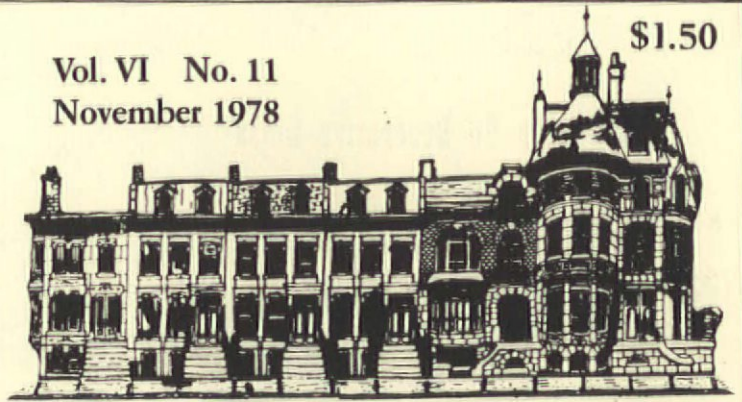


THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

Vol. VI No. 11
November 1978

\$1.50



Restoration And Maintenance Techniques For The Antique House

The Victorian Christmas Tree And Garden

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Coming Next Month

DUPLICATING PLASTER MOULDINGS

By Tom H. Gerhardt

AROUND THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, Christmas Eve saw the opening of many a parlor door that, to the delight of children and adults alike, framed the Victorian Christmas tree sparkling with lighted candles and garlands of tinsel, filling the room with evergreen scents sweetened by the aroma of candy decorations, and towering over a frozen fairy-land village surrounded by a whimsical fence of iron or wood.

RE-CREATING THIS CHRISTMAS TRADITION of bygone years is one way of providing Yuletide decoration that is compatible with the decor of the older house. It is a handsome and authentic decoration, also, that was almost a novelty at the time because the Christmas tree, a tradition that developed in Germany and was brought to the United States in the mid-18th century by members of the German Moravian Church, did not flourish in homes until the last half of the 19th century.

MANY OF THESE EARLY residential Christmas trees were on tables, but floor-to-ceiling trees were also soon used by many Americans. One feature that was often included with these early trees was the Christmas garden or Putz, a feature that certainly distinguished these trees from those of today,



where in most cases the Christmas garden has given way to a field of presents.

The Tree

BASICALLY, THE TREE should either be alive, or as in the case of the snow tree that will be explained shortly, very dead. Artificial trees (unless they are the fascinating novelties manufactured out of green feathers in the 19th century), aluminum trees, and the like just cannot recapture the spirit and look of the trees of bygone years. Most any evergreen tree will look beautiful when decorated; and depending on the section of the country, there will be only certain types of trees available.

A FASCINATING and very beautiful turnabout of the live tree is the snow tree. It offers a great possibility of having an authentic, unusual Christmas tree in the old house today. The custom originated when thrifty persons kept their Christmas trees year after year. The first year, it was fresh and green; after it was taken down (and often trees were kept up in unheated parlors until spring), it was stored to dry out.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, the tree was strip-

(Cont'd on page 128)

More On Decorative Glass

To The Editor:

SINCE PUBLICATION of my three-part series on decorative glass, I have received numerous requests for further information. Many of the inquiries have been basically the same, so I thought I'd share the additional information with all the readers of The Old-House Journal.

USING ACID to etch glass seems to be of great interest to large numbers of people today. But it is critical that the dangers of using hydrofluoric acid be understood and respected. Working with this acid without the proper precautions can create grave health hazards.

I STRONGLY RECOMMEND that anyone thinking about using hydrofluoric acid first read the article about acid etching that appeared in the April 1978 issue of Glass Studio magazine. Then, before doing any work themselves, they should speak directly to someone familiar with the acid etching process.

I'VE ALSO RECEIVED numerous requests for specific sources of materials and supplies, so I have been suggesting that persons interested in the various decorative glass processes subscribe to the three major "glass" magazines. They are:

Glass and Glass Studio (two separate journals)
9420 Activity Rd.
San Diego, Calif. 92126

Stained Glass
1125 Wilmington Avenue
St. Louis, Mo. 63111

THESE MAGAZINES provide a steady source of technical information, excellent leads on other persons involved in similar work, and a comprehensive listing of the major distributors of glass and glass working materials.

I'M PLEASED TO KNOW that readers of The Old-House Journal enjoyed the articles on decorative glass, and I will be happy to answer further questions if I can.

H. Weber Wilson
Chambersburg, Pa.

The Old-House Journal On The Air

HELPFUL how-to-do-it hints from The Old-House Journal are now being heard every weekend in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania over WCBS radio—880 on the AM dial.

THE 2-MINUTE SPOTS, called "Weekend Around The House," are broadcast 4 times on Saturday and 4 times on Sunday. The shows feature Clem Labine, The Journal's editor. Tune in if you have the chance.

THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL®

Published Monthly For People Who Love Old Houses

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Published by The Old-House Journal Corporation, 199 Berkeley Pl., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217. Tel. (212) 636-4514. Subscriptions \$12/yr. in U.S. and Canada; \$20/yr. elsewhere. Printed at Royal Offset Co., 34 W. 15th St., NYC 10011. Contents of the Old-House Journal® are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without specific permission in writing from The Editor.

And The Winners Are...

WE RECEIVED 1,179 entries in the "How The Old-House Journal has been helpful" contest that was announced in the August issue. It was most gratifying to read about the ways that The Journal has aided you—and the way it has apparently lifted your spirits on those days when it feels as if the house is gaining on you!

THE 10 WINNERS were:

- Janet E. Brown, Salt Lake City, Utah
- Susan L. Clark, Houston, Texas
- David A. Clumpner, Seattle, Wash.
- Christopher C. Glass, Camden, Maine
- Kay Keating, Bethesda, Maryland
- Brian E. Michaels, Palatka, Florida
- William S. Rush, Alexandria, Virginia
- Larry L. Sluder, Enka, North Carolina
- Lisa vanden Heuvel, Atlanta, Georgia
- Ed & Jan Zenner, Dubuque, Iowa

EACH OF THE WINNERS receives a three-year renewal of their subscription plus \$50 in cash to buy a present for their house.

OUR SINCERE THANKS to everyone who took the time to write.

--Clem Labine

Fancy Bevelled Glass

By H. Weber Wilson

FANCY BEVELLING was the last of the decorative window treatments to come into fashion mainly because it had to wait for production of inexpensive plate glass that was thick enough to have its edges ground down without breaking.

BEVELLING GLASS gives the same result as faceting jewels--the refracted light through the angled portion emerges in rainbow-hued flashes. This decorative detail was employed on mirrors before the development of plate glass--the first bevels painstakingly done by hand with a pumice stone. That earlier glass was also quite thin, so the resultant "vauxhall" or "antique" bevels are so slight as to be barely felt with the fingertips.

IT TOOK UNTIL the end of the 19th century for plate glass to become inexpensive enough for beveling and become an affordable decorative medium. But because plate is ground and polished, and reflects light brilliantly, fancy beveling became as important an architectural element as leaded art glass.

THE BEVELLING PROCESS starts with polished plate that is normally 1/4 in. thick. Each piece is cut to the required pattern and then hand-held against a horizontally revolving cast iron "stone" onto which drips a solution of sand and water. The rough sand grinds off the excess glass and the water keeps the glass from overheating.

STANDARD BEVELS are from 3/8 in. to 5/8 in. for windows and 1 in. to 2 in. for door panels. The wheel "turns with the sun," that is clockwise, and the glass is presented to the abrasive on the right side. This eliminates abrasive build-up under the glass which would scratch the top surface.

THERE IS NOT ANY SET angle of bevel, each craftsman having his own "perfect" cut, but the width of the bevel is periodically checked with a rule. It takes about 10 minutes over the iron mill to rough grind a straight 1/2 in. bevel on a single 12 in. side.

AFTER THE FIRST STEP of rough grinding, the beveller moves to the second wheel for smoothing. This is made of sandstone and is used without additional abrasives, although water is applied as before. Smoothing time is about half the time on the mill, and when the glass finishes here, the bevelled edge has a grey matte finish.

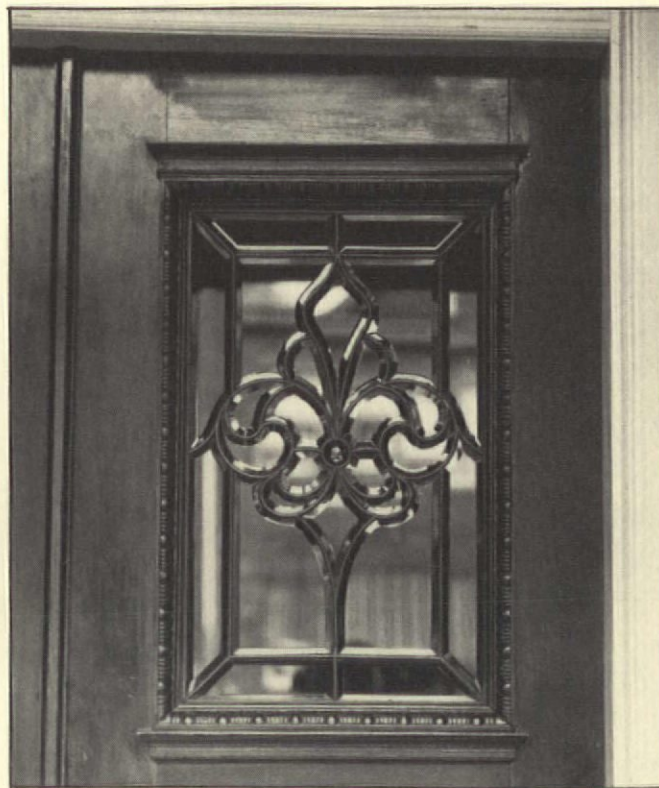
WHAT REMAINS IS THE KEY STEP--polishing. This requires two separate wheels and polishing agents. First comes grade 2F pumice, a fine, almost powdery stone. Originally it was applied on a white wheel, so called because it was made from willow or poplar wood. But the

wood wheel retained water in the bottom when left idle, which then threw off the torque when re-started, so this first wheel is now made from cork.

AFTER POLISHING WITH THE cork wheel--again about half as long as on the mill--the bevelled edge has become transparent. The final step is to use a felt wheel, from which the glass comes away brilliant and sparkling. The final polishing agent is presently cerium oxide, which is more expensive but also much faster than the traditional ferrous oxide or black rouge.

THE TRULY EXOTIC bevelled panels found in so many homes contain pieces of glass with both inside and outside curves. The outside curves can be done with flat stones, but inside curves require the use of conical and other specially shaped stones to produce the tight curves sometimes referred to as "banana bevels."

AN EQUALLY IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE between bevelled and leaded glass windows is that the common practice is to set bevels in came made



Detail of a double-door entrance with an exquisite pair of fancy bevelled panels.



A detail of a single door with a large bevelled panel. The double chip glass provides privacy at the front entrance while fancy cut bevelled plate creates a very pleasant opening with which to view approaching visitors.

from zinc. This provides more strength to hold the heavier plate glass, and also gives much more protection against the shock of doors being jarred open and shut.

UNFORTUNATELY, this rigid framework means that the conventional repair method of opening up soft lead came to replace a broken piece of glass is not possible with most bevelled panels. If pieces are broken or cracked, and set in zinc, the whole panel must be removed, the came hack-sawn apart, and the pieces disassembled until the broken piece is removed. After replacing the broken piece, the panel must be reassembled, using new came if necessary, and the joints resoldered.

BEVELLED GLASS is presently undergoing a real revival for both new and antique houses, so getting even fancy bevelled pieces replaced is not too difficult--although not inexpensive either. Straight bevells cost about 30¢ per inch which works out to \$12 for a piece 8 in. x 12 in. Curved pieces can cost as much as 50¢-60¢ per inch.

YOU CAN SOMETIMES get straight bevelling done at a local mirror store. Production of decorative panels and curved replacement pieces, however, requires special equipment and skills. Some specialty shops are listed in The Old-House Journal Catalog. Here are a few:

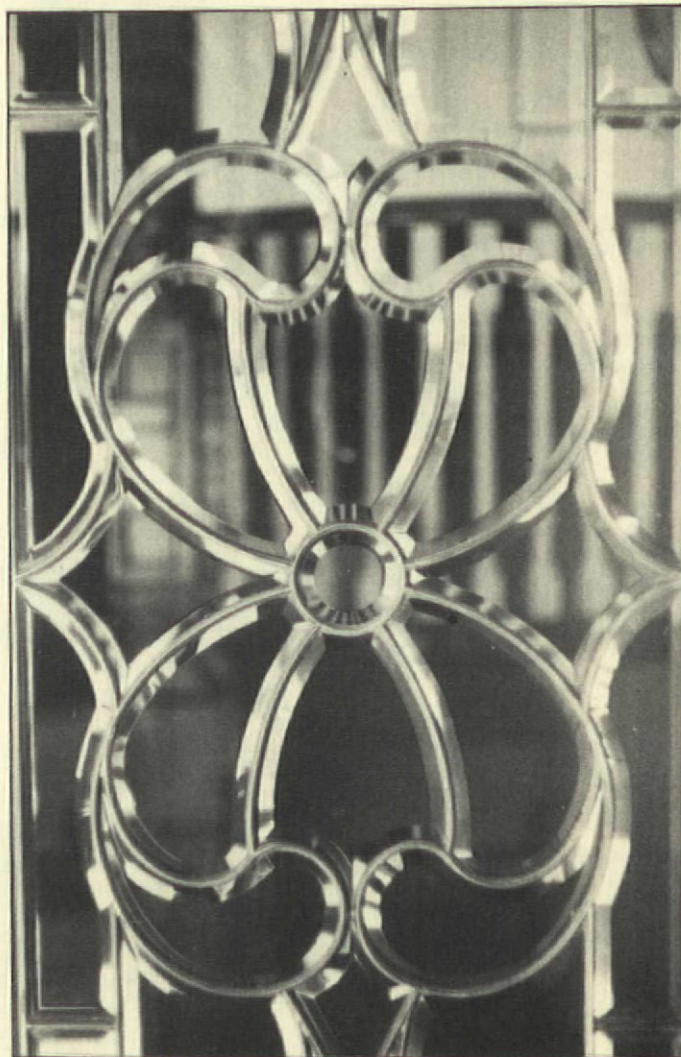
- Albert Thuilot is a fourth generation beveler and proprietor of Apex Mirror Works, 5 West 21st Street, New York, N. Y. 10010. He cannot, however, handle mail orders.

- Cherry Creek Enterprises is a newer shop that specializes in fancy bevelling and can do etched and cut glass as well. Write for their catalog to: Cherry Creek Enterprises, Dept. OHJ, 937 Santa Fe Dr., Denver, CO 80204.

- Beveled Glass Industries produces bevelled glass panels in stock patterns. Prices start as low as \$125. Sold through distributors. For brochure and distributor list, send \$1 to the firm at: 900 N. La Cienega Blvd., Dept. OHJ, Los Angeles, CA 90069. Tel. (213) 657-1462.

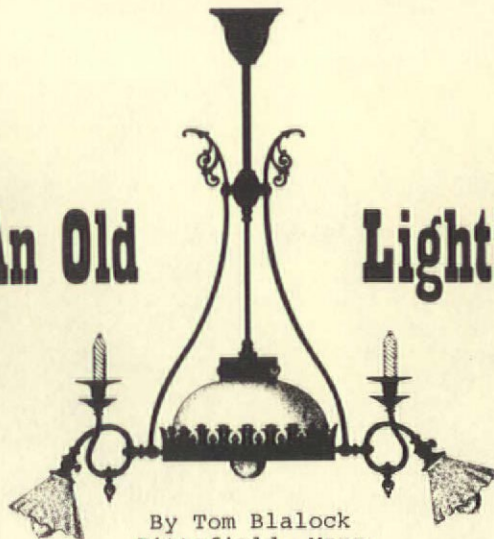
This article is the third in a series on decorative glass by H. Weber Wilson. A noted specialist in stained and art glass, Web has received a grant for research in the field from the National Endowment for the Arts.

His firm, Architectural Ecology, recycles fine architectural components and specialize in late 19th century decorative windows. Web also creates new stained glass on commission. To contact him, write to: H. Weber Wilson, Architectural Ecology, 447 East Catherine Street, Chambersburg, PA 17201. Telephone: (717) 263-4925.



Part of a fancy bevelled window. Note the many "inside" curves required to produce this design. Note also the clarity and obvious thickness of the polished plate glass.

Reviving An Old Lighting System



By Tom Blalock
Pittsfield, Mass.

AN AVID INTEREST in old houses, coupled with training in electrical engineering, has led me to study the history of electric lighting and wiring in the home. The purpose of this article is to share some of my findings that might be of interest to other readers of *The Old-House Journal*. I will refer to some specific examples found in the 1850's Italian villa style home of which I am part owner.

OUR HOUSE HAS GONE THROUGH the normal series of electrical alterations over the years, and so makes a typical case history. The age of the house precludes it having electrical wiring when it was built. Electric lighting in the home followed Thomas Edison's development of the incandescent lamp in 1879.

IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE that the house was piped for gas when it was built, since the use of gas lighting was well established by the mid-19th century in most cities and towns. For example, the works for the Pittsfield Coal Gas Company, which were located nearby, were completed in 1854.

THE EARLIEST THAT our house could have been wired for electricity was 1887—the year that

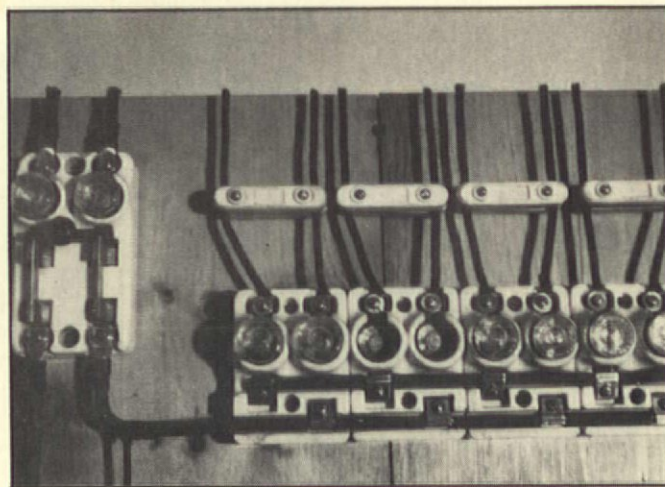
the Pittsfield Illuminating Company was established. Lacking a specific date, we assume that our house was wired sometime in the early 1890's.

THOUGH THE WIRING in the house is now quite modern, there are remnants of old wiring (now unused) beneath the attic floorboards and inside some walls. It is of the "open" or "knob-and-tube" variety—which was used extensively in the decades around the turn of the century. The individual wires needed for each circuit were stretched tightly from point to point, and were supported by white porcelain insulating devices—either "knobs" or "cleats." Knobs were cylindrical in shape and held only one wire; cleats were rectangular and held either one wire, or two wires at a fixed spacing from each other. Where the wires had to pass through wooden structural members, white porcelain "tubes" were used to act as insulating bushings between the wire and the hole through which it passed.

USES TO PROTECT individual circuits were often installed in white porcelain blocks or "cut outs" mounted on the cellar ceiling or in the attic (see photos). Sometimes



The 1850's Italian villa house has had 3 generations of lighting systems: The original gas; a turn-of-century electrical system; and modern electricity.



Above is a replica of old electric service wiring, showing main fuse cutout on left and four branch circuit fuse cutouts. Wires are held by cleats.

fuse cabinets with ornate wood trim and hinged glass doors were installed in a pantry or other rear service area.

A GOOD DEAL of this type of wiring is still in use in older homes and, in fact, is still recognized as an acceptable form of wiring in existing installations by the most recent edition of the National Electric Code. In spite of this, however, its use is generally discouraged because of possible deterioration of the insulation over the years—and because it is subject to damage during renovations.

Tracing Old Wiring

I MADE AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY while searching for a way to install a lighting fixture in the rosette on our dining room ceiling. Behind the rosette I found a capped gas pipe and two electric wires—both apparently long unused. Using the old mirror and flashlight technique, I found that the wires were fastened to the joists above the ceiling by porcelain knobs.

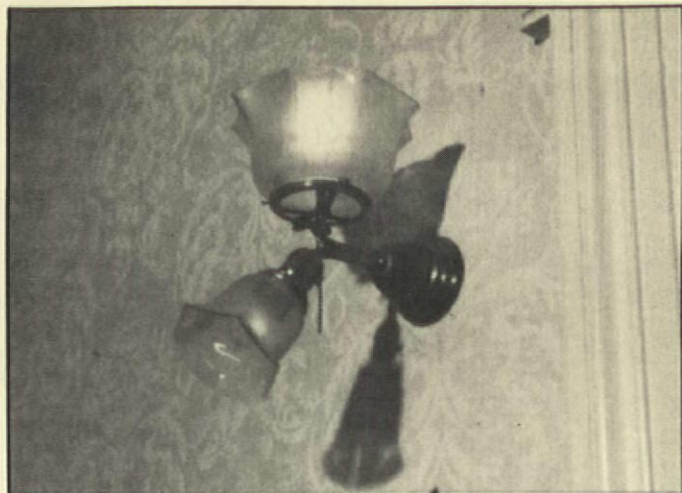
ON A HUNCH, I removed an electrical box in the wall near the dining room door, which currently houses a switch to control the present wall sconces in the room. Behind the box I found two unused wires coming down from above. A quick electrical test confirmed that these wires had connected to a former switch to control the ceiling rosette, in a manner that electricians call a "switch loop." This implied that the circuit originated above (in the attic) rather than coming up from below.

I COULDN'T LOCATE the original wiring in the attic. However, some time later, curiosity led me to investigate a large rectangular outline high up on the plastered wall in the second floor servants' hall. Imbedded within the wall I found a black wooden box roughly 12" x 18", which I recognized as the type of enclosure once used for wall-mounted fuse panels. Indeed, at the bottom of the box were three pairs of cut-off wires. Again, a quick test showed one of these pairs to be the missing dining room circuit.

FURTHER INVESTIGATION in the attic showed that this had to be the original fuse cabinet and, in fact, I was able to trace the path of the original wiring back to the point of entry of this original electric service through the attic wall.

Re-Creating Old Lighting

MY RESTORATIVE INSTINCT then led me to construct a replica of a fuse panel such as was often used in a wall cabinet. I installed the panel and fitted the opening with wooden moulding and a hinged glass door. As a next step, I ran a special circuit to the fuse box that operates at 60 volts instead of the standard 120 volts. (More about this later.) The lower voltage is obtained from a step-down transformer, in the same manner that a doorbell circuit is operated from standard house current.



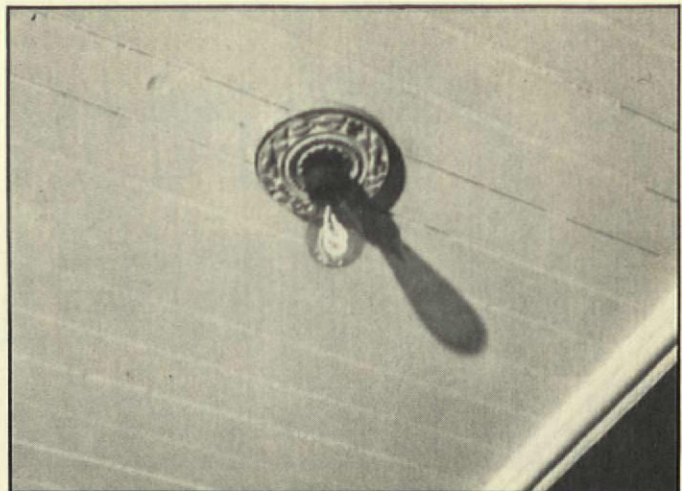
Hallway sconce is piped for gas in top of fixture, and has 60-volt electricity in bottom half for a soft glow that makes an excellent night light.

I CONNECTED THE DINING ROOM CIRCUIT to the new fuse panel and re-installed an appropriate switch by the dining room door. We are now searching for an appropriately styled chandelier, either of the straight electric type, or of the combination gas-electric type, to install in the dining room ceiling.

IN THE MEANTIME, as a lark, I installed a simple socket containing an antique carbon filament light bulb on the rosette, just to show that the circuit works once again.

The 60-v. System

THE 60-VOLT SYSTEM has a couple of advantages. The first is safety. I would be very reluctant to bring back to life an old circuit if it were to operate at a full 120 volts.



Carbon filament bulb, operated on 60-v. current, is installed in ceiling socket until appropriate chandelier is found.

I MIGHT ADD that this increased safety from lower voltage only applies if you are using a step-down transformer. Without going into electrical details, let me say that the use of a series-connected device such as a modern wall dimmer to reduce voltage does not accomplish the same result from a safety standpoint.

ANOTHER ADVANTAGE of the 60-volt system is the soft glow of a standard light bulb used at the lower voltage, which is reminiscent of the quality of light that was obtained from a gas jet. I have used the same 60-volt system to supply the electric socket of a combination gas-over-electric wall fixture that I installed in place of a more modern fixture in our front hallway.

AGAIN, IN THE CASE of this hallway light, removal of the modern electrical box supporting the former fixture revealed both a gas pipe and unused wires on porcelain knobs. Thus, there is a good chance that such a combination fixture was used at this location at some time in the past. I decided to pipe the fixture for gas so that the jet could actually be used. The gas is supplied from a small tank of propane located outside the house.

I USED THE 60-VOLT SYSTEM to supply the electric part of the fixture because of my reluctance to use the standard 120 volts in close proximity to the gas, even though I know the fixture was originally designed for it. Also, the amount and quality of light obtained from a standard low-wattage light bulb in this socket makes a beautiful (and economical) night light. The gas jet is lit only on special occasions and makes a wonderful conversation piece.

System Details

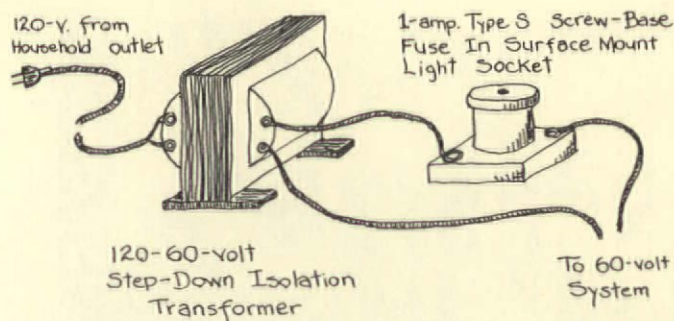
A SUITABLE STEP-DOWN transformer for a 60-v. system such as described can be obtained from any electronic supply house. For example, Newark Electronics, 500 N. Pulaski Rd., Chicago, Ill. 60624, lists in their catalog a Triad type N-67A step-down transformer for about \$15.00. This transformer is actually designed to step 230 volts down to 115 volts. Since this is exactly a two-to-one voltage reduction, it will also deliver 60 volts when fed from a standard 120-v. house circuit.

NOTE THAT ANY TRANSFORMER chosen for this service should be an "isolation" type transformer. This simply means that the 60-v. wiring will be totally isolated from the 120-v. house current—exactly the same as doorbell wiring.

THE TRANSFORMER DESCRIBED has a capacity such that the 60-v. output should be fused at 1 ampere to protect the transformer from overloading. Considering the electrical behavior of standard light bulbs when used on lower voltages, the following relation holds for a 60-v. system:

$$\text{Wattage} = 175 \times \text{Amperes}$$

where "Wattage" refers to the wattage rating stamped on the light bulbs, and "Amperes" refers to the capacity of the transformer



supplying the system. In this case, a total of 175 watts could be connected to the system, since the transformer is fused at 1 amp. For example, this would be the equivalent of a total of seven 25-watt bulbs.

IF MORE CAPACITY IS DESIRED, then larger transformers are available from the same sources, at a proportionately higher cost. The actual transformer and fuse connections can be as simple as shown in the sketch.

Safety Notes

IN SPITE OF the lower voltage being supplied by the transformer, all wire and wiring devices should be the same as used for standard 120-v. house current. If an extensive 60-v. system is installed, care should be taken to clearly label all junction boxes and related connections to indicate that they are part of a low-voltage system.

THE 60-VOLT wiring should NEVER be brought into an existing electrical box that also has 120-v. house current in it. Also, this type of system should only be used to supply permanently mounted lighting fixtures, and NOT outlets. In the latter case, there's always the chance that a piece of equipment other than a lamp might be plugged into the outlet—resulting in damage to the equipment or to the transformer.

Sources

TO DUPLICATE the aesthetic effect of old light bulbs, I use clear (unfrosted) lamps in the lighting fixtures supplied by the 60-v. system. Also, there is a type of light bulb known at electrical supply counters as an "S-14", which is clear and has straight sides similar to the shape of old bulbs. The only problem is that I have not been able to find these in sizes bigger than 10 or 11 watts.

I HAVE PURCHASED a number of antique wiring devices at an interesting little shop in New York. It is: The Allied Electrical Co., 89 Christopher St., New York, NY 10014.

THERE IS ANOTHER interesting antique lighting store in New York that carries modern replica carbon filament lamps: City Knickerbocker, 781 Eighth Ave., New York, NY 10036. The bulbs aren't cheap—they are \$6.50 each. City Knickerbocker will also ship these bulbs by United Parcel Service for an additional \$4.00 handling and shipping charge. ■■



A doll dreams by this snow tree that is decorated with candles, strings of popcorn, gumdrops and candy canes.

(Victorian Christmas--Cont'd. from page 121)

ped of its needles and lined with cotton to look like new snow had descended on its bare branches. The tree was wrapped in paper each time it was stored away.

TO MAKE A SNOW TREE, all one needs is last year's Christmas tree, glue, cotton batting, and patience. The snow tree pictured above was made by first spraying the tree a dark gold with "English Antique Bronze" made by the Illinois Bronze Paint Company. The tree branches and trunk still looked like wood after they were sprayed but seemed to appear less crude and more decorative.

THE COTTON BATTING was torn into long, thin strips before it was glued to the upper parts of the branches, just as snow would fall. The thin strips still allowed the bottom portions of the branches to show. Also, the tips of the branches were left uncovered. Each branch, large and small, was carefully done; and the resulting tree looked just like a tree covered with wet snow.

ADDITIONAL SPARKLE was obtained by shaking mica snow over the tree after spray glue had been applied to the cotton. However, mica snow, which is also an important part of the

Christmas garden, has all but disappeared from the market and may take some searching to find. The snow tree was then decorated in the same traditional manner as the evergreen, although electric lights could not be used as cotton is very flammable. An alternative method of lighting this type of tree is to use a small floodlight.

Lighting The Tree

LIGHTING is probably the most difficult phase to handle authentically. Before the first tree was electrically lighted in New York City in 1882 by Edward Johnson, an associate of Thomas Edison, the wax candle was the only means of lighting a Christmas tree in a darkened room.

THIS METHOD WAS extremely dangerous and could only be used for short periods of time under watchful eyes, with buckets of water and wet mops nearby. The risk and trouble of lighted candles is just not worth the resulting authenticity. The tree should contain wax candles to add interest, however, even if they are not lighted.

THE OLD CARBON Christmas tree lamps are hard to find. However, they make wonderful collector's items and add interest to the tree. They should be lighted dimly with a low-voltage transformer so they do not burn out. They do produce great heat and should be used with metal reflectors.

INTERESTINGLY, Mr. Johnson's Christmas tree featured red, white, and blue lamps that flashed on and off alternately while the tree was revolved by a small electric motor!

I WAS STILL LONGING FOR the look of the lighted candle and determined to devise something that would be able to be used with the old candleholders that would light electrically and still look like a candle. How I did it is described in the box on the next page.



The first commercially produced Christmas light sets used bulbs of the type shown in the upper half of this picture. Below is a string of the electric candles that were custom made to fit the old weighted holders.

Making Electric Candles

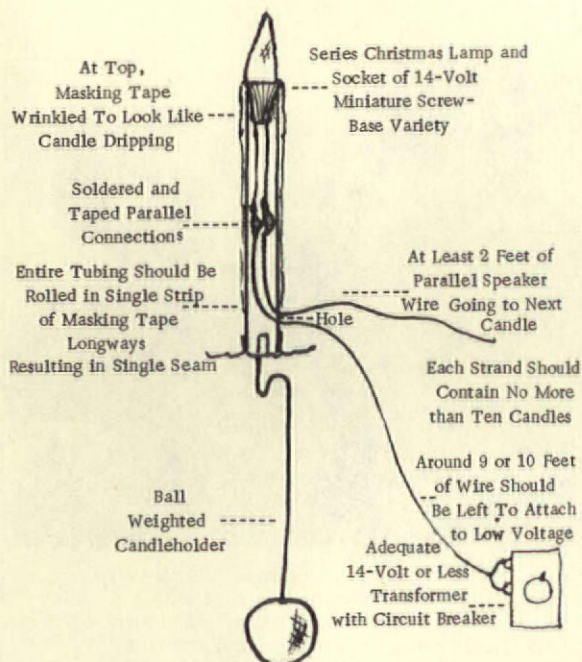
MATERIALS:

- Lightweight tubing to make the candle. Cardboard tubing from coathangers is the right diameter.
- Miniature screw-base sockets with several inches of wire from old strings of series Christmas lights (the type where one goes out and they all go out).
- Lightweight insulated parallel wire (called "speaker wire" in most stores)
- Old pointed series Christmas tree lamps with all the colored paint scratched off.
- Electrician's tape and masking tape

AFTER THE TUBING was cut in 3 in. lengths, a small hole was drilled in the side of each length near the bottom and the speaker wire was pulled through this hole and out of the top of the tubing.

WIRES of the socket were connected in parallel to the speaker wires, the connections soldered and taped with electrician's tape and pulled down until the socket rested on the top. To finish the candle and hold the socket in place, a single strip of masking tape was twisted longways over the socket and the entire length of tubing. Candles were then painted dull reds, greens, ivories.

POWER SOURCE was an adequate wattage transformer that stepped the power down from the household current of 110 volts to 10 volts with a circuit breaker device. Transformers can be purchased from electronic dealers or a strong electric train transformer can be used.



Decorating The Tree

MANY THINGS WERE USED TO decorate the turn-of-the-century Christmas tree. Most common were:

HOMEMADE FOOD ITEMS: Strings of popcorn and gumdrops are easy to make and will hold together several seasons with the use of nylon thread. Cranberries are delightful but they dry up within a few days of being strung. Also popular were candy (often placed in miniature boxes or baskets), cookies (marzipan and springerle), and fruit. Also nuts, pine cones, and gumballs.

MANUFACTURED ORNAMENTS: Earliest manufactured items were stamped of tin and moulded from wax. Like most manufactured ornaments up until World War I, they were produced in Germany. Popular items were embossed silver and gold cardboard which took the shape of animals, ships or toys after they were assembled. Ornaments were made from colored picture cards and decorated with tinsel, angelhair and cellophane. They can still be made if you can find the right kind of tinsel (hairlike gold wire on cord). Tinsel with long, coarse hair currently made should be avoided. Tinsel was also wound around wire frames in geometric shapes with single large glass beads strung in the circles or squares and then gold tassels were hung from them.

A WIDE VARIETY OF glass beads and ornaments were popular, with ornaments coming in ball and figure shapes. Plastic ornaments and satin balls made today add a modern flavor that is to be avoided in re-creating authentic Christmas decoration.

WHATEVER MATERIALS are used, to make the tree look Victorian the branches should be well-filled with many garlands of tinsel, beads, popcorn, etc. draped evenly from top to bottom.



Some of the early manufactured decorations used around the turn of the century were candle holders with and without shades, tinsel and card decorations, large glass beads, candy baskets, glass ornaments wrapped with crinkled wire, wooden woolly sheep, wire tinsel used to create a spider-web effect, and cardboard angel treetops with gold wings and angelhair.

Beneath And Beyond The Tree

LARGE OR SMALL, the Christmas tree garden, or Putz, was a very important element of Victorian Christmas decoration, especially for the German people who brought the custom to this country. Originally, it consisted of only the manger scene but it spread out to become a whimsical fantasy containing snow-covered villages, mountains, lakes, animals, trains, and mechanical toys.

THE LAYING OUT of these villages started as early as November and ran as wild as one's imagination, space, and time permitted. The tree and the Putz were often kept from the eyes of both children and adults until Christmas Eve. Before their decline in popularity around World War I, the gardens sometimes covered more than one room, had running water, and were competitive projects with neighbors trying to outdo each other. A part of the holiday activities was visits to the most outstanding Christmas gardens.

TO BUILD A PUTZ, one first established boundaries and the terrain for the display. Almost always, the garden was surrounded by an iron or wooden fence. These fences often portrayed the whimsical patterns of larger fences of the day. There was usually a grand entrance gate that would open and close. These fences can still be found in antique shops or they can be constructed of wood.

THE TERRAIN was an area for great creativity. The simplest was a number of white sheets or tablecloths spread over boxes and wadded newspapers to create the effect of mountains and hills. Moss was used for green areas and old tree trunks and rocks made cliffs and bluffs. Mirrors with cloth, moss, etc. arranged over the edges made the irregular ponds and streams necessary for reality.

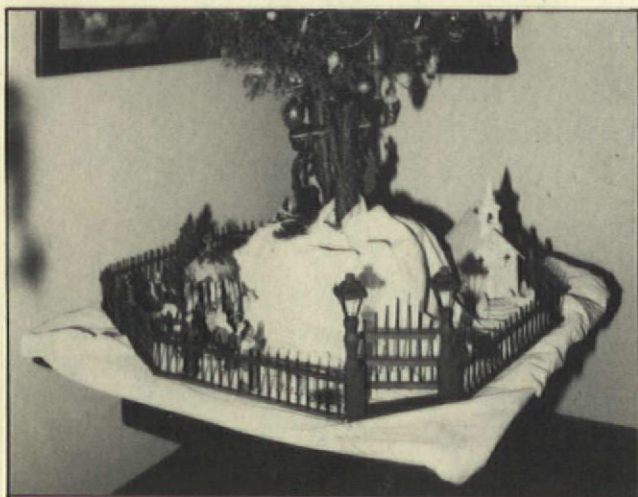
AROUND THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, cardboard houses were made in Germany that had windows, doors, siding, roofing, and people printed on them. More readily available are the later Japanese cardboard houses that have a snowlike finish and window openings covered with cellophane so that they can be lighted.

HOUSES ALSO CAN BE constructed by cutting the walls out of cardboard with holes for the windows and coating them with the following formula tinted with the desired food coloring: 1 cup flour, 1/2 cup salt, 3 tablespoons alum, and water. Homemade or manufactured wooden manger scenes, churches, and log cabins were other items used as highlights in the Putz.

SMALL GERMAN FARM SCENES were widely available years ago and can still be found. The fences, gates and outbuildings were built of small twigs and sticks. Celluloid and clay animals as well as wooden ones with woolly coats glued on them were used. Many times, Santa Clauses, sleighs, and reindeer were about to take flight from the Christmas garden.

AFTER EVERYTHING WAS PROPERLY arranged, it was time for a snowstorm in the form of mica flakes being sprinkled over the scene to add sparkle. Some of the toys of the day, such as dollhouses, doll furniture, dolls, rocking horses, magic lanterns, toys on wheels, and cookstoves often provided additional interest just outside of the Putz.

THEN THE PUTZ was ready to be shown as the fairyland almost became real when one bent down and looked across the scene through small frozen trees at the snow-covered dwellings, twinkling lights, and hills and mountains that were finally surmounted by the Victorian Christmas tree. With time and effort, this thrill of yesteryear can once again occur in the old house at Christmas. ■ ■



A small Christmas garden at the base of a table tree. The gate and lampposts were recently constructed out of wooden dowels and turnings to match the fence which is old. Inside the fence is a small manger.



A detail of the larger Putz. Note the charming cast iron fence. A 1920's electric train runs through a village of Japanese-made cardboard houses, mica frosted trees and a tiny Santa.

Restorer's Notebook

Cleaning Gilding

I HAD A BEAUTIFUL gilt frame that had acquired more "patina" than it needed; it had gotten positively grimy. Upon investigating methods for cleaning it, I was advised by a museum curator against using anything containing water. Sometimes water will loosen the size that holds the gold leaf.

THE METHOD HE RECOMMENDED, which worked fine, was to use a dry cleaning fluid (I used trichloro ethylene) applied with soft cotton swabs. This washed off the grease and accumulated dirt, without making it so shiny that it looked brand new.

John Scott
Houston, Tex.

Simulating Old Plaster

IN THE RESTORATION of our very early house, it was not possible to save the badly deteriorated plaster...except for the plaster on the chimneys, which we left in place to contain sparks.

WHEN SHEETROCK drywall went up on all of our walls, we wanted the walls to have the look of old plaster. Using 5-gal. pails of drywall tape compound, I thinned it down with water to heavy mayonnaise consistency and applied it to the walls with a long-nap roller. Then I trowelled it nearly smooth with a 12-in. joint knife. The few vertical marks left exactly matched the original plaster left on the chimneys.

A COUPLE OF notes on joint compound: Beware that color varies from different manufacturers. Any time water is standing at the top of a new bucket of compound, the material has probably been frozen and will never be free from lumps. We have left our walls without any painted finish and merely sand out any wear marks.

Gail Niedernhofer
Nokesville, Va.

Old Faucet Washers

IF YOU'RE FORTUNATE enough to find an antique faucet, you may discover that the original washers are hard as cement and almost impossible to remove. They'll come out easily if you boil them for a while in hot water. In the event that the brass screws holding the washers have deteriorated, they may have to be drilled out and the holes re-tapped. That is a little more complicated—but it can be done.

Birdie Bates
Kellogg, Iowa

Haircut For Paint Rollers

A COMMON PROBLEM when painting with a long-nap roller is the trails of paint left on the wall from the ends of the roller. Painters in my area refer to these as "railroad tracks."

TO ELIMINATE THIS CONDITION, simply snip the hairy ends with a sharp pair of scissors or a single edge razor blade—preferably tapering the edges slightly. You can save money by giving your rollers a periodic "haircut" rather than throwing them away when the ends get bedraggled. You'll also get a better looking paint job.

Richard Nicholls
Niantic, Ill.

Patching Problem Cracks

THERE'S A PATCHING COMPOUND I've found numero uno for filling cracks in plaster—especially the ones you know will reappear. The material is called "Tuff-Patch". It's a vinyl compound that is flexible and moves with the house. Although it looks and feels like dry-wall compound, Tuff-Patch is waterproof, elastic and will patch numerous materials.

TUFF-PATCH can be used on clean and firm substances like plaster, masonry, wood, roofing, firewalls, galvanized metal and other applications where patching and resurfacing against water damage is necessary. It can be applied by knife, trowel or brush, depending on the type of surface to be repaired. Tuff-Patch may be applied to a damp surface, and may be painted over immediately with latex paint. If oil-based or alkyd coatings are used, the surface should be thoroughly dry.

FIBERGLASS CLOTH may be used in conjunction with Tuff-Patch for bridging large open cracks and voids that continue to expand and contract due to temperature change and/or structural movement.

TOOLS CAN BE easily cleaned with soap and water while the material is still wet. When it dries, it has to be dissolved with lacquer thinner.

IF YOU CAN'T FIND a distributor locally, Tuff-Patch is made by The Synkoloid Company, 400 Colgate Dr. S.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30336. There's also a plant in Los Angeles, Ca. 90221.

J. Christie Lash
Atlanta, Ga.

Got Any Tips?

Do you have any hints or short cuts that might help other old-house owners? We'll pay \$15 for any short how-to items that are used in this "Restorer's Notebook" column. Send your hints to: Notebook Editor, The Old-House Journal, 199 Berkeley Pl., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

Products For The Old House

Reinforced Concrete Roofing Tiles

THE HENDRICKS TILE COMPANY manufactures concrete and steel reinforced roofing tiles in a variety of styles, including a round butt shingle style that is appropriate for many Colonial and Victorian houses.

The tiles are custom made in colors and textures selected for each specific job, and are hand finished to achieve a natural variation of texture. They are completely frost proof, with a very low rate of water absorption. Basic materials are concrete and steel and they cannot burn.

These reinforced concrete tiles have been used in many restorations including: The Thomas Jefferson birthplace, Williamsburg, Virginia, and the Stone Mountain Plantation in Georgia.

A free descriptive brochure is available by writing to: The Hendricks Tile Manufacturing Co., Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 3573, Richmond, VA 23234.



This house, part of Old Salem Restorations, Winston-Salem, N.C., is roofed with round butt shingle tiles.

Helpful Publications

Floorcoverings Surveyed

THERE IS AN excellent new book available that surveys the many kinds of floor treatments used in America over the last 300 years.

"American Rugs and Carpets" is subtitled "From the Seventeenth Century to Modern Times" and it begins with dirt floors, painted and sanded floorboards, straw and rush matting--all used in early Colonial days.

There is a full account of the development of the American carpet industry beginning with the importing of ingrain, Brussels, Axminsters and Wiltons.

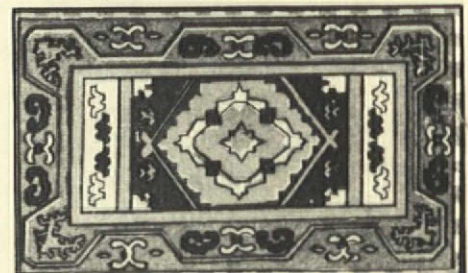
Also discussed are all the homemade rugs--braided, hooked, embroidered, as well as floorcloths, oilcloths and the beginning of the linoleum industry.

The book is well organized with a pattern chronology for ingrain and Brussels, Wilton and Tapestry carpets, a glossary and bibliography.

The book is very nicely illustrated with 32 color plates, 200 photographs, and 30 drawings and is a large-size volume with 192 pages.

This informative historical survey of floor treatments will be a great help for those who wish to approximate a period floor for their own house and a delight for anyone wishing to know more about America's decorative arts.

"American Rugs and Carpets" by Helene Von Rosenstiel, is \$25. You can order it by mail by sending a check plus 75¢ to: William Morrow and Company, Inc., Sales Dept.—OHJ, 105 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.



1881 Oriental rug pattern.

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