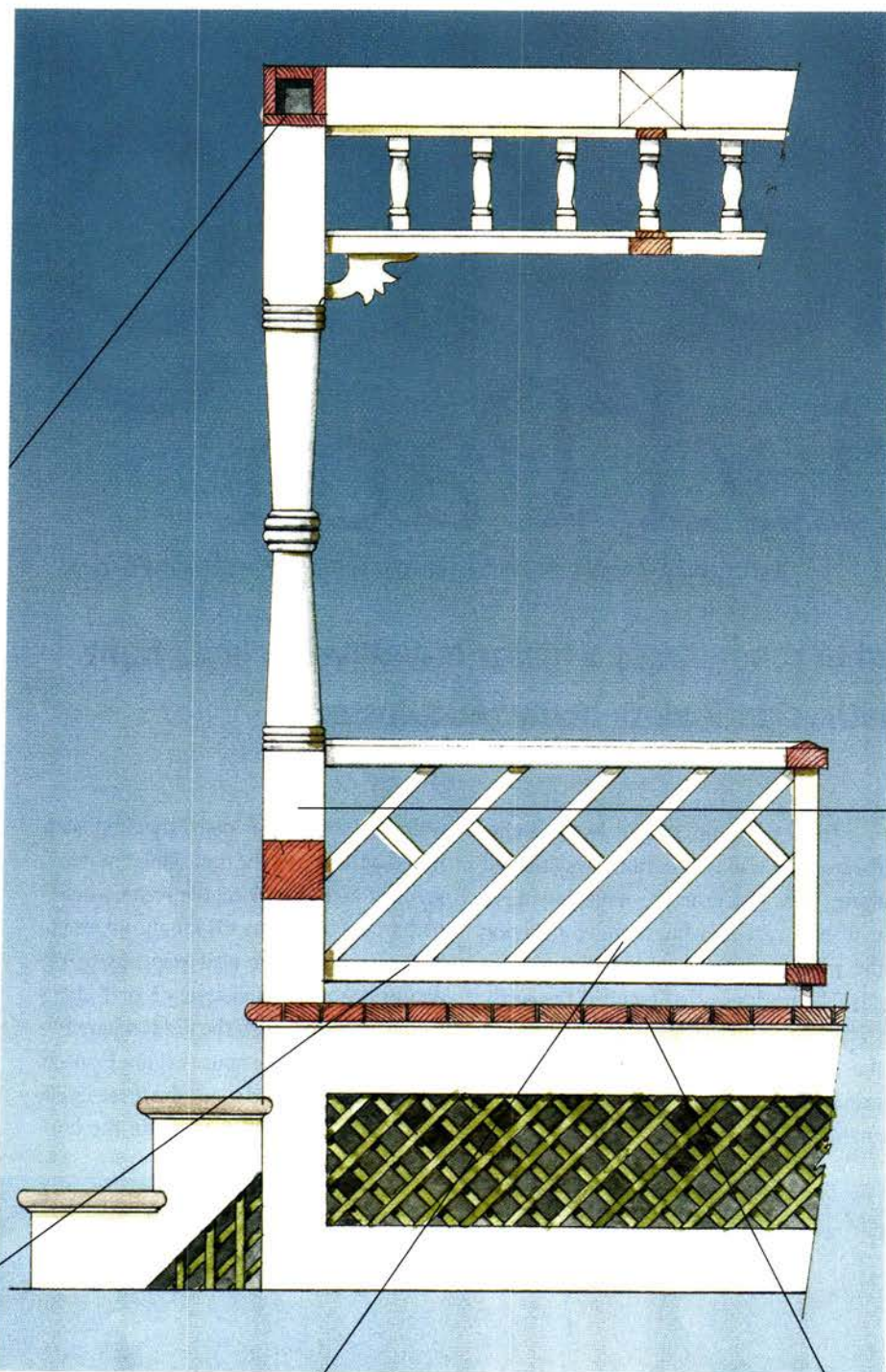


RAILS

Water will always puddle on the bottom rail of the frieze and the balustrade because both are long, horizontal surfaces. If there's any break in the paint film, water will seep into the wood, which will begin to decay.

A better design would create a double bevel -- a gable roof shape-- on the upper surface of each rail (A). This design requires additional cuts in the bottom of the balusters so that they sit properly on the rail, but in the end the extra effort will be worth the extra performance. As a variation, the lower rail can simply be cut with a single beveled top, (B) a common method with sawn balusters.

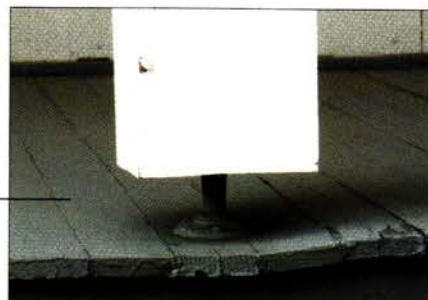




POSTS

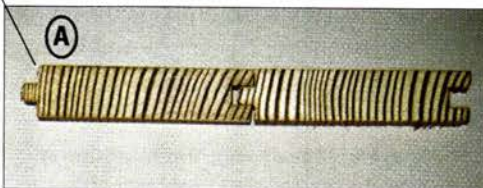
Unlike hollow posts, solid posts do not demand internal ventilation. However, solid posts do place a large area of end grain in direct contact with the porch floor or column base where water is apt to collect. Ever vigilant caulking and painting can block water from wicking up into the post bottom, but a more preventive approach is to raise the column off the floor so that the end grain will remain dry.

The point at which the railings join the columns is another prime area for decay. A better way to design this intersection is to mortise the column to a depth of about 3/8" to 1/2" with the profile of the hand and toe rail. This detail will encourage water to travel over the joint, not into the joint.



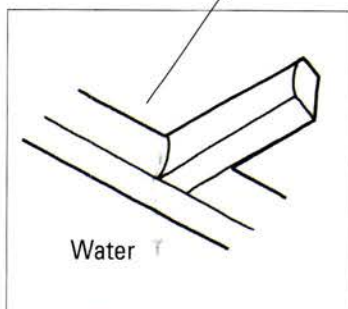
DECK

Traditional porch floor boards run at 90 degrees to the wall face, leaving hundreds of vertical joints subject to water infiltration. The long-term survival of the porch floor often depends on the detailing of their outer edge. As the boards release and absorb moisture, the ends of the boards may shrink and, most importantly, cup, exposing the tongues and grooves to free-flowing water. Choosing flooring lumber that is vertical-grain or quarter-sawn (A) will greatly minimize the shrinking and cupping. Attaching a bullnose (half-round) moulding to this edge with stainless-steel nails and polyurethane adhesive or sealant will keep water penetration to a minimum. Make sure the sealant is marine grade and made for below waterline use, and plan on regular maintenance for the longest lasting service.



BALUSTERS

As a general rule, the more complex the railing, the more likely there will be intersections and flat, horizontal surfaces that collect water. If you are constructing a balustrade of your own design, keep it simple and detail all surfaces and intersections to shed water. If you are restoring, follow the original construction closely but always be prepared to introduce even minor contouring that promotes drainage without threatening the overall design. Even the balustrade pattern in old Chippendale railings is designed with crowned surfaces to direct water away from the many intersections.



ROB LEANNA

Ray Tschoepe is the director of conservation at Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust in Philadelphia.

Relaying a Storied Path

BY DEMETRA APOSOROS | PHOTOS COURTESY OF TUDOR PLACE HOUSE & GARDENS

The process a museum used to reconstruct a historic walkway sheds light on how to relay the brick paths that lead to many old houses.

Decorative, durable, and remarkably adaptable, brick walkways have a long history in North American architecture. Not only can they snake in curves or turn on right angles, they are readily pulled up and relaid when an underground utility needs servicing or a pathway changes direction. While relaying a brick walkway may seem like a masonry specialty, it's a project well within the skill set of handy old-house owners. To observe the process firsthand, OHJ visited Tudor Place, a house museum and National Historic Landmark, which recently rebuilt a historic brick walkway that encircles the house.

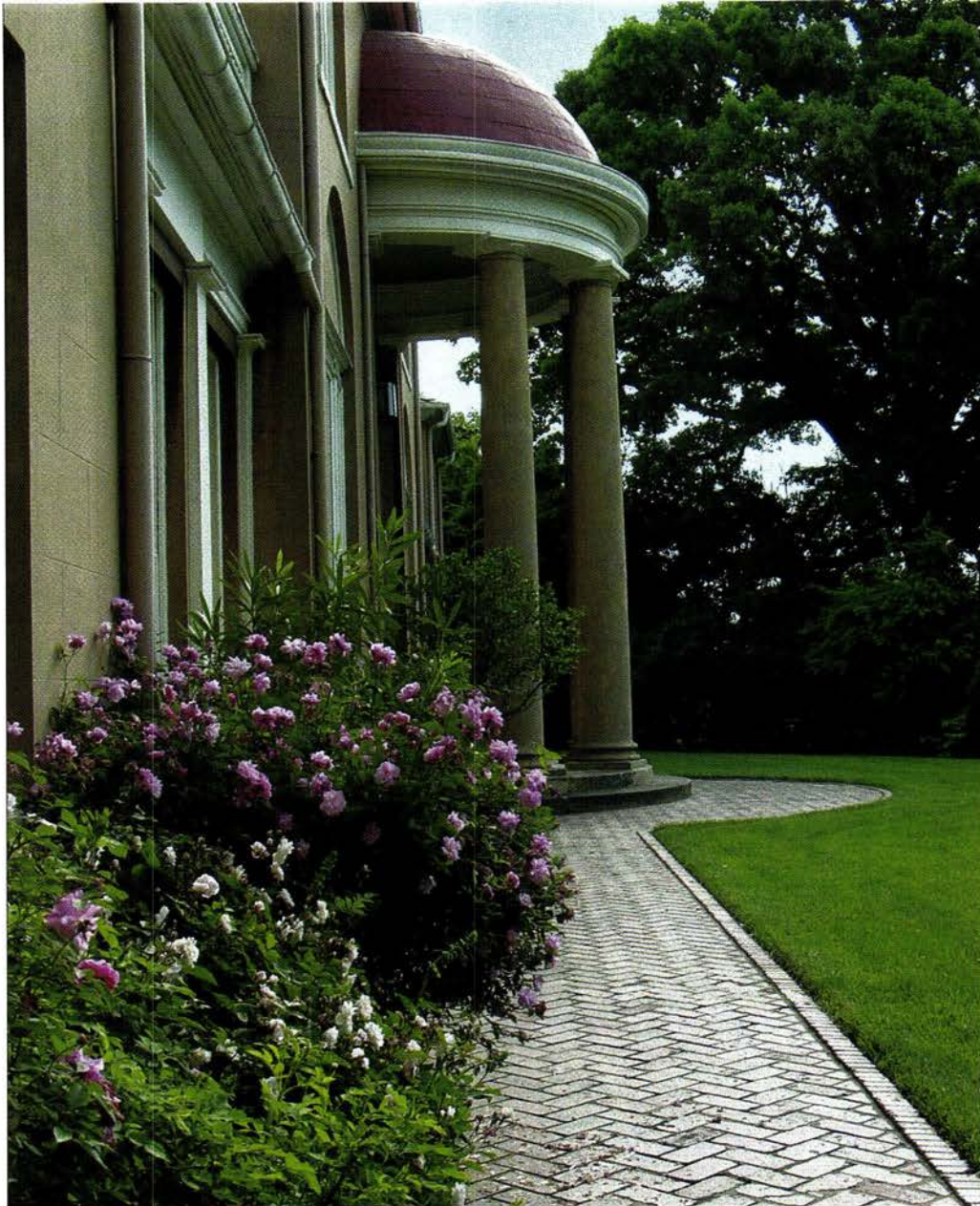
Richard Gilmore, project manager for Tidewater Preservation, a contractor specializing in historic building restoration, led a team of a dozen craftspeople through the special needs of the job. "Logistically, Tudor Place was the hardest site I've ever worked on," says Gilmore, "because of the topography and because of what we had to protect."

With the leaks fixed, the restoration team backfilled disturbed soil and tamped it along the original footprint before setting datum stakes to mark critical measurements.

Gilmore's team started by removing the existing walkway, cutting away the old drain lines underneath, replacing them with new cast-iron lines, and connecting the window drains (see sidebar on page 58). The work greatly disrupted the earth, so the team backfilled the area and tamped the soil with a power plate tamper—a heavy, flat metal plate vibrated by a gas engine. Work then turned to rebuilding the

walkway. On a new path, the first step would be to lay out the route and remove all sod, but at Tudor Place, the reconstructed path would follow the 1914 footprint exactly. Consequently, the next step was to set datum stakes as a guide every 3' or 4' along the walkway to match the grade where the stucco portion of the house begins. He used a transit to sight and mark the three levels of the walkway's reconstruction: the bot-





Tudor Place's walkway was still intact nearly a century after installation, but chronic drainage problems required that it be removed to repair corroded pipes underneath.

A string line sets the position and height of the brick soldier course at the path's edge (below left). Next, the team laid a French drain made of pvc pipe wrapped in filter fabric and covered with blue-stone gravel.



TRADITIONAL WALKWAY PATTERNS



Running bond:
Joints fall half-
way between
adjacent rows.



Herringbone:
Bricks laid zig-zag
at 45 degrees to
row direction.



Basket weave:
Groups of two or
three bricks laid
in alternating
directions.

Updates at Tudor Place

Tudor Place is an impressive neoclassical mansion completed in 1816 by Martha Washington's granddaughter, Martha Custis, and her husband, Thomas Peter. Since 1988 it has been a house museum that educates the public about life in the nation's capital as experienced by this one family.

The walkway project stemmed from an ongoing battle with the elements that had plagued the house for well over a century. During heavy rains, water consistently poured into the basement. In 1914 the house's third owner, Armistead Peter Jr., tried to mitigate the problem by resetting the traditional herringbone-patterned walkway into 10" of Portland cement.

While the 1914 walkway held up quite well visually and structurally, it had failed to stem the water flow. Nearly a century later, leaks continued to damage the foundation and jeopardize the museum's trove of archival documents stored in the basement. "Every time it rained, we were terrified about what was going on at the house," says Leslie Buhler, executive director of Tudor Place. So the museum contracted Mesick, Cohen, Wilson, and Baker, architects specializing in historic preservation, to survey the house and assess the steps needed to alleviate the water issues once and for all.

By snaking miniature cameras down the cast-iron drain lines, the architects concluded that many of the lines were completely corroded or blocked, and that drains within the window wells were not attached to the overall system. The architects suggested installing new drain lines, connecting the window well drains, and adding a French drain under the walkway's perimeter as well as a waterproofing layer beneath the walkway to help channel water away from the house. Because the walkway was embedded in all of that 1914 cement, the only way to proceed with the project was to rip up the walkway and start over.

In a perfect world, Tudor Place would have used the original bricks to set the new walkway, but only a few survived extraction from the cement with a jackhammer. Thus began a search for bricks that would closely resemble the originals. "Bricks get a wonderful character when they are walked on for years and years," says Jana Shafagoj, Tudor Place's director of architectural and landscape conservation, "and we just weren't finding it on new pavers." So they contacted Gavin Historical Bricks, which specializes in reclaimed antique bricks. After reviewing a half-dozen samples removed from Tudor Place, Gavin sent a sample of bricks that had once paved a street in Ft. Madison, Iowa, around the turn of the 20th century, and they were a close match. After 100 more bricks were ordered, they were laid out in a herringbone pattern alongside the original bricks. Then Tudor Place's building and grounds committee and advisory board (a volunteer group of architects and historians) voted on the match, and gave Gavin's bricks the green light.

The finished walkway is a source of pride for the staff at Tudor Place, and the extra effort in waterproofing the building was deemed a success. But the biggest reward was the walkway's finished appearance. While most of the brick pavers from the 1914 installation were destroyed, the few dozen that survived were reset and scattered among the reclaimed pavers that comprise the bulk of the walkway. Even Buhler and Shafagoj can't tell where they are.

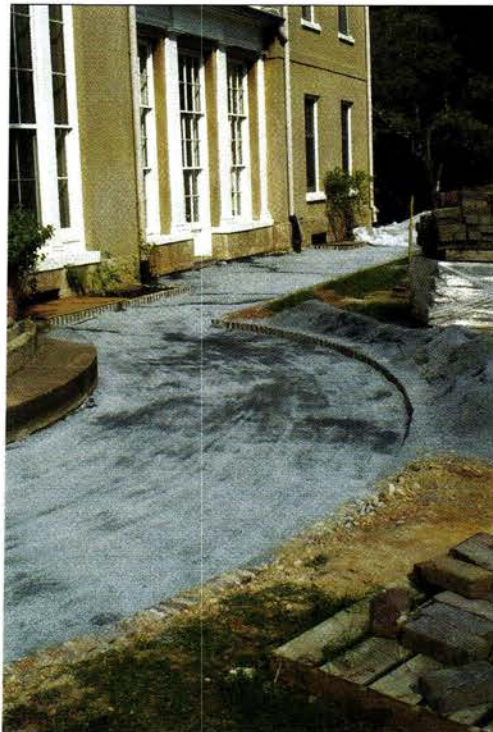


Layering bentonite fabric across the surface and extending it 1" over the drain added waterproofing.

tom of the excavation, the beginning of a layer of stone dust, and the final elevation for the walkway. That elevation aligned with the top of the soldier course (bricks set on end vertically and laid flush with the finished walkway's outside edges).

The team then tamped the soil again, grading it at a pitch of $\frac{1}{4}$ " per foot away from the building to aid drainage, an improvement on the 1914 layout. They knew the grade of the tamped soil was correct if it aligned with the lowest mark on the datum stakes, but Gilmore says pitch can also be checked with a 4' level taped to a straightedge the width of the path. Next, the team installed a standing soldier course and laid the bricks standing on end in Type S mortar, rated for below-grade use.

From here, the team added waterproofing layers to the walkway, something not all old-house owners will need. Using a shovel, the team dug a 16"-deep trench just inside the soldier course for the French drain, into which they laid a drain tile or a perforated schedule 35 pvc pipe. They laid the perforated side at the bottom so that water wouldn't have to cover the pipe to start flowing through it. They also wrapped the pipe in filter fabric to keep gravel dust



The team spread stone dust over the entire walkway and then tamped it to a slope of $\frac{1}{8}$ " per foot.



Masons carefully dry-laid bricks in a diagonal herringbone pattern using string lines to lay out leading corners.

and other debris from clogging the line. The team then covered the drain with 57s bluestone gravel ($\frac{1}{2}$ " to $\frac{3}{4}$ " crushed stones). Next, they placed overlapping sheets of bentonite fabric on the tamped earth, extending 1" over the French drain for water to flow into it. Sodium bentonite is a natural clay with excellent water ab-

sorption that expands when wet, blocking water. Unlike plastic, however "bentonite fabric still breathes and lets water vapor migrate, which is important because you don't want to trap water under the walkway, right next to the house," says Gilmore.

After completing the waterproofing phase, the team hand-spread a layer of

stone dust (bluestone ground very fine) about 6" deep atop the fabric and French drain, and tamped it into place with the plate tamper. Then they graded the stone dust at a pitch of $\frac{1}{8}$ " per foot, matching the grade of the finished walkway.

Work then began on dry-laying the bricks in a diagonal herringbone, a complicated historic pattern in which bricks form a zigzag pattern diagonally at a 45-degree angle to the building, a characteristic that added to the project's complexity. The team used string lines to lay the leading corners of brick and to maintain the 45-degree angle. The pattern also requires ordering a fair amount of extra bricks (typically five bricks per square foot) because many must be mitered to fill the gaps along the edges. Gilmore's team used a 12" diamond blade gas-powered saw to cut the bricks.

Once the bricklaying was complete, the team spread masonry sand several times over the entire surface to fill joints between the bricks and to give the walkway a finished appearance. Sand also adds vertical and horizontal support to keep the bricks from rocking. "The walkway looked wonderful when we were done," says Gilmore. 🏠

Special thanks to Tidewater Preservation, Inc. and Tudor Place Historic House & Gardens.

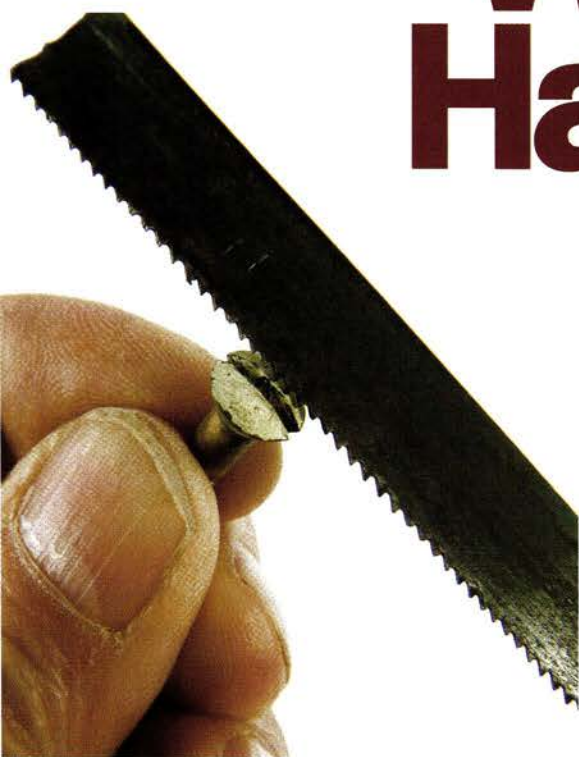


After carefully tapping bricks in place in dry stone dust (top left), sweeping masonry sand into joints (bottom left) adds vertical and horizontal support. The finished walkway (above) is a dead ringer for the 1914 version it replaced.

IN STEP WITH

Working Hardware

BY GORDON BOCK
PHOTOS BY ANDY OLENICK



Reviving screw slots

Slotted screws invariably collect paint and rust over time, making it hard to properly fit a screwdriver tip and avoid stripping the slot. Before you replace slotted screws like the #8 sizes commonly used in butt hinges, lightly draw a sharp hacksaw blade through the slot to clean out any debris and square up the bottom.

For a list of
SUPPLIERS,
see page 74.

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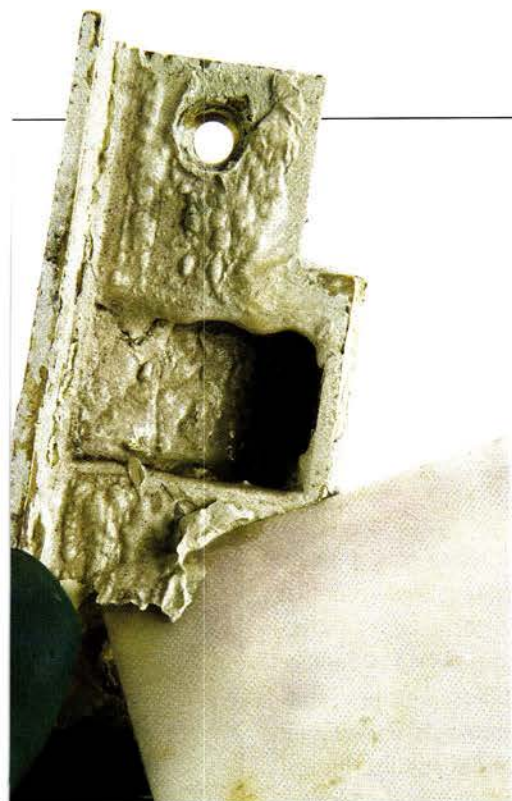
For a related story online, see "Handling the Past." Just click to "The Magazine" section, and go to "Hardware" in the list of recent features.

Hinges and catches, and the screws and bolts that attach them, comprise a lot of the essential hardware that allows many old-house parts to swing open or stay closed. For this installment of In Step, we're going to highlight the solutions to a few common problems that old-house owners encounter with vintage hardware, as well as explore some insider tips—or what mechanics of the past used to call "kinks"—for dealing with the world of geriatric castings, threads, and fasteners. 🛠️



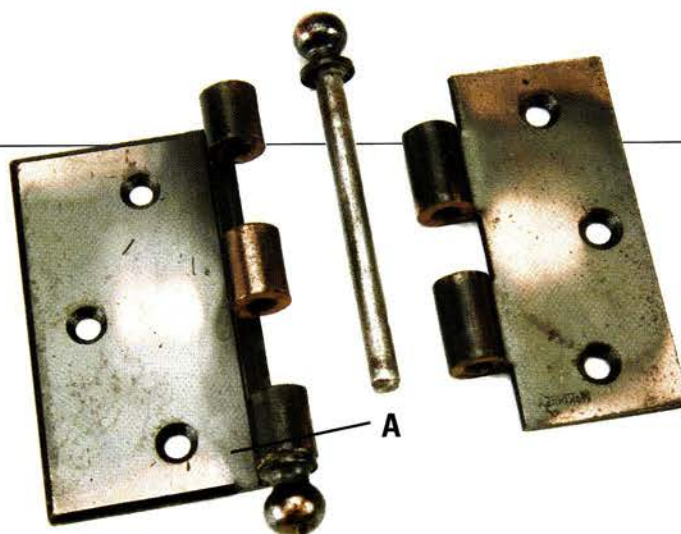
Pulling hinge pins

Doors are designed to be unmounted by pulling the pins that connect the hinge leaves, but in old houses where hinges tend to get rusty or out of line, this isn't always easy. If the hinge pin won't budge after applying penetrating oil and tapping at the base of the tip, try cushioning the tip with cardboard, grabbing it gently but firmly with locking pliers, then wiggling it loose and up at the same time.



Removing unwanted paint

Rather than removing overpaint by resorting to stripping products or scraping (which is laborious and can damage finishes), try soaking the hardware for several hours in a mixture of very hot water and TSP. The hot water expands the metal, breaking the paint bond, while the TSP softens the paint, making it easy to rub off with a plastic applicator or toothbrush.



Replacing hinge tips

When hinge pins lose their decorative tips, such as balls or the cast iron steeple tips common on 19th-century door butts, try this idea. If you happen to have a matching damaged hinge in your scrap pile, bore a hole the diameter of the pin into the decorative tip on the bottom of the leaf (A), then cut it off and mount it to your tip-less hinge pin.



Matching bolt threads

Though bolt diameters are easy to recognize, the threads per inch aren't, and forcing, say, a 10/32 stove bolt in a 10/28 hole will only strip both threads. If you don't have a thread gauge or nut handy, a quick way to compare threads is to lay them on top of each other. If the threads are the same pitch, they'll mesh perfectly; if not, you'll see the difference as the light shines through gaps.



Pushing hinge pins

If your door is large, look to see if the decorative tips on the hinge bottoms are attached like screws. If so, then you can unscrew them and tap the hinge pin up at its bottom with a machinist's drift or 10-penny nail.



ROB HUNTLEY

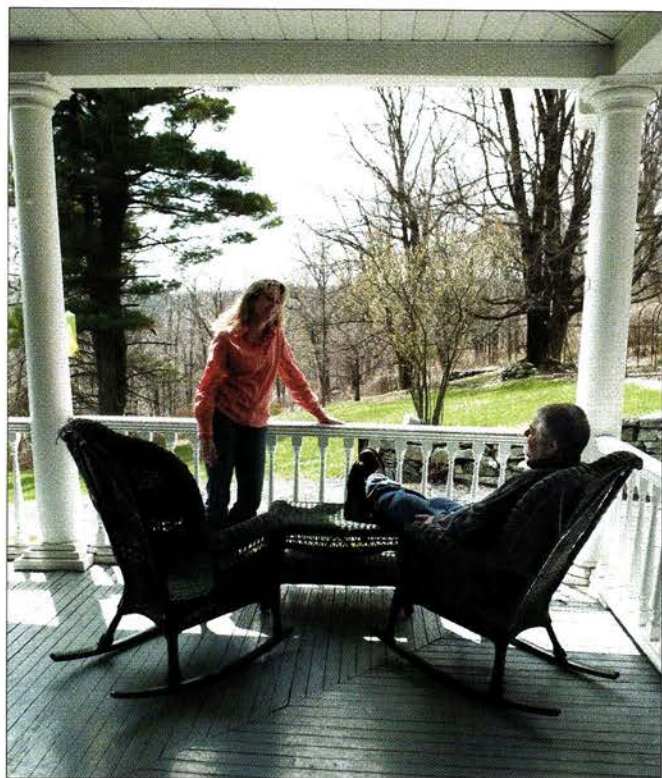
Removing frozen nuts

When frozen nuts won't loosen with heat, shock, or lubrication, try destruction. Take a new, fine-tooth hacksaw blade and cut the nut in half, working just aside the bolt threads. Often the nut will free up before you're done.

Bidding on a Dream

A family must compete for their fantasy house at auction. When the gavel falls, will their offer be the winner?

BY CATHERINE VAN GILDER
PHOTOS BY JASON LEE



Cathy and Bill Van Gilder park themselves on the wrap-around porch expansive enough to house a car.

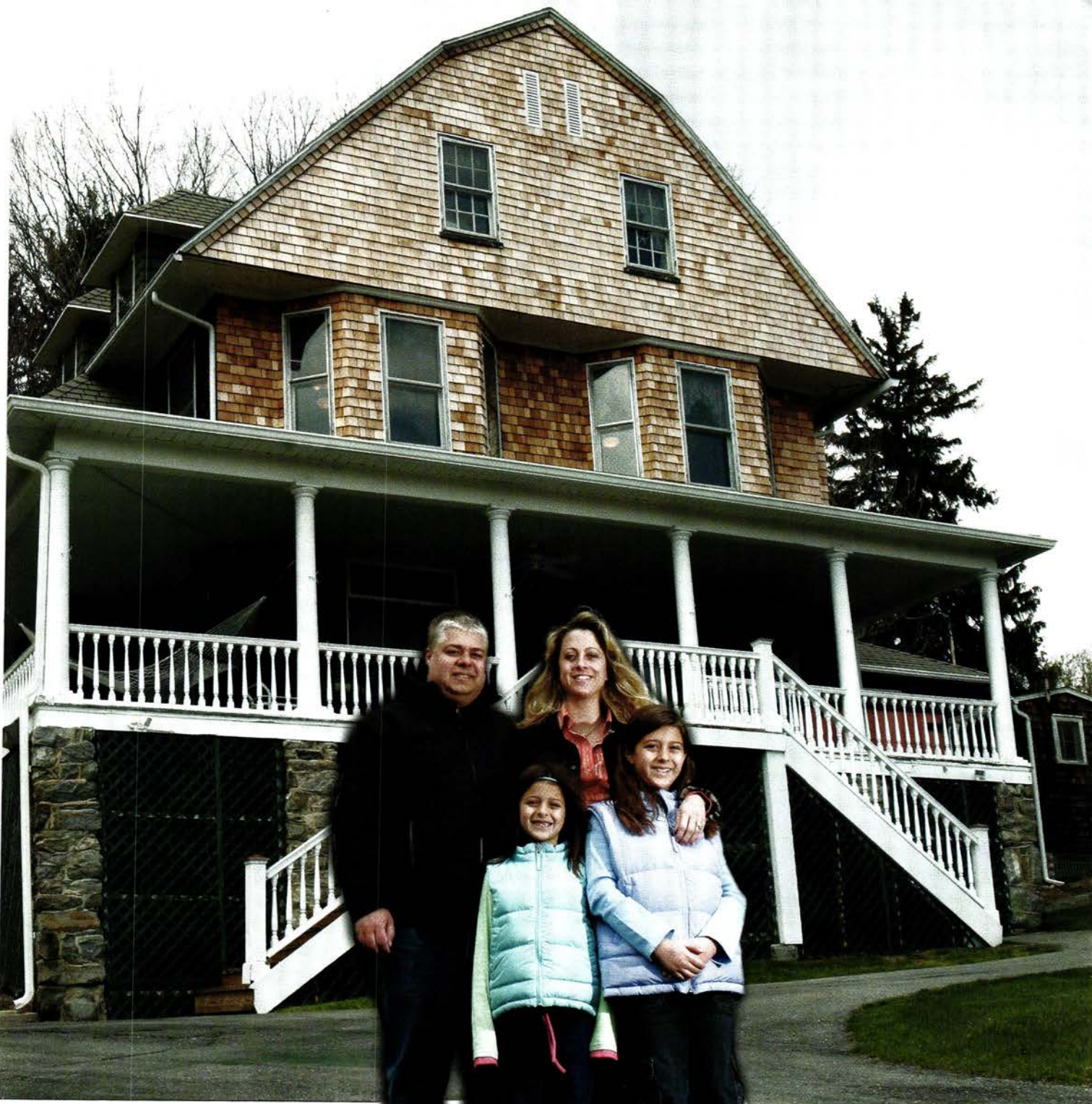
Our first house was a small, tired-looking Victorian that had seen better days. Advertised as needing TLC (a huge understatement) it was nonetheless affordable for two newlyweds finishing up college, my husband Bill and me. Instead of buying new furniture, clothes, and vacations, we blew our hard-earned cash on caulking and sandpaper, fixing rotten floors, and scraping and painting into the wee hours. That building, humble as it was, made us fall in love with anything antique and sparked dreams of one day finding our forever house—a huge, drafty old gem in need of restoring. We knew that mystery house, our castle, was out there, waiting for us.

A Fantastic Discovery

Skimming the local Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania, paper one evening, I saw an advertisement for a nearby property auction that took my breath away. “Escape the hustle and bustle!” read the ad. “Built in 1902, this 13-room Colonial Revival home features a wrap-around porch, pocket doors, stone fireplaces...” Within five minutes, I herded my family into the minivan. Even though it was late in the day, nothing could stop us from taking a peek at the property that very evening. We followed the newspaper’s directions; moss-covered stone pillars greeted us at the property’s edge and, as we inched down the driveway, a colossal house covered in stained cedar shingles came into view. I was captivated by a front porch big enough to house a car. Bill and I exchanged knowing glances; we

Built as a summer “cottage” for a Baltimore tycoon, the 1902 Shingle-style house remained in one family until Bill and Cathy moved in with daughters Sophie (at left) and Grace.

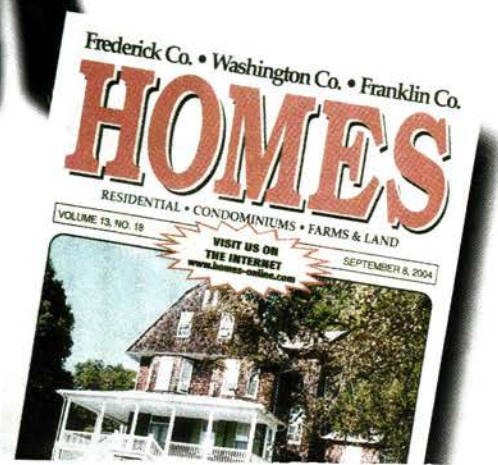




had arrived at our paradise.

Two men walked out of the side door, one of them using a cane. "Who are you?" the old man asked defiantly. I leaned out of the car window and introduced my family as I held up the newspaper ad. "My wife died six months ago," he said, getting right to business, "I'm selling the house." Then the younger man spoke up, "I'm his son, from Boston. Dad's moving to a home up north. This is his last night here." I felt guilty, as if we were imposing. So I nudged Bill that we should go.

Even with stained siding, the house made the cover of an auction circular and immediately fired Cathy's imagination.





Two massive pocket doors (above) on the main floor weigh hundreds of pounds apiece, and stretch nearly to the 10'-tall ceiling. The dining room's rubble fireplace and glass chandelier (right, in middle) are original.



"Thank you for your time. We'll be back for the auction," Bill promised.

All of us stared mesmerized at the house as we drove away. It wasn't until we reached the end of the driveway that I could pry my eyes away, to discover the house faced an incredible view; the lights of the valley below twinkled like friendly beacons in an oily, black sea. Upon returning to our house, my mother-in-law up from Florida scolded us for not staying longer. "Drop your girls off and get back up there," she commanded. "That's your house!"

We took her advice. We were both now head over heels in love with the place before even setting a foot inside. As we knocked on the door, we apologized profusely about returning, but told the men we hoped to see the house then and there. They seemed pleased and showed off the fine points like proud parents. On the front porch, the owner told us the view stretched 50 miles on a clear day. We were overcome by the butler's pantry, the ten-foot-high ceilings, the eight bedrooms, and double staircases leading to the second floor. When we returned downstairs, we actually got confused as to which way we'd gone up! Best of all, the house was untouched. There were no funky additions or weird alterations, no paneling or wallpaper, no carpet, and hardly any drywall. It was exactly what we had been hoping to find.

The men said the house needed kids running up the stairs, but we stopped short of making them an offer. "Let's take our chances," Bill whispered. I hated waiting; it felt like our life was on hold.

Since we knew the house was vacant, Bill and I went there many times before the auction just to walk around the property, in effect trespassing. We weren't looking at all the work it needed, both inside and out; we were looking at the possibilities; thinking about spending the rest of our lives there.

The Competition Begins

The day of the auction was a beautiful fall Wednesday. We milled around the property with the dozen or so other potential buyers, all eyeing each other nervously. Some cou-

ples brought their contractors. One guy was barking orders on his cell phone, "We should tear down this wall and expand the kitchen. We need more bathrooms for a bed and breakfast." Tear down walls? I felt I had to save the house; rescue it from greedy hands!

The auctioneer called us all out to the front lawn. Our competitors were people from all walks of life. Earlier, I overheard a couple and their six children picking out bedrooms. Eight bedrooms would have been perfect for them—what claim on the house did I have with just two kids, a cat, and two gerbils? But I fiercely loved the house. I wanted to protect it and beautify it, shine its floors, make memories in it.

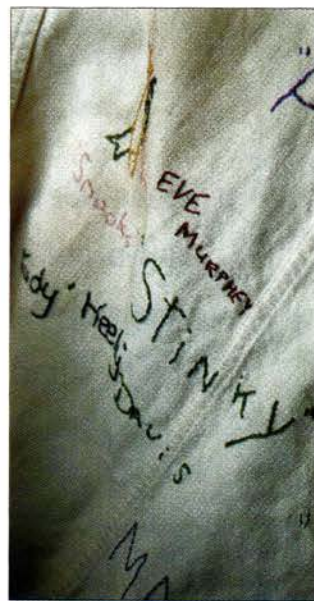
Several real estate agents were poised with their cell phones, looking out of place on the overgrown lawn in their suits and heels. Addressing his microphone, the auctioneer began with a price so high I thought I'd faint. Things got frantic as everyone seemed to be bidding; everyone except us. Finally, Bill raised our number. We were in, but the price kept going higher and higher. Soon it passed our pre-determined top dollar. My stomach was flip-flopping, and bidders started dropping out like flies. Only the really serious contenders remained, including the bed and breakfast people. The family with six kids had already given up and piled into their minivan. For a fleeting moment, I felt for them.

Several times, the auctioneer stopped and waited to add to the drama. When he began calling numbers again, Bill did the worst thing I thought he could ever do; he stopped bidding. I wanted to cry, I wanted to leave and get out of there. Then Bill raised his hand again, determined to keep trying. I held my breath, watching the other two remaining bidders like a hawk; mentally urging them to let us have it. Then, before I knew it, the auctioneer yelled, "Sold!" and the frenzy was over. I was bewildered. What happened? Who got it? I looked at Bill and he was grinning, saying, "It's ours, it's ours!" Tears started flowing freely down my face. I grabbed the kids as we all jumped up and down.

The next few hours were a blur as our



A site-built kitchen dresser (left) is an early model of work-space cabinetry, and required only cosmetic restoration. A treasured find is a sewing jacket left in a closet (below), embroidered with decades-old nicknames of sewing club members.



family, friends, and fellow auction-goers came up to offer congratulations. I was so ecstatic that I hugged complete strangers; I even hugged the auctioneer. When it was time to sign the papers, my feet never touched the ground as Bill and I entered the house. Mentally, I was already figuring which room we would restore first, along with how many buckets of putty we'd need, what colors we would paint, even where the Christmas tree could go—all in that short walk to the kitchen.

The auctioneer was on the telephone, "I think we just sold your house," he said. Then he handed the receiver to me.

"Do you remember us?" I said to the old man. "We're the people that came to your house on your last night here."

"Ah yes, the family with the two little girls," he said. "I'm glad it was you." And I knew that he was smiling. 🐾

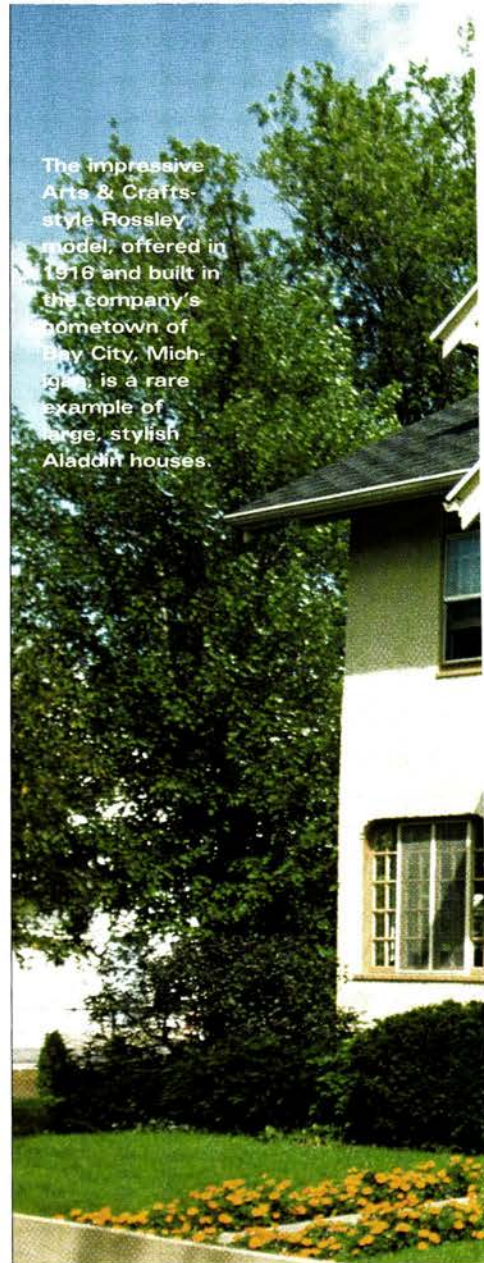


The servants' call bell—used to summon staff from their third floor living quarters—remains on a kitchen wall, a reminder of the house's grand past.



Like many Aladdin Read-Cuts, this Old English-style Shelburne model in Orangeburg, South Carolina, shows how builders modified the original catalog design.

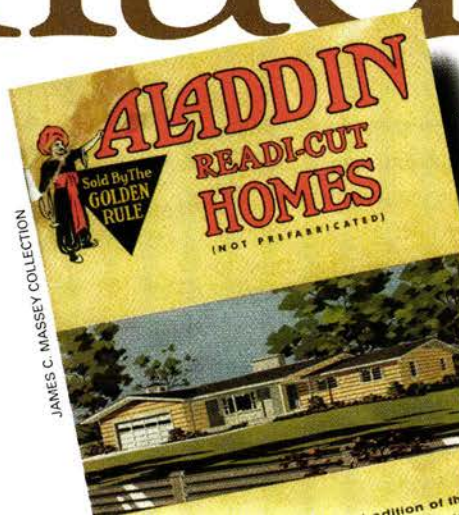
The impressive Arts & Crafts-style Rossley model, offered in 1916 and built in the company's hometown of Bay City, Michigan, is a rare example of large, stylish Aladdin houses.



Though Sears Roebuck is more famous today for its mail-order houses, Aladdin Houses was arguably the most successful of the kit house manufacturers and the first to churn out bungalows by the box car.

BY JAMES C. MASSEY AND SHIRLEY MAXWELL
PHOTOS BY JAMES C. MASSEY

Those Amazing Aladdins



\$483 BRINGS YOU THIS 5-ROOM HOUSE

SAVE 15% Lumber Waste \$1165 Labor Cost

Buy all the materials direct from the Aladdin Mills and make big savings. Price includes all lumber cut to fit, millwork, hardware, glass, nails, paint, roofing and concrete foundations. Build it yourself.

Homes—Summer Cottages—Garages

Aladdin's latest 1930 Catalog shows 100 plans of homes, summer cottages, and garages, at money-saving prices. Write nearest office today for your free copy. Ask for Catalog No. 100. No obligation.

The ALADDIN CO., Bay City, Michigan
Wilmington, N.C. Portland, Ore. 100 New House Plans in Aladdin's Latest Catalog

From a 1930 magazine ad for a small, \$483 cottage to an up-to-date 1963 ranch house, Aladdin covered all the bases.



By the late-19th century, industrialization had created a large and quickly growing American middle class, hardworking folks with some cash to spare but generally not enough to buy a conventionally constructed house. The problem was custom-built houses simply cost too much in man-hours, leftover materials, middleman profits, and maybe even architects' fees. In 1906, two brothers in Bay City, Michigan, hatched a plan for giving homebuyers cheaper and more reliable alternatives.

What would happen, speculated W. J. and O. E. Sovereign, if you could cut out the middleman, eliminate wasted lumber, nails, and labor, and make it possible for the average Joe to build his own house, maybe with a little help from a handyman or local carpenter? For the next 75 years,



The Plaza, with its prominent front and side porch, was a popular model in many eastern cities—shown here in Linwood, New Jersey. It was offered for many years, with occasional design modifications.

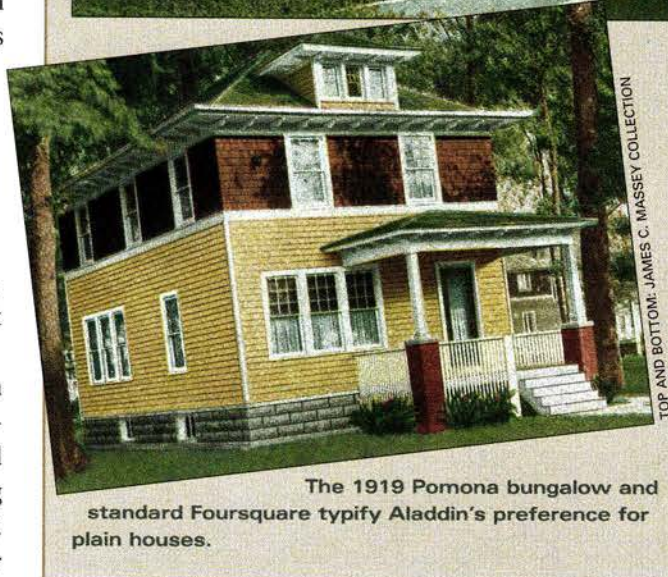
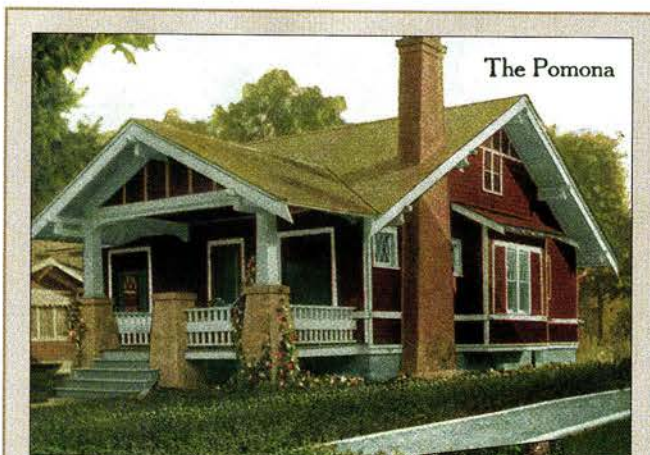
the lumber mills of the North American Construction Co.—renamed Aladdin Houses in 1916—spewed out the factory-cut makings for thousands of owner-built houses, each one ordered by mail and delivered to the builder's site by rail and truck. The fraternal duo from Bay City were clearly onto something big.

A Readi-Cut Above

Aladdin was not the only mail-order-house business in the early 20th-century, nor the biggest, and it may not have been the best known. Sears' Modern Homes probably fits the bill on both counts. What's more, Aladdin was not exactly lavishly financed. Although the brothers scraped up what seemed like a lot of money at the time to publish their first "catalog" (a one-page flyer), the investment was still just \$200. Yet Aladdin Co. appears to have been not just the first but also the longest running of its ilk.

The Sovereign boys' fledgling firm had a lot going for it. In addition to ambition and energy, the brothers contributed an unusual set of varied but intermeshing skills that would serve them well. Bill (W. J.) had legal training, plus a penchant for design; Otto (O. E.) was a marketing genius with a correspondence-school background in advertising. Plus, the Sovereign family already owned a prosperous lumber mill in Bay City, located at the mouth of the Saginaw River on the edge of Michigan's hugely productive forests—an asset surely not to be underestimated.

And so it happened that W. J. and O. E. Sovereign established what they proudly called "the first Readi-Cut System of home building in the world." They soon found themselves holding their own against retail giants Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, both of which entered the field later than Aladdin: Sears (Modern Homes) in 1908 and Ward's (Ward-Way) in 1916. Subsequently, myriad smaller pre-cut house sellers joined the market across the country, from California (Pacific Homes) to New York (Bennett Homes). In the Midwest alone, there were at least six catalog house suppliers, each with a slightly different take on the industry. Other than the



TOP AND BOTTOM: JAMES C. MASSEY COLLECTION



Aladdin produced hundreds of small houses for workers of corporations, many of them built around World War I. This group in Hopewell, Virginia, was built for DuPont. Porches were often sold as separate, add-on features.





Compare this Pomona model in Arlington, Virginia, with the catalog at the left. The open-rectangle eaves brackets are a distinctive Aladdin design element.



The traditional American Foursquare, a basic model for all of the ready-cut companies, varied in size, window arrangement, and details. The full porch and triple windows of Aladdin's Wenonah model are an unusually expansive design.

big three—Sears, Ward, and Aladdin—they included Gordon-Van Tine, Lewis (Easy Built Homes), and Liberty (a later, simpler offering from Lewis Co.).

In fact, the Sovereigns' business association with the Lewis firm was at first close. It was, after all, a Lewis Co. flyer for mail-order boat-making kits that inspired W. J.'s interest in pre-cut houses by mail. Furthermore, the Lewis mills provided sawn lumber under contract to Aladdin until 1916, when Lewis went into the pre-cut house business on its own.

Eventually, although the main office of the Aladdin enterprise remained in Bay City, the company opened branch offices and additional sawmills in Portland, Oregon, and Wilmington, North Carolina, making it easier to deliver on its promise to pay freight costs for its houses. (In practice, 10 states were specifically excluded from that promise.) Aladdin's catalogs boasted that "the Readi-Cut System will

save you \$18 out of each \$100 dollars on your lumber costs" and \$30 dollars out of each \$100 on labor costs. The catalogs also illustrated how Aladdin could produce "twenty feet of lumber from a sixteen foot board." (The secret was in carefully planned, precision-cut angles.)

Unlike Sears and Montgomery Ward, Aladdin generally did not sell household furnishings, although they did make a brief and apparently not very successful foray into that field with their 1916 Aladdin Craft catalog. Mostly, the company contented itself with making built-ins for its houses: kitchen cabinets, dining room buffets, interior colonnades and arches, mantelpieces, and bookcases. While the company opened no retail facilities for walk-in customers, it did invite visitors to tour its mills in Bay City, Portland, and Wilmington. It also offered a "department of service" to advise buyers of "the many nice discriminations to be made" in decorating and landscaping their homes.

Do-It-Yourself Shelter

While Aladdin was careful to distinguish its Redit-Built houses from flimsy, knocked-down portable buildings, the company did sell less substantial, single-wall, uninsulated structures: barns, garages (named after popular automobiles like Buick, Peerless, Winton, Packard, Ford, and Maxwell), summer cottages, and boat houses. During the Depression, when folks were eager to earn money any way they could, Aladdin even sold tiny tourist cottages and roadside stores. Summer cottages could be as small as the two-room Asbury ("built for two"), which measured only 16 feet square overall, including a six-foot deep front porch, but no bathroom.

Aladdin knew its market. From the beginning, it advertised in magazines that targeted farmers and the middle class—*Successful Farming* and *Saturday Evening Post*, for instance, but not *House Beautiful*, and never architectural journals.

Most of Aladdin's houses were not only inexpensive but small and simple, making it entirely feasible for reasonably adept homeowners to erect their own houses using the detailed instruction

Twenty feet of lumber from a sixteen foot board
How it's done

To cut the sheathing for this gable:

The carpenter usually takes an eight-foot board, a six-foot board, a four-foot board and a two-foot board and cuts them this way:

The carpenter requires twenty feet of lumber for the job. Aladdin takes a sixteen-foot board, cuts it this way:

Using some Aladdin magic, builders got 20 feet of lumber from a 16-foot board by carefully arranging the angle-cut ends. After World War II Aladdin's ads for ramblers and ranches appeared in shelter magazines in color.

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TOP AND BOTTOM: JAMES C. MASSEY COLLECTION



Aladdin mostly produced small, simple homes like this 1930 Sprucewood, which came in a selection of three floor plans, siding or shingles, and an optional porch.



From Lewis Mfg. Co., a ready-cut company in Bay City closely related to Aladdin, came the Dorchester model, a popular, large design that was widely built and copied.

books that came with each shipment. Aladdin provided everything needed for house construction, from nails and plaster board to paint and siding or shingles. It did not, however, sell bricks, cement, or stucco, explaining that it was cheaper to buy these materials locally.

Most Aladdin houses appear to have been designed by W. J. Sovereign. Bungalows of all descriptions, from California versions to Aladdin's perennially popular Kentucky bungalow, were among the company's most successful offerings in the 1910s into the '20s and early '30s. Other designs followed the changing American house styles of the century, from Queen Anne holdovers to Foursquares and Tudor and Colonial Revivals. There were only a few large, elaborate designs, but the 1919 catalog featured a most interesting one: the "Villa," designed after W. J. Sovereign's own substantial Bay City residence.

Catalogs varied in size and complexity as Aladdin's financial outlook rose and fell along with that of the nation. As they grew steadily fatter throughout the 1910s and 1920s, catalogs added more—and more elaborate—designs, only to shrink again when the Great Depression hit. World War II had mixed effects. On the one hand, there was a demand for wartime workers' housing and military housing, and on the other, a shortage of materials and labor for the sawmills.

World War I brought added prosperity to the already healthy Aladdin enterprises. In 1914, the company received an order from DuPont Corp. for an entire town of homes for munitions workers at Hopewell, Virginia, encouraging the company to issue a special Industrial Housing catalog. Other big orders soon followed, including one in 1916 from Bristol Brass Co. in Bristol, Connecticut.

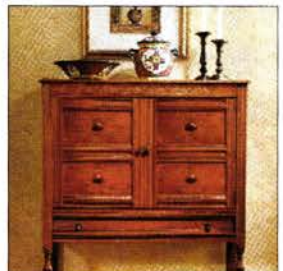
Aladdin persisted well into the post-World War II era and beyond, long after

Sears and Montgomery Ward had faded from the housing scene. They continued to sell modernized designs—now mostly ranch houses and split-levels—through catalogs and shelter magazines. Aladdin's slogans were catchy and its philosophy unwavering: "Direct from the forest to the home." (Cut out the middle man). "Sold by the Golden Rule." (Keep your promises). "We sell for cash only." (No credit, ever). "Every stockholder in the Aladdin Company is a worker in the business." (Keep the company in the family.)

By sticking to simple house designs, meticulously honoring its guarantees, marketing to a well-defined audience, and exercising fiscal caution, Aladdin outlasted its competition by many profitable years. Though the company closed its doors for good in 1987, it helped fill thousands of towns with affordable, livable, cottages, Foursquares, and bungalows. Look for one near you. 🏠

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The oak china cabinet shown here was one of those dream finds at a local secondhand furniture store. Not only did it go well with the room's other furnishings, it could easily contain a big wide-screen TV. After being stripped of its old varnish, only minimal sanding was done so as to preserve the oak's patina. Then the piece was stained and topcoated in one step with Minwax® Polyshades® Natural Cherry in a gloss sheen. Now it's hard to say which is nicer, watching the show or admiring the showcase.



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

A Primer on Pickets, page 38

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www.prowellwoodworks.com

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Screen Savers, page 44

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(continued on page 76)



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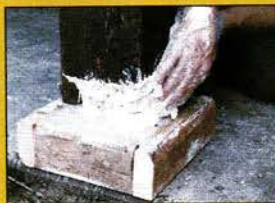
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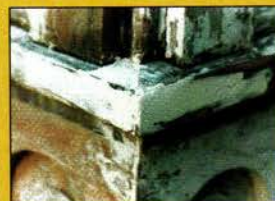
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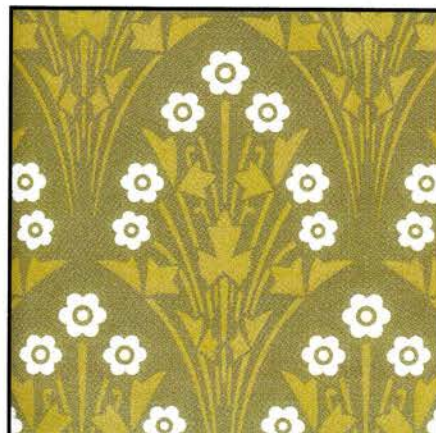
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(continued on page 78)

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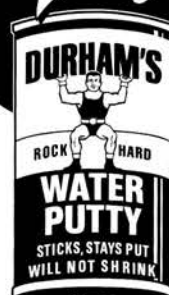
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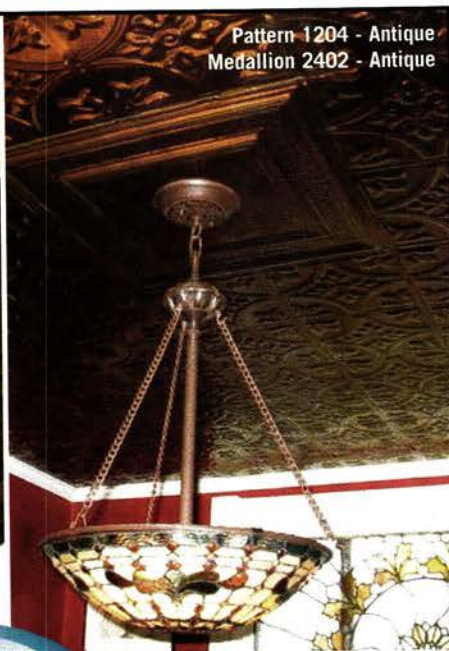
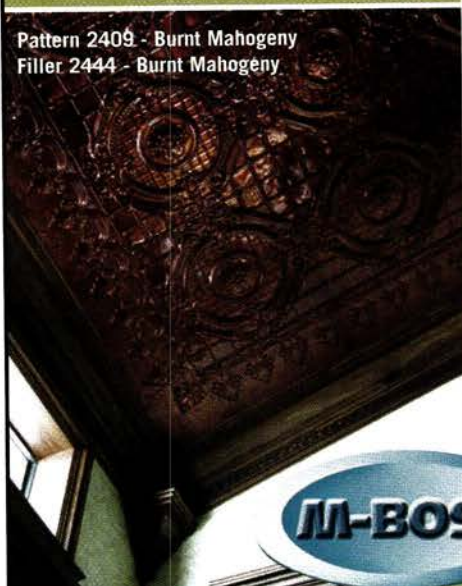
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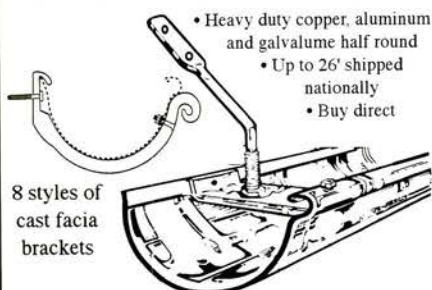
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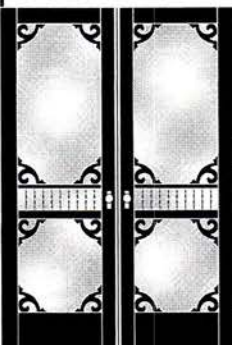
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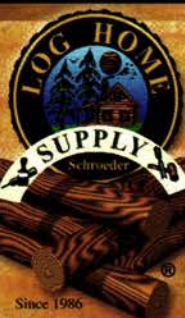
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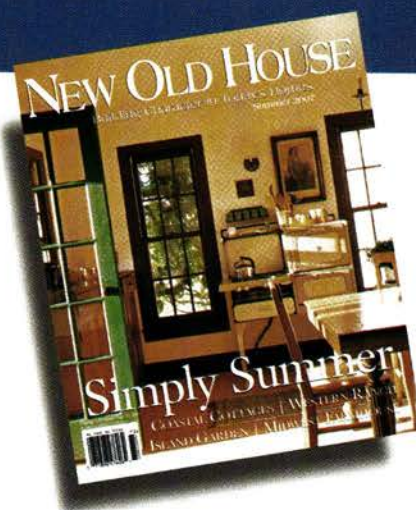
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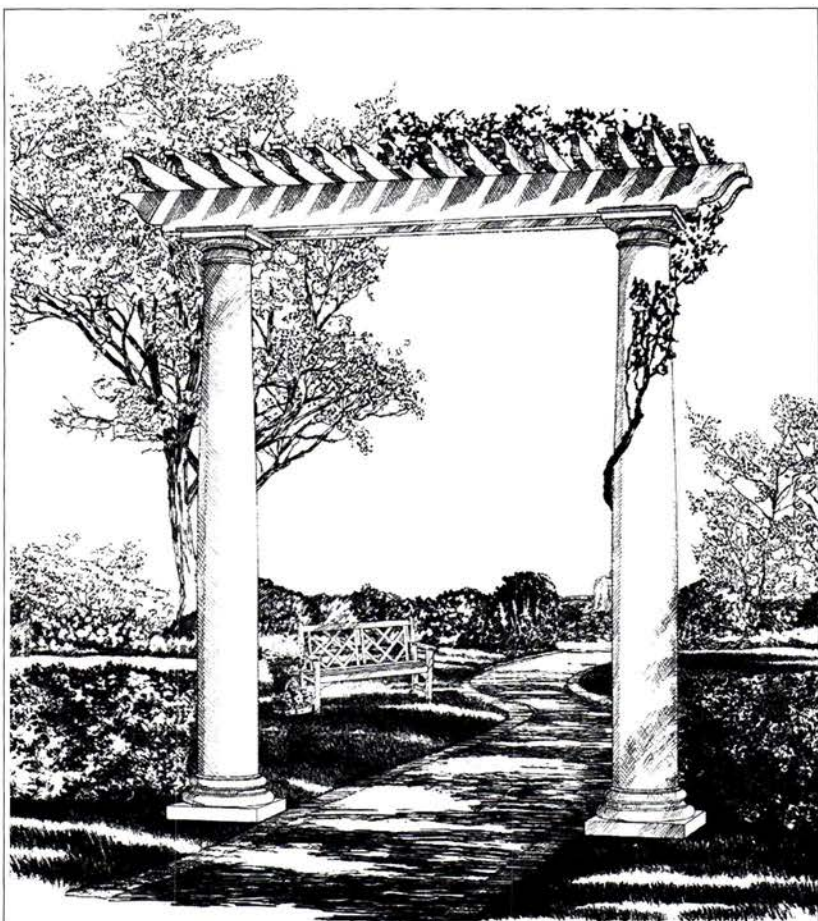
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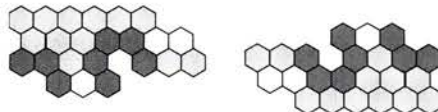
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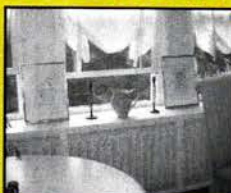
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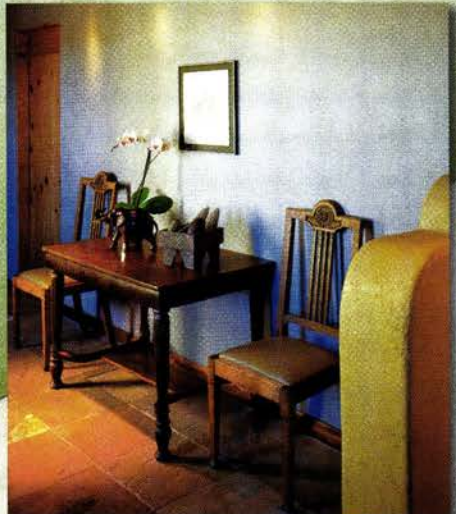
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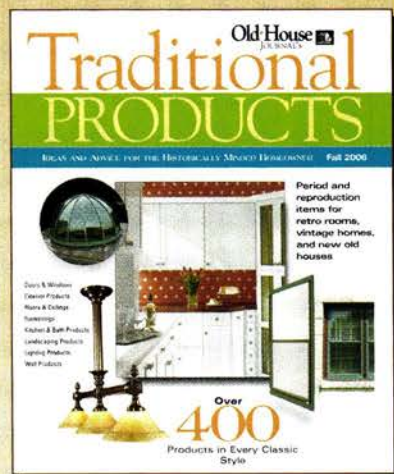


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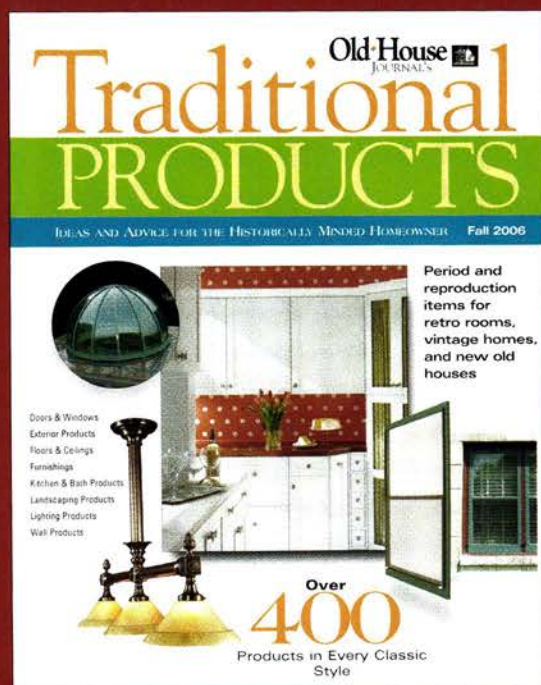
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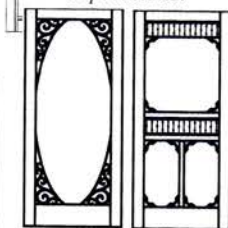
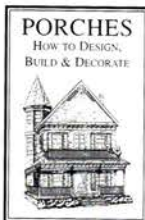
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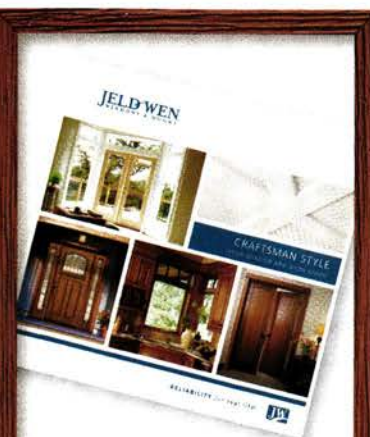
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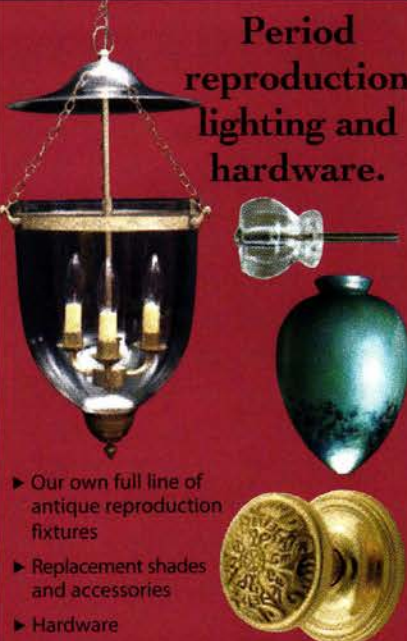
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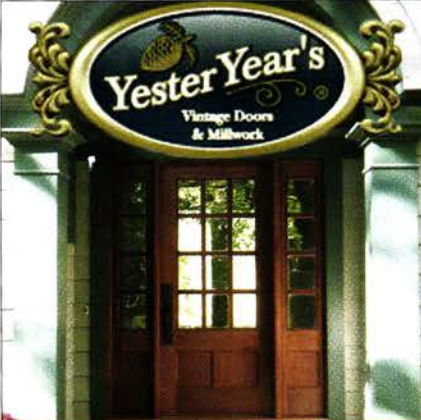
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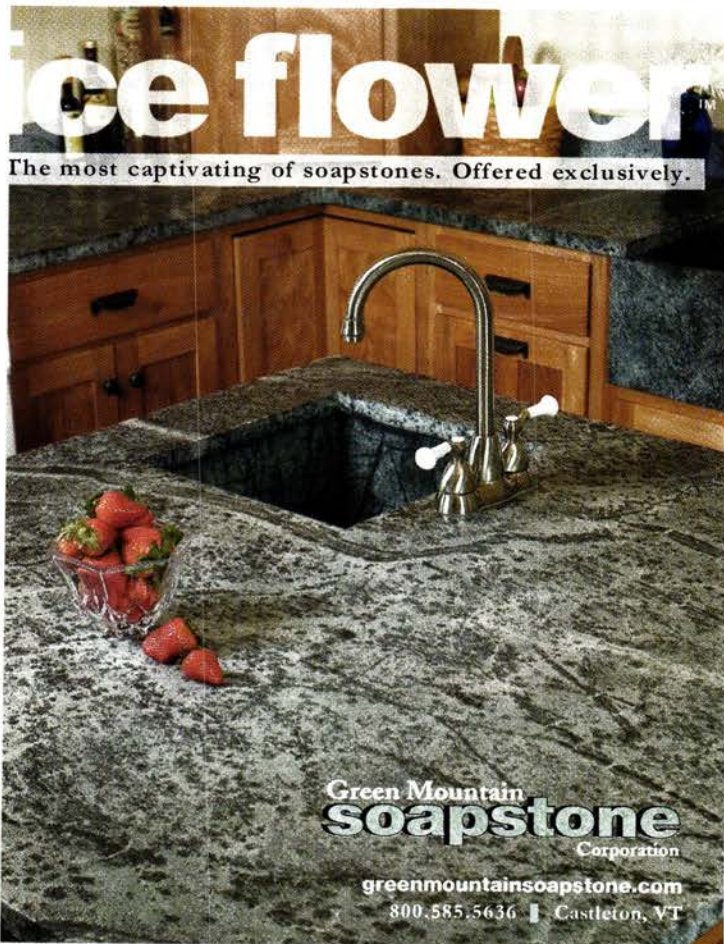
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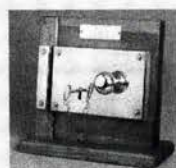
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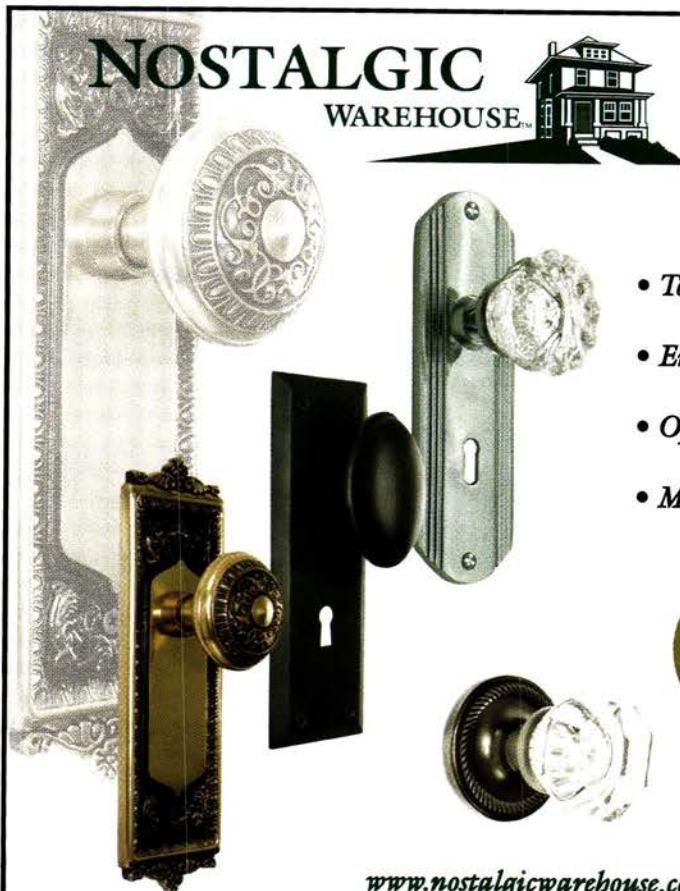
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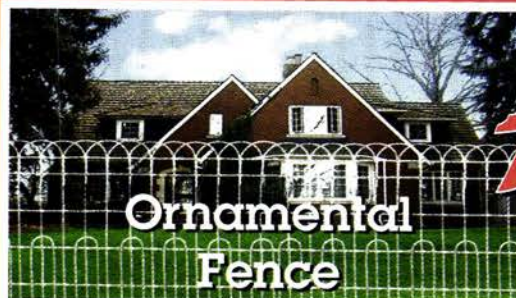
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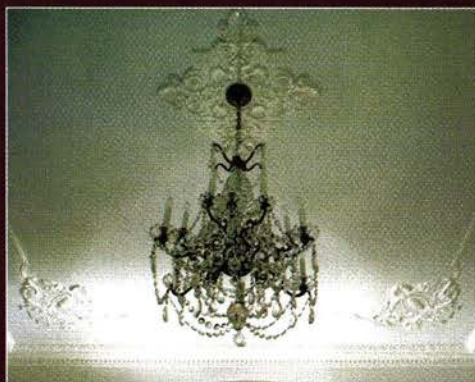
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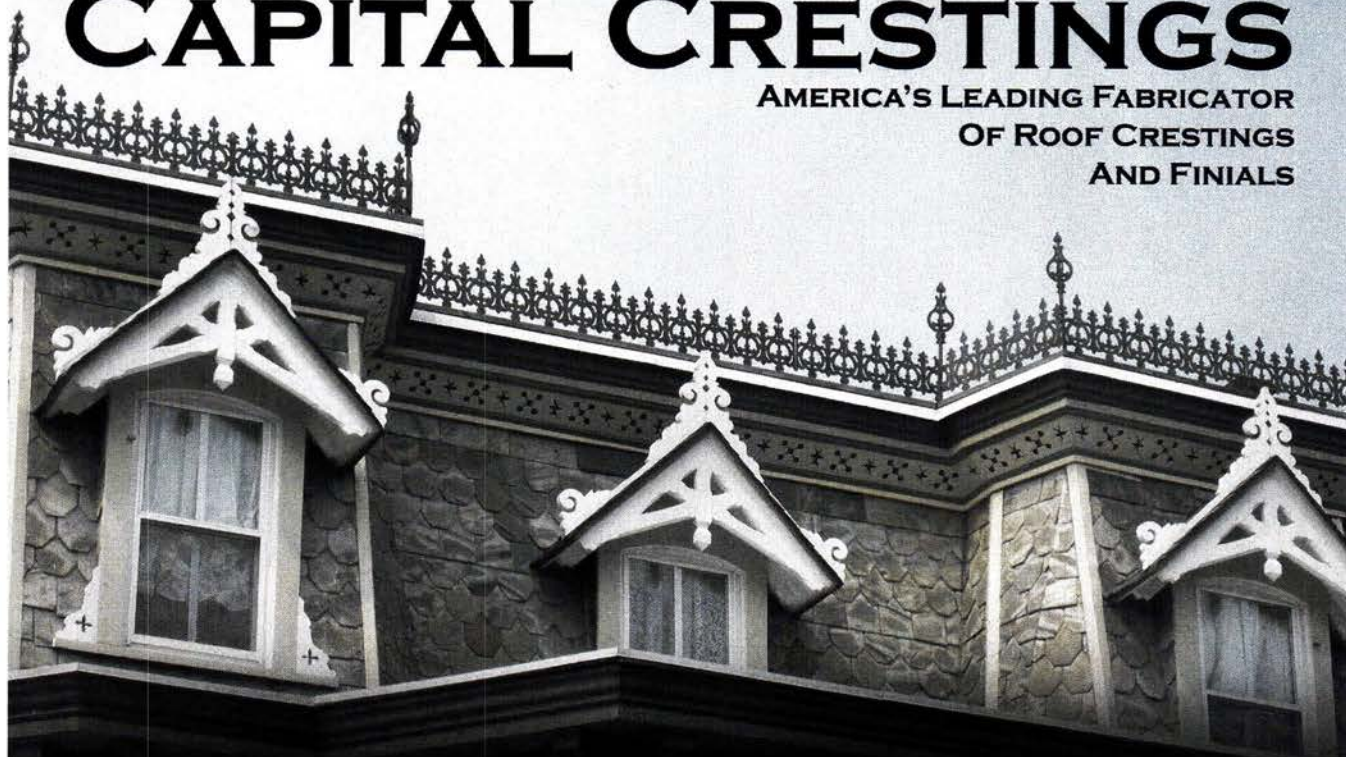
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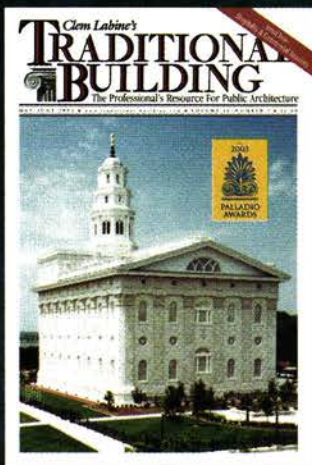
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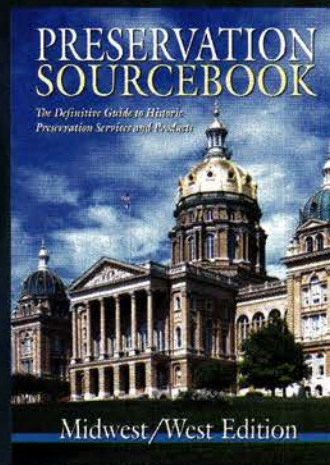
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Traditional Building is a bi-monthly magazine edited for 55,000 professionals involved in restoring old buildings or designing and constructing new buildings in traditional styles. The audience includes architects, contractors, building owners, facilities managers, interior designers, developers, landscape architects, building managers, preservation planners, restoration consultants, and other professionals who need to know where to locate hard-to-find traditional-style products and services.



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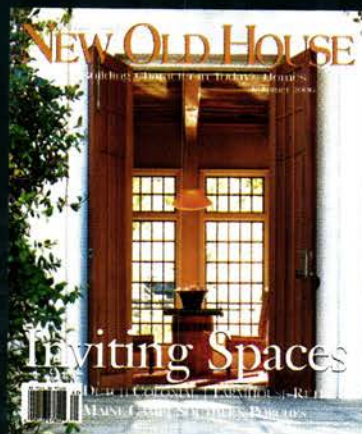
The Traditional Building Exhibition and Conference is the only national event for professionals who restore, renovate or preserve historic buildings or build new ones in a traditional style. Attendees include commercial, institutional and residential architects, contractors, planners, developers, building owners, facilities managers, interior designers, landscape architects, renovators, trades people, artisans and enthusiasts. The Traditional Building Exhibition and Conference takes place twice a year, spring and fall. In spring, the show presents 85 seminars, workshops and special events as well as 300 exhibits to 6000 attendees from around the world. In the fall, a regional event, the trade show and education program attracts 3500.

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Old-House Journal is a bi-monthly special interest title for old-house owners and enthusiasts, as well as for professionals who restore and renovate older homes. OHJ, which has a total circulation of 10,000, is the only consumer magazine in the field that's strictly about owning, renovating, restoring, decorating, and maintaining homes built before 1960. OHJ was launched in 1973, which makes it the oldest publication in its category.



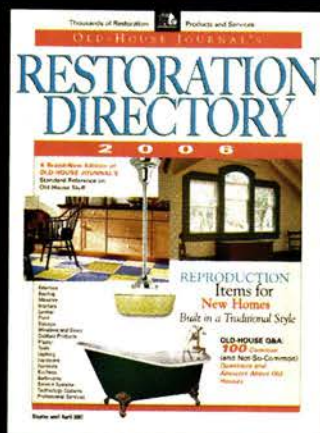
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New Old House, the latest launch from Old-House Journal, covers the ever-widening world of new homes built to replicate the look and feel of classic American housing styles, including Arts & Crafts (bungalows), Foursquares, Shingle-style houses, and Victorians of all stripes. With newsstand distribution of 100,000, New Old House is loaded with eye-popping photography; it is a stunning addition to Restore Media's stable of publications.



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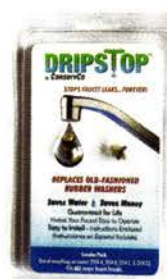


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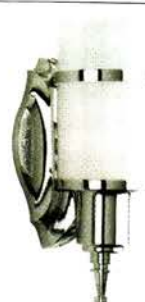


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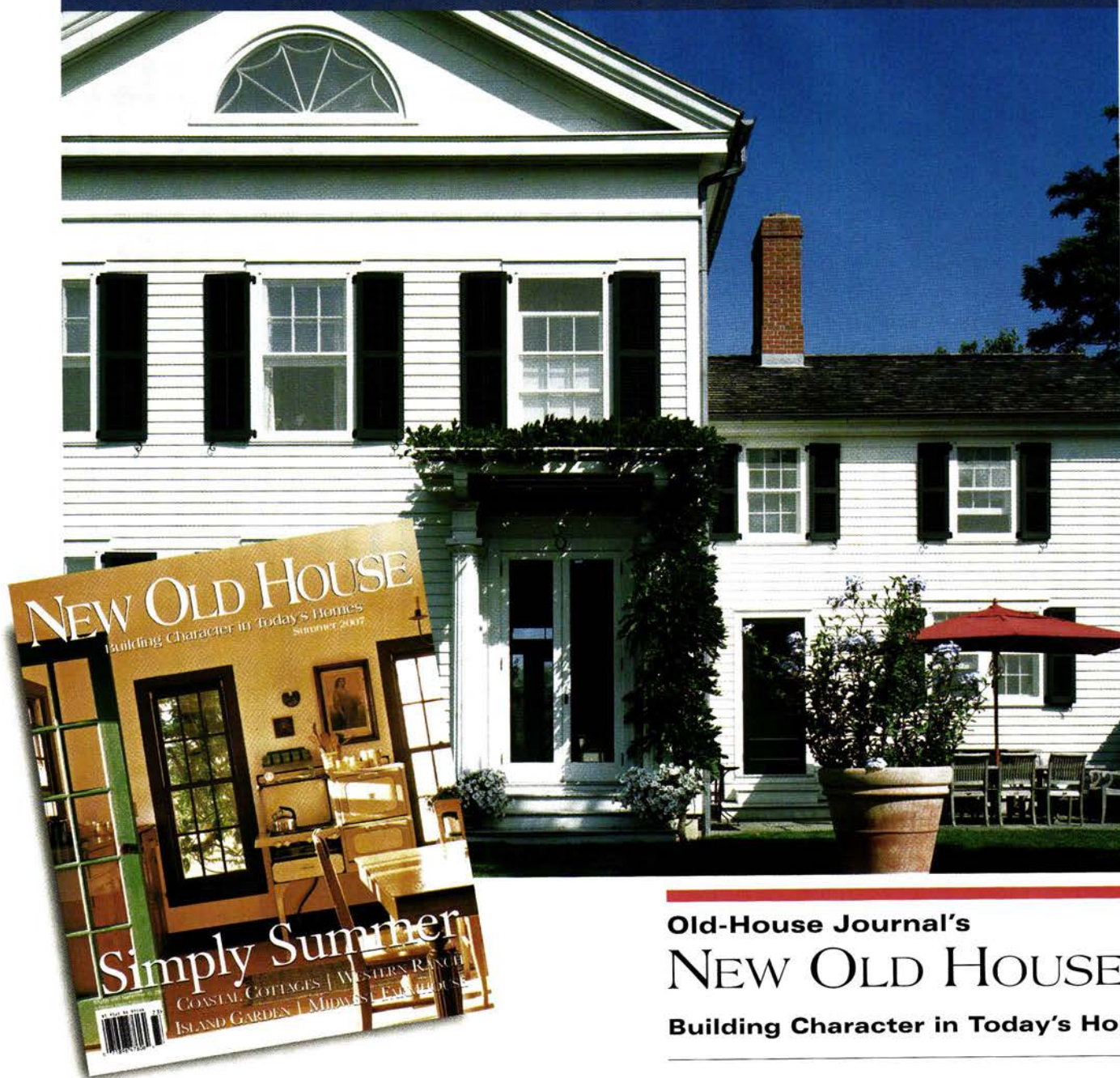
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VENTURA COUNTY, CA — The Howland House. Beautifully restored 1920 California Bungalow w/3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms - 1,700 sq. ft. Quarter sawn oak & fir floors, formal dining room w/built-ins, original slipper light fixture & French doors, living room has wood burning fireplace & built-ins, large front porch w/5 massive columns. Henry T. Oxnard National Historic District & Mills Act eligible. Patty Maugher, Re/Max Gold Coast, 805-320-3633

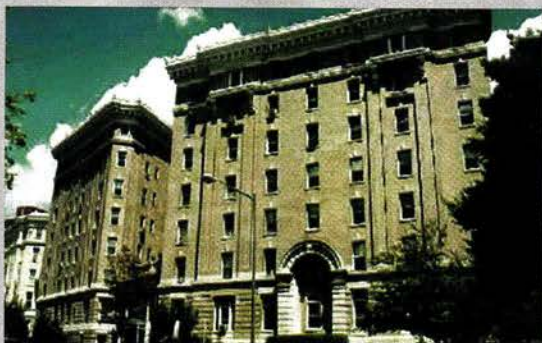


JOLIET, IL — 950 Western Ave. Stately, brick, 1913 Prairie-style home in Upper Bluff Historic District. Almost 3700 sq.ft. plus a finished basement & 2-car garage. Sitting on a massive 100x185 lot, this home, designed by Spencer & Powers, features a 2-story master suite and private library with beautiful built-in bookcases & leather walls. \$495,000. Melody Hochevar, Coldwell Banker Honig-Bell, 815-773-6006 x146. Virtual tour, www.Melodyshome.com



WHITE CLOUD, KS — Circa 1880 Poulet Mansion. On the National Register. 12 rooms including a fourth storey Italianate tower, 1.5 baths. Central halls with three-storey staircase. 3600 sq.ft. plus full attic. French Renaissance rear has 21 bays, two balconies with imported iron balustrades overlooking Missouri River, Kansas' largest catalpa tree. Historic richness, enduring charm. Northeast Kansas' finest. \$249,500. John Thompson, 816-424-3281

SPOTLIGHT PROPERTY



WASHINGTON, DC — The Wyoming (circa 1905), one of the grandest buildings in the nation's capital, boasts a marble lobby so ornate it's one of only two in DC to be separately listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Among the largest residences in this much-coveted building, Unit #201 touts 3 bedrooms, 3 exposures, 2,190 square feet and exquisite architectural details. 9' ceilings add volume to the grand entertaining-size rooms. Offered at \$1,000,000. Best Address® Real Estate, LLC. 202-669-4656. Preview photos, floorplan: www.BestAddress.com



BARNESVILLE, MD — Circa 1800, lovingly restored with spacious entry foyer, gourmet kitchen w/stainless steel appliances, 4 bedrooms & 1 1/2 baths, historic detailing, wood floors, exposed log walls, deck w/Jacuzzi, in-ground pool, 19th century log cabin studio, 1 acre landscaped lot, mountain view. Minutes to DC. \$749,000. Gary Gestson, HistoricHomeTeam.com, Long & Foster Real Estate Inc., 301-975-9500 ext. 4604. Direct 866-437-8766, gary@HistoricHomeTeam.com. EHO



BRANDYWINE, MD — Black Walnut Thicket circa 1850, beautifully restored plantation house, 10 acres w/stream, grand entry foyer, 3 story staircase, wood floors, 4 roomy bedrooms, 3 updated bathrooms, gourmet kitchen w/Jennaire & custom cabinets, 2 story porch, tobacco barn, potential equestrian estate. Minutes to DC. \$875,000. Gary Gestson, HistoricHomeTeam.com, Long & Foster Real Estate Inc., 301-975-9500 ext. 4604. Direct 866-437-8766, gary@HistoricHomeTeam.com. EHO



DETROIT, MI — Museum-quality 16,000 sq.ft. home by architect George Mason for auto pioneer Charles Fisher, 1922. Black walnut paneled living room & library w/painted ceiling; hand carved woodwork, Pewabic tile throughout; 5 bedroom suites; chapel; 6 fireplaces; ballroom; Estey pipe organ; marble fountain; elevator; original fixtures; servants' wing; carriage house; 1/4 acre, historic district. \$995,000. Cheryl Kachaturoff, Century 21 Curran & Christie, 313-377-5717



WILLIAMSTON, NC — Queen Anne Beauty — Approximately 97-year-old home needs TLC. 4 bedrooms, 6 bathrooms, 7 fireplaces, many originals, wraparound porch and much more! \$85,000. United Country, 800-999-1020, Ext. 108. www.unitedcountry.com/old

American Treasures — a full color magazine of older and historic properties for sale. Just \$5.95.



JAFFREY, NH — This gracious 18th century colonial on 8 acres has been tastefully restored to take advantage of the numerous original features intact. 7 functional fireplaces, beautiful paneling and wide plank floors. 4000+ sq.ft. of living space with room for in-home studio or office. Extremely pastoral setting. Small barn, large in-ground pool. \$625,000. David Deysher, Historic & Distinctive Properties of New England, 603-485-8300, www.historicprop.com



NEWTON, NH — Circa 1720 — 3 bedroom, 1 1/2 bath Colonial home on 4+ acres offers 5 fireplaces, wide pine floors, updated kitchen and more. 4 stall horse barn, riding ring, 2 car carriage shed. Brook along back. \$448,500. United Country, 800-999-1020, Ext. 108. www.unitedcountry.com/old

American Treasures — a full color magazine of older and historic properties for sale. Just \$5.95.



GREENPORT, NY — A Greek Revival in the beautiful Hudson Valley! On 5.3 acres overlooking the Catskill Mountains and Hudson River. Circa 1838-1843 and on the National Register, the 4400 sq. ft. H.A. Dubois House has a classic 4-over-4 center hall, grand entry, wrap-around staircase, marble mantles and wide board floors throughout. Huge carriage barn and more. Waiting for you to complete the restoration! \$515,000. Broker 518-469-3166.



UPSTATE, NY — 1701 home meticulously maintained on 3.70 landscaped acres. Convenient to Albany and Saratoga. Original features: four fireplaces, wide plank floors, Dutch door, chair rails, raised panel doors, 6 over 6 windows with original glass, large exposed beams, crown moldings, high ceilings. 3000 sq.ft., 4 bedrooms, 2 full baths, kitchen, formal rooms, library, study, 2-car garage. \$699,000. 518-377-6186 or house1701annie@yahoo.com. www.historicproperties.com



BUCKS COUNTY, PA — Beautiful circa 1850 property that blends the traditional farmhouse w/modern amenities. Formal living room w/fireplace, hardwood floors, French doors to patio and heated in-ground pool. 3 bedrooms, 2.5 baths. Master suite addition w/vaulted ceilings and a wall of windows plus office. Updated kitchen and tiled bathrooms. Heated studio/barn. 4.03 acres. \$595,000. June Croisette, Prudential Fox & Roach Realtors, 215-257-6547x6030 or 215-872-4966



POCAHONTAS, TN — Known as Joyner-Carr House, circa 1855. This Federal style home was in tear down condition when new owners came in and renovated. High ceilings, pine floors. 5 fireplaces. 10 rooms. Approximately 5000 sq.ft. Detached pole barn. Storage building/shop. Home is on 3.5 acres. Located in small community approximately 1 hour east of Memphis. \$349,000. Contact Mary Jean Smith, Banyan Tree Realtors, 901-359-2520.



BUCKINGHAM COUNTY, VA — Built in 1838, this president's "cottage" for Virginia Women's Institute is on the Historic Registry, featuring 8 fireplaces, hardwood floors, updated kitchen, almost 3000 square feet. 4 bedrooms 2 full baths. The working farm is 67 acres - mostly pasture with barns, fencing, and a pond. \$775,000. Call Joyce Sweet, Coldwell Banker Lafoon Realty, Farmville, VA 23901 at 434-547-9131, joyce@lafoonrealty.com



DUNNSVILLE, VA — "Aspen Grove" was built in 1721 and enlarged in 1810 to include the present parlor and second upstairs room. It appears today much like it must have 200 years ago. Restoration of the home began in 1978 and was completed with several historical additions. 3200 sq. ft.; featured on Historic Garden Week in VA. Outbuildings include pool house, smokehouse, workshop and guesthouse. 10 acres. \$700,000. John and Paige Garrett, 804-443-3096



FREDERICKSBURG, VA — "The Spooner House," circa 1793, is one of the few remaining 18th century residences in area. Original beamed ceilings, flooring, moldings, and mantles. 6 fireplaces plus a warming oven. Private entrance on lower level, currently a "B&B," w/bed and sitting rooms, mini kitchen and bath. Charming gardens plus garage w/office. \$824,900. Janel O'Malley, ext. 151, Robin Marine, ext. 145, Coldwell Banker Carriage House. 800-852-1798



KENBRIDGE, VA — In town, 2 1/2 story, Colonial Revival style brick home. Both front and side porches have Tuscan columns. Tall ceilings with custom moldings, 6 fireplaces with original mantles, den has gas logs. 10 rooms, 3 baths, hardwood floors, gourmet kitchen-two pantries, office, 2 car garage. 3 walk-in closets, new master bath with marble sunken tub. \$329,900. Antique Properties, Max Sempowski, 434-391-4855. www.oldhouseproperties.com



MONTROSS, VA — "Montross Inn" circa 1792. 0.7 acres on Court House Square. Original floors and windows. 8,600 square feet. 18 rooms, high ceilings, many large rooms. Seven bedrooms, 7 full baths, 4 half baths. 6 fireplaces. Huge restaurant kitchen. Two bars. Charming patio and porch. Operated as Inn until last year. \$595,000. Dave Johnston, "The Old House Man"® 804-370-5302. AntiqueProperties.com



STRASBURG, VA — Shenandoah Valley. Circa 1870 brick Italianate on 2/3-acre in historic district. Tranquility, mountain views, in-town conveniences. 3,000+ sq. ft.; four bedrooms; two newly updated full baths; two parlors; four fireplaces; walnut staircase; expansive halls; country kitchen with new appliances; walk-in attic, walk-out basement; new metal roof. Work at home or commute to DC area. \$439,500. masmax@shentel.net or 540-465-4566.



Family Feuds

We've all seen them before: Double houses that begin life as identical twins, but over years morph into distant cousins bearing little family resemblance. Like a rebellious teenager (bottom photo), the house at left wears trendy siding and cutting-edge porch columns to be different from the choirboy-next-door, decked in a traditional brick suit.

In a similar family affair (top photo), the house at right sports a recent, closed-in, extended porch that appears to mock its sibling rival, dressed in an open, ornamented, old-fashioned veranda. As our photo contributor points out, "the lower stories show that these twins have drifted apart over time." It seems that in double houses, as in life, you can't choose your relatives. 🏠

Win \$100 If you spot a classic example of remuddling, send us clear color prints. We'll award you \$100 when your photos are published. The message is more dramatic if you send along a picture of a similar unremuddled building. (Original photography only; please, no clippings. Also, we reserve the right to republish the photos online and in other publications we own.) Remuddling Editor, OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL, 1000 Potomac Street, NW, Suite 102, Washington, DC 20007.

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