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# OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1996

## WINTER WORK

Life with Radiators  
Caulk Talk  
Drill Maintenance

1996 Index Inside



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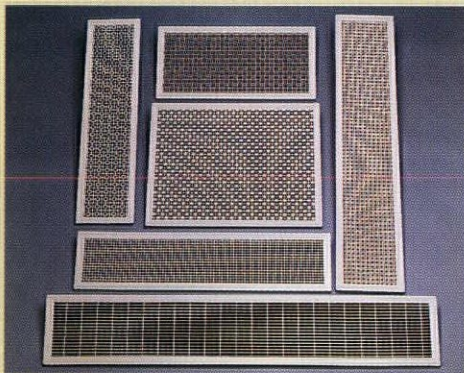
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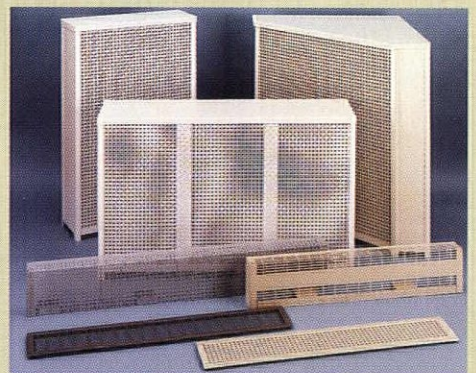




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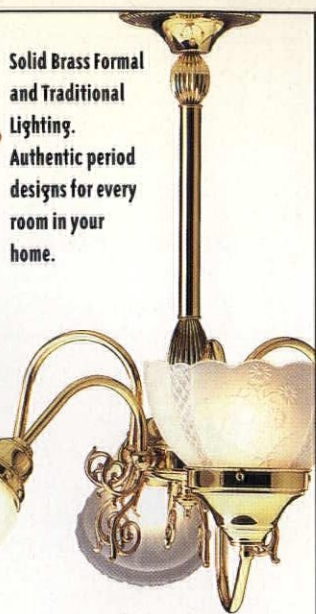
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**8 EDITOR'S PAGE**

*Winter brings not only snow and ice, but a whole different set of old-house maintenance activities, too.*

**12 MAILBOX**

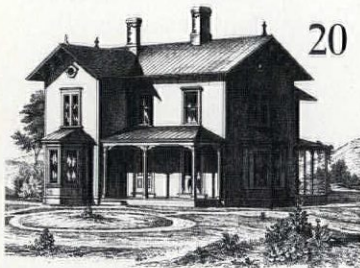
*Success with a turret, thanks for Golden Glow, and remarks on the safety of pressure-treated wood are among the responses to the previous issue.*

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BY JAMES C. MASSEY & SHIRLEY MAXWELL

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*No need for vague worries about regulations that come with historic-district designation. You probably share its goals already.*

BY SANFORD JOHNSON AND THE OHJ STAFF

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## A Seminar at Radiator City Study Hall

*The cast-iron behemoths that keep us warm are usually prized by old-house owners, despite their inevitable troubles. Our resident expert answers the most frequently asked questions about radiators.*

BY DAN HOLOHAN

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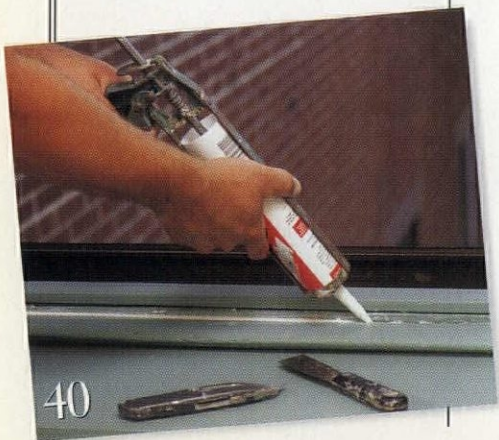
BY GORDON BOCK

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## Caulking about the Weather

*Caulks and sealants are low-tech and effective, but somewhat labor-intensive to apply. Use the right product in the right place, and the job will last.*

BY JOSH GARSKOF



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ESTABLISHED 1973

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BY PATRICIA POORE

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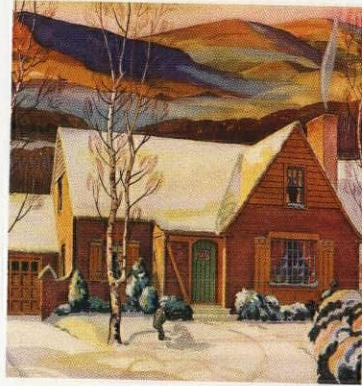
## Winter Work

ONCE WARM WEATHER wanes and the sun starts keeping banker's hours, it becomes time for winter work. In an old house, this means not only securing the building for coming weeks of wind, rain, and cold, but making the most of quieter days and getting ready for the next year.

At farms, sawmills, boat-yards—anywhere activity peaks in yearly cycles—the slack season is catch-up time for chores that get put off at the height of business. Workers keep busy sharpening tools, overhauling equipment, and fixing up shops and sheds. Even when inches of snow fall outdoors, there are projects we all could be doing around our old houses.

Caulking for thermal comfort, as we learn in this issue, is really an indoor job. (Moreover, why waste a good day at the beach when you can caulk a tub almost anytime?) If you live with a house full of cast-iron radiators, you might want to heed some of Dan Holohan's advice on their care before the heat comes on. Winter evenings are also prime time to fix up the power drills you use for fixing up—or maybe for doing a little research on house styles in some Good Books.

MY OLD HOUSE IS A LONG WAY from where I live now, so I don't get there as often as I'd like. At this rate, repair work moves slowly in fits and starts. When I visit the property in wintertime, I tend to



tackle yard work: cleaning up the grounds, checking for storm damage—the stuff that's most practical to do when the earth is hard and the weather's too poor for painting or roofing. Lately, though, I've hit on the idea of carting pieces of my old house back home with me to work on in off hours.

Sash windows are perfect candidates, and mine sure need some attention. I can swiftly swap each one for a plywood cover, then overhaul each window back in the shop. It's fairly meticulous benchwork—removing fossilized putty and broken glass, then rebuilding split parts—and a bit introspective. As a pass of the scraper lifts some useless paint and grey wood, it releases a whiff of the still-sound fiber underneath, the unmistakable aroma of resinous pine.

Soon I'll be looking out this window at a hillside of apple blossoms. Winter is also a time for planning and dreaming—after all, spring is just around the corner.

*Gordon Bock*

# OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

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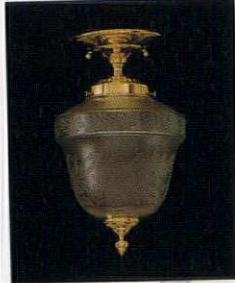
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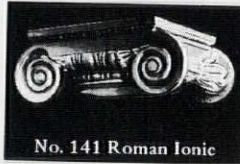
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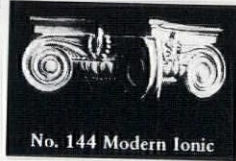
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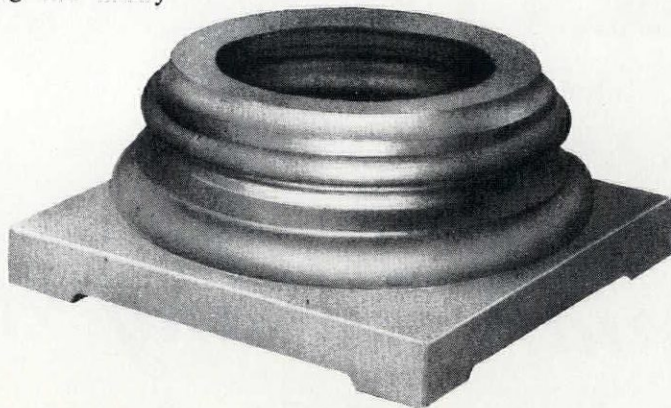


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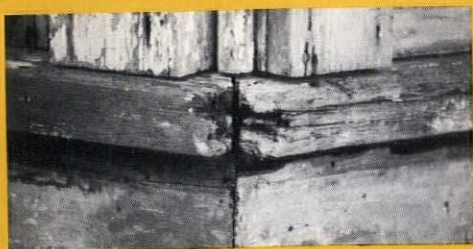
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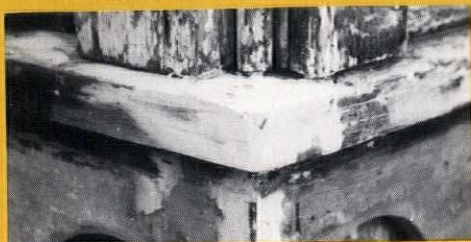
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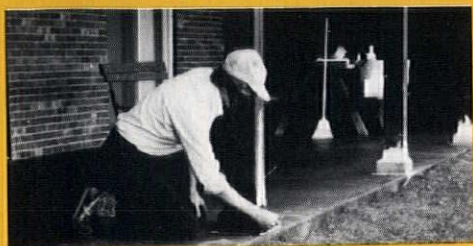
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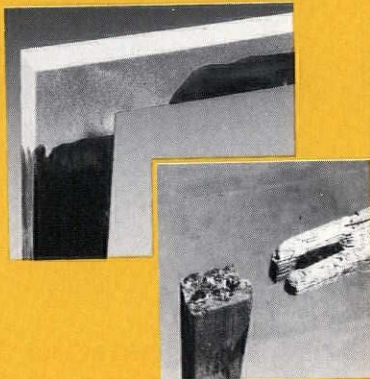
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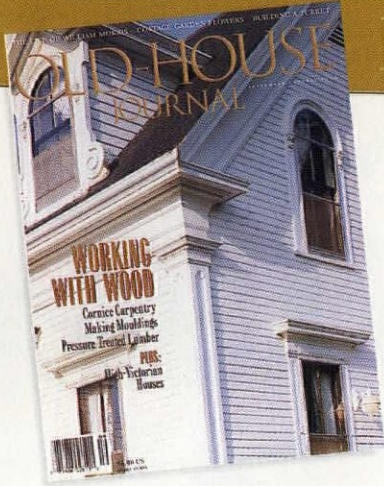


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**PRESSURE-TREATED SAFETY**

THE HAZARDS OF HANDLING PRESSURE-TREATED LUMBER ["Beyond Decks", Sept./Oct. 1996] extend beyond installation. What is the likelihood that homeowners will take proper safety precautions in 50 or 80 years when millions of board feet of treated lumber are removed? Individuals may not realize the toxicity of the materials they are handling, especially if the wood has been painted. Much of this wood will be burned, which can release dangerous poisons.

—PATRICK D. MURPHY  
*Indiana, Penn.*

**NUMBERED BEAMS**

IN MY EXPERIENCE, PAINTED NUMERALS ON A HEWN-FRAMED HOUSE ["Techniques for Two Timbers,"

Sept./Oct. 1996] indicate that the frame has been disassembled and put back together. Housewrights did not normally carry paint pots while they were framing (inconvenient and potentially messy). Instead, they marked joints with cutting tools. Also, they used Roman numerals, which were easy to cut. It was, however, neat and convenient to label a structure with painted Arabic numerals before disassembling it.

— ALLEN C. HILL, AIA  
*Winchester, Mass.*

**POSITIVELY GLOWING**

I HAVE ARGUED FOR YEARS ABOUT the existence of Golden Glow ["Golden Oldies," Sept./Oct. 1996], but was frustrated by nurseries' ignorance of this plant. I cannot tell you what a whoop of happiness your article brought. Finally I can acquire a root.

— MRS. E. R. OLNSTEAD  
*Castle Rock, Wash.*

**RIPPING 2X10s**

In response to "Framing with 2x5s" [Restorer's Notebook, Sept./Oct. 1996], ripping a 2x10 to make 2x5 lumber is not permitted by industry standards for structural applications. Large knots that are accept-

able in the 2x10 could be too large for a 2x5 or could wind up along the board's edge, where they would weaken the member. A 2x10 graded as No. 1 could become No. 3 lumber when ripped.

— CATHERINE M. MARX, P.E.  
*Southern Forest Products Assoc.  
Kenner, La.*



**This gable-and-ell Victorian house stands in Clarksville, Arkansas.**

**FOLK VICTORIAN**

GOOD WORK ON "THAT WHICH WE Call Victorian" [Sept./Oct. 1996]. Here's a picture of my 1888 Italianate, built by my great-grandfather.

— DON H. PENNINGTON, M.D.  
*Clarksville, Ark.*

**HIGH STANDARDS**

I ONLY HAVE A SMALL "LOGGER'S Cottage," built in 1927. These were affordable homes for the timber industry. Not too fancy. Your journal gives me strength to continually strive for appropriateness in my old-house efforts. You set a high standard for us all. Thank you.

— JENNIE PATTON  
*Olympia, Wash.*

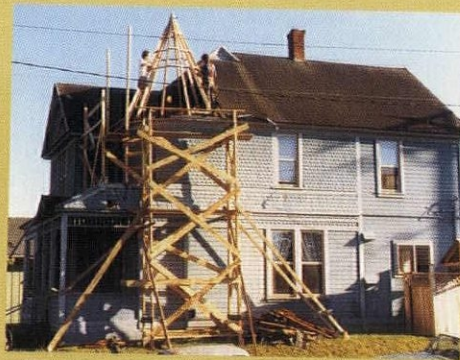
**CANVAS FLOOR**

A number of readers responded to "Living Under the Porch" [Ask OH], Sept./Oct. 1996], about canvassing a porch deck. Timothy S. Shelly of

**ADDING A TURRET**

I SEARCHED FOR MONTHS trying to find plans for a "witch's cap" turret ["West Coast Turret," Sept./Oct. 1996], but had little luck. Eventually I used plans from a 1923 Audel's Builders Guide, and some basic drafting skills, to come up with a plan.

— GARY LETZRING  
*Montesano, Wash.*



**Another West Coast turret goes up.**



Elkhart, Indiana, writes: "Research indicated that our porch had been canvassed. After a year of searching for a high-quality canvas, we located a supplier of heavy-grade marine canvas traditionally used on the decks of wooden sailboats. Since applying the canvas, we have had no leakage problems and are extremely pleased. Our supplier is Pearl's Canvas Products, 26005 State Road 2, South Bend, IN 46619, (219) 289-6992."

John Martin, of Washington, D.C., recommends C.R. Daniels Inc., 3451 Ellicot Center Drive, Ellicot City, MD 21043, (410) 461-2100, e-mail: fabric@cr-daniels.com. Other readers suggest calling local awning and marine suppliers in your area.

— THE EDITORS

#### SKUNKS CONTINUED

I'VE HAD MULTIPLE OCCASIONS TO encounter skunks ["It Came From Under the Cottage," July/Aug. 1996] while restoring log cabins. The best method I found to deter the striped fellows is to put a mechanic's drop light in the crawlspace, facing toward the space. If you want to know when the stinker comes and goes, sprinkle some fine sand at the entrance and watch for footprints.

— ROBERT HART, M.D.  
Hickory, N.C.

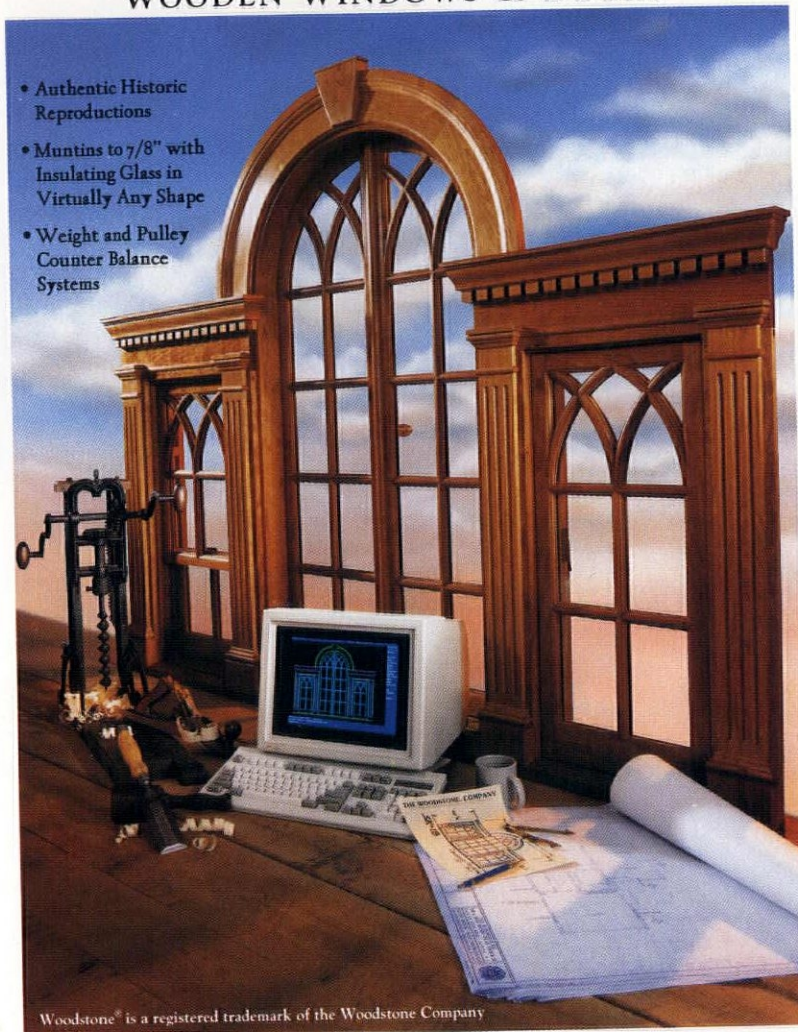
#### NEW SUBSCRIBER

YOUR SEPT./OCT. ISSUE WAS THE first I'd ever seen. Wow. This magazine speaks my language. It puts me in touch with other old-house lovers across the country. I'm like a kid in a candy store.

— JOHN D. BROWN  
Springfield, Ill.

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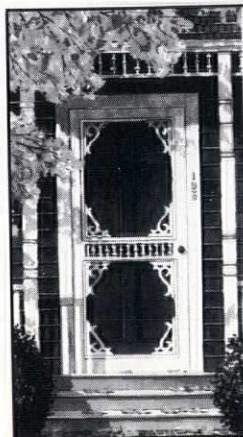
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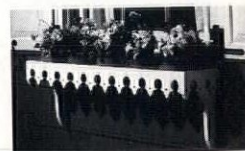
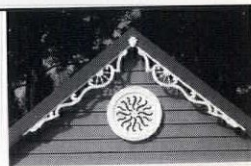
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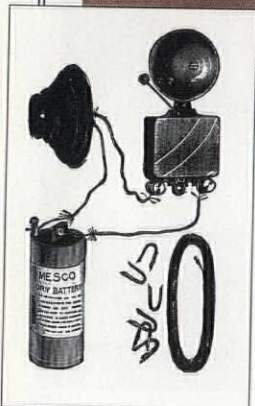


# Ask OHJ

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Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930



Above: A wood push-button doorbell, from a 1920s bungalow. Left: This outfit retailed for \$1.50 in 1907. The same setup with a metal push button cost \$2.



## Ring My Bell

*Our original push-button doorbell is wood. Is this unusual?*

— Leonard Thibadeau  
Decatur, Ga.

ELECTRIC DOORBELLS WERE COMMON by the 1890s. Even where there was no electrical service, they could run off a dry-cell battery. Wood was an economical alternative to metal push buttons.

Rebuilding your wood doorbell is easy and working with the 12-volt current is as safe as changing a battery. First clean the oxide and dirt from the contacts. Fine-grit sandpaper works, but may erode the fragile metal. Better is a soft

fiberglass typewriter brush. Next align the contacts so that pushing the button will make them touch, completing the circuit.

If the contacts are damaged, use new contacts sold for hobbyists

(available at electronics stores) or cannibalize them from a flashlight battery compartment. Then simply wire the unit and close it up.

## Strip Tease

*How do you strip milk paint from an intricate wood mantel?*

— April Howsare  
Pittsburgh, Penn.

SOLVENT STRIPPERS WON'T WORK on milk protein (casein), a powerful paint binder. On flat surfaces, sanding may work best. For detailed woodwork, use caustic strippers, such as sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide (lye). Some readers report success with ammonia. Or try PDE Paint Remover, H. Behlen & Bro. Inc., 4715 State Highway 30, Dept. OHJ, Amsterdam, NY 12010, (518) 843-1380. Wear gloves, goggles, and proper respirators.

## Well Preserved

*A hardware store clerk said new preservatives would react with the creosote on these doors and would be rendered ineffective. Is this true?*

— John F. Caldwell  
Burlington, Ky.

WE RAN YOUR QUESTION BY DAN Foster, a chemist at the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory. Creosote will not react with the preservative, Foster explained, but it may prevent absorption of brushed-on products. Unlike modern preservatives that work because they are toxic, creosote works by filling the voids between wood cells so moisture and organisms

can't get through. Foster recommends using a solvent-based preservative. These will penetrate better than water-based products. No matter what, though, if there's still a lot of creosote in the wood, it won't accept much new preservative. That means the creosote is still doing its job.



The wood is dark with creosote.





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## THE SPINNERS

THE BRASS DOORKNOBS IN MY old house were black with tarnish. Here's the quick cleaning method I developed. Chuck the knob's spindle into a variable-speed drill. Then take one of those green scrub pads that you find in the cleaning aisle of the grocery store and hold it in the palm of your hand. Gently grab the knob with the pad as you spin it slowly (while wearing rubber gloves and eye protection). Use some water or brass cleaner as a lubricant. For the door plates and other flat hardware in an old house, put one of the scrubbers into your palm sander.

— BRIAN PATRICK  
*E. Palestine, Ohio*

## DOING WINDOWS

MOST OLD-HOUSE OWNERS NEGLECT to clean their windows. The same folks fret about high heat-

ing bills. Yet cleaning the windows can help warm your interior. Soot buildup on the panes limits passive solar heat that enters the building. Make it regular winter maintenance to clean windows and storms, at least the most accessible ones. In the summer, close drapes or shades to block the passive heat.

— B. JOHNSON  
*Coeur d'Alene, Idaho*

## POST-PAINTER DRIPS

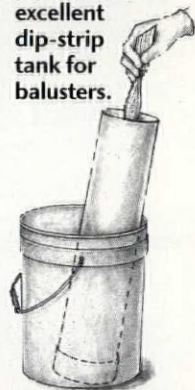
AFTER STRUGGLING FRUITLESSLY with chemical solvents, I hit on a great way to remove paint splatters from my rough-faced stone foundation. Take a sandstone block and rub it against the dripped-on area. The soft stone will crumble against the harder rock, and the abrasion easily removes the unwanted paint.

— BYRDINE BATES  
*Grinnell, Iowa*

## BATHING BALUSTERS

IF YOU'RE HAVING DIFFICULTY stripping paint off stair balusters, you can create your own mini-dipping tank for them. Use a length of 6" diameter PVC (polyvinyl chloride) pipe that's at least 2" longer than the balusters. Cap one end and stand the tube upright in a bucket. Place two or three balusters in the tube and fill it with chemical stripper. Soak as long as recommended by the manufacturer of the stripper. Remove the balusters and scrub with a wire brush or steel wool. Clean with TSP and sand lightly before finishing.

A length of PVC pipe makes an excellent dip-strip tank for balusters.

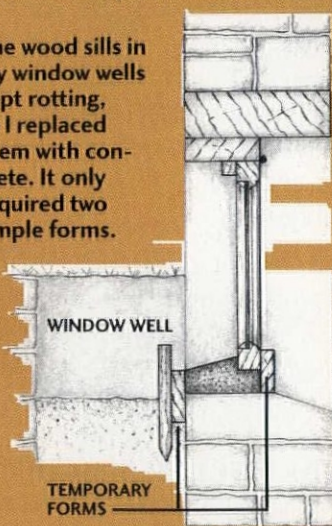


— JULIA GOEB  
*Sanford, Fla.*

## GETTING SILLY

OUR CA. 1800 STONE HOUSE has wells for all the basement windows, which are below grade. Water puddles in the wells,

The wood sills in my window wells kept rotting, so I replaced them with concrete. It only required two simple forms.



and replacing rotted sills was becoming routine maintenance.

So I replaced the wood sills with concrete. It was easy, because I used the windows themselves as part of the forms. I simply created a front form with a staked plank and then temporarily screwed a rear form onto the interior. Then I poured in a rich concrete mix and troweled it to match the bevel of the wood sill (still outlined on the jamb). After it set up, I opened the window, tied it up, and cleaned excess concrete off the sash. Once the new sill cured, I painted the concrete to match the wood.

— ALFRED BONNELL JR.  
*Greencastle, Pa.*

## COLD SHOWER

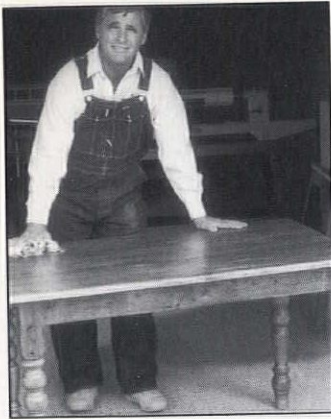
HERE'S A TRICK MY FOREMAN taught me. When you're working with materials such as fiberglass batt insulation, the dust can get stuck in your skin, causing irritation. To wash it off, take a cold shower. Though it's more comfortable, warm water opens your pores, which is great for allowing fiberglass and other irritants into your skin. Cold water tightens your skin so the fibers will wash away without getting further imbedded.

— CLYDE FREEDMAN  
*Springfield, Ill.*

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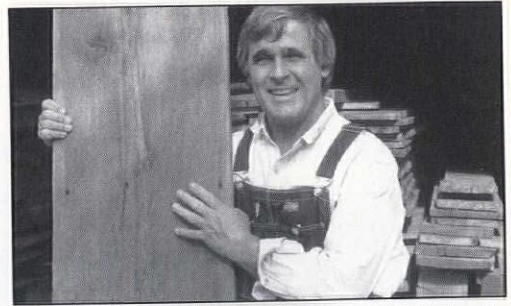


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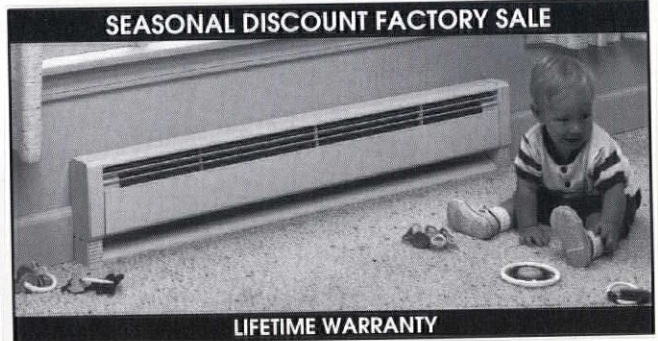
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2. Apply saturant to area to be covered.



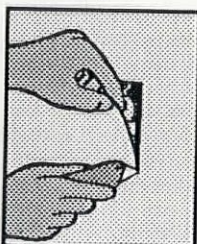
3. Apply fiberglass mat to wet surface.



4. Trim excess mat where wall meets ceiling.



5. Trim mat at baseboard and window.



6. Trim mat at outlets, switches, etc.



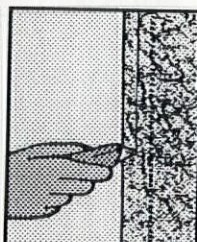
7. Apply second coat of saturant to wet mat.



8. Apply 1st coat of saturant to adjacent area.



9. Apply mat to 2nd area, overlapping by 1".



10. Cut down center of overlap (both layers).



11. Remove mat strips on both sides of cut.



12. Apply 2nd coat of saturant (include seam)

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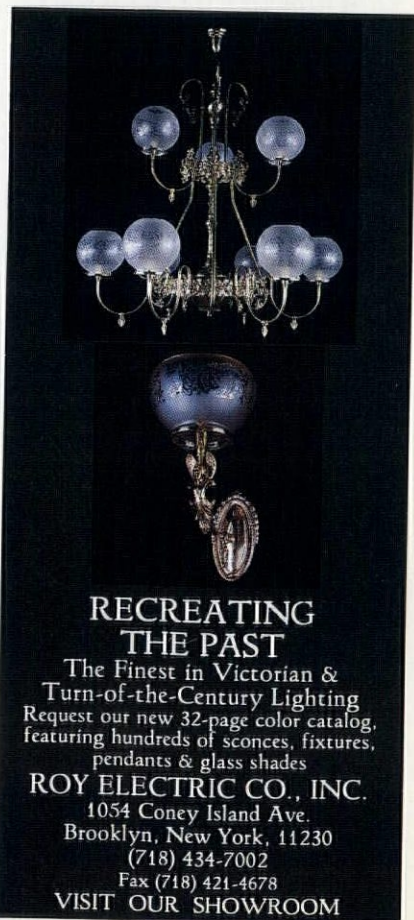
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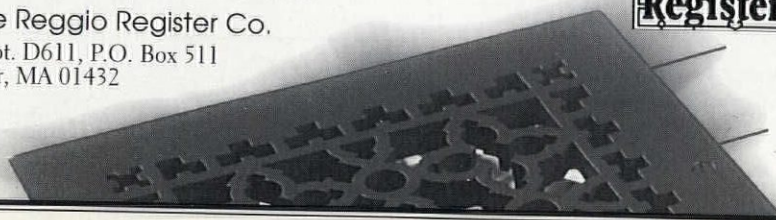
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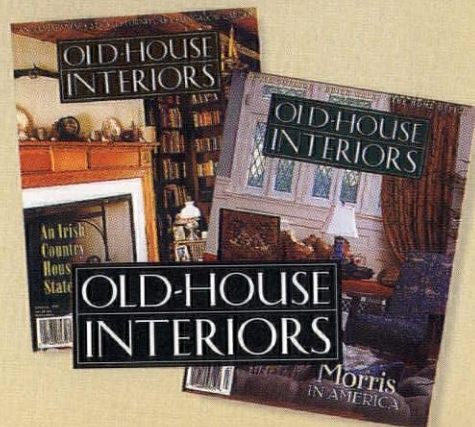
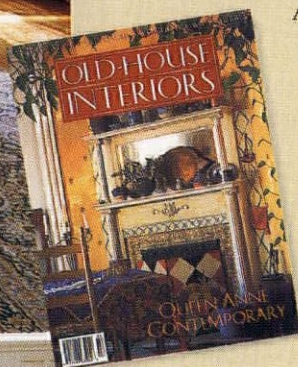
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# Victorians Plain and Popular

## Two Common House Types

BY JAMES C. MASSEY & SHIRLEY MAXWELL

**J**UST LIKE MANY OTHER OWNERS OF LATE-VICTORIAN houses, *OHJ* readers Printis Shelton and Jim Wohler are puzzled. Each has a house with little exterior decoration: few clues as to style. Their Midwest houses were built a quarter-century apart, and they're quite different from each other. What they have in common is that they are defined not by a high-style label, but by their basic shape, or massing.

Our designation for houses like the Sheltons' is gable-and-ell; for the Wohlers', cross-gable (actually, in this variation, cross-gambrel). Some writers prefer "tri-gable" and "cruciform" or "crossplan," respectively. Others simply describe houses as L-shaped or T-shaped.

You may have heard the catchy term "Folk Victorian" used generically for these small charmers of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Victorian, they certainly are; their asymmetrical massing and spare but confident features all belong to the Victorian period. True, as well, that they don't fall into any formal, "academic" style category of the era. Although some bear touches of Gothic Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Stick Style, Eastlake, or Colonial Revival decoration, most are relatively (or entirely) unadorned. Yet they are not really folk architecture. The essence of folk architecture is its sense of place. Think of regional types: log houses, the saltbox, the true Cape Cod, the I-house. Folk architecture is based on traditional practices that have persisted over

time in a specific region or locality, passed along through generations: father-to-son, master-to-apprentice, neighbor-to-neighbor. Its "architect" is a community rather than an individual.

So let's call these generic types "popular architecture." Unlike folk buildings, these common houses *can* often be traced to an individual source—and, always, to a particular *time*. Popular architecture is transmitted by mass communication—such as architectural planbooks—and may have very broad geographical circulation. Any particular form may end as suddenly as it began when some other form becomes—well, more popular.

Houses like the ones in this article proliferated in the American landscape after the Civil War. They were simplified versions of houses shown in architectural pattern and plan books, beginning in the 1850s with those of A. J. Downing and Calvert Vaux (great champions of picturesque, irregularly massed Gothic Revival cottages and Italian villas). In the post-Civil War decades, catalogs of architectural plans flooded the market, fed by a voracious demand for single-family, middle-class housing. These picturesque designs, though they looked intriguingly complex, were in fact quite standardized. Thus they were easily and widely copied, often with minor variations, by local builders. Not surprisingly, you can

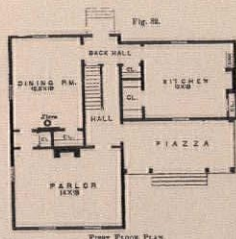
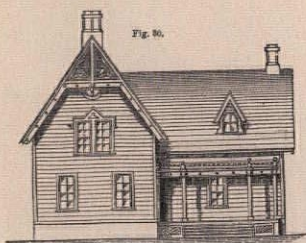
expect to find such houses in areas settled from about 1865 to 1910 or so.

There are many brick examples of both house types, but most gable-and-ells and cross-gables were constructed of wood. Balloon framing, invented in the 1830s, facilitated intricate connections [text continued on page 22]

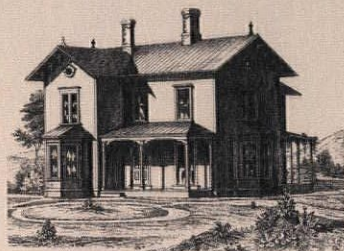
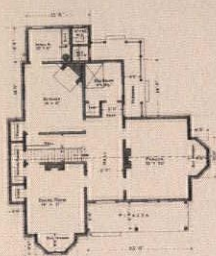


**At top: Junction City, Kansas, 1898. With its only style flourish the complex shingle pattern in the front-facing gambrel, the Wohler House is typical of the cross-gambrel form. Above: Madison, Indiana, ca. 1874. The Shelton house is classic gable-and-ell plan, this one in brick.**





from *The House: A Pocket Manual of Rural Architecture*, by F.E. Graef, 1859



from *Woodward's National Architect*, 1869



## Coast to Coast

Gable-and-ell houses follow the tradition of the temple-form, Greek Revival buildings ubiquitous from the 1830s until the Civil War. The storey-and-a-half plan at top closely resembles Downing's Gothic Revival interpretation of a medieval cottage. Below it, the same

basic plan, but this two-storey house is reminiscent of Downing's idea of an "Italianate villa."

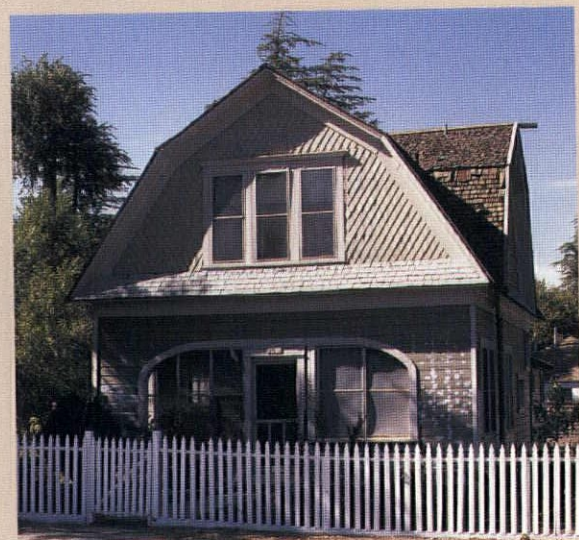
THE CROSS-GABLE OR cruciform house was a major type in pattern books, as was its gambrel variant. With their asymmetry, vaguely classical allusions, and

shingled gables, such houses often look like smaller, simpler versions of the Queen Anne style.

Almost anywhere in the nation, a tour of neighborhoods developed from about 1890 until World War I will turn up cross-gable and cross-gambrel house plans. The three examples at right span East Coast to West: Baltimore, Maryland; Bay City, Michigan; and Independence, California. On the Baltimore example (top), note the projecting gable end in the front-facing gambrel. The wrap-around porch is set into the roof of the house. In the Bay City example (center), the porch projects out from the main house. Like many others of the type, the California house (bottom) wears its decoration as fancy-cut shingles in the front gambrel.

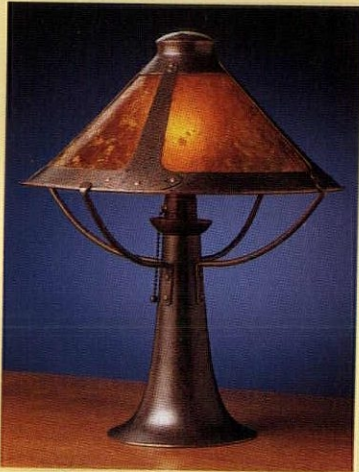


from *Hodgson's Low Cost American Homes*; plan ca. 1902





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in the  
Darkness."  
Carl Jung

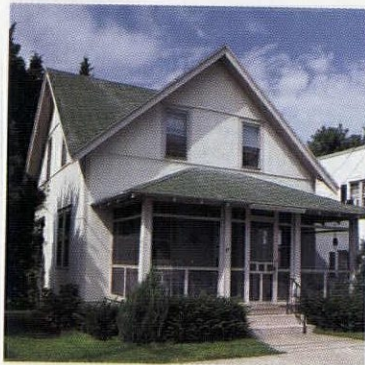


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The gable-and-ell house form appears all over the country and was standard for almost a century (above). Most were of wood construction, but brick was popular in certain areas. This Midwestern example has a one-bay porch with gingerbread. The entrance is into the ell. The cross-gable plan, seen in this stucco house in Delaware (left), was even more common than the cross-gambrel variant described in this article.

[text continued from page 20]  
of roofs and building sections. The introduction of central heating, and of cast-iron heating and cooking stoves with small, metal stove pipes, also allowed the construction of houses with irregular massing. With less need to cluster work and social activities around one or two large chimneys, late-Victorian families broke out of the boxy shapes of earlier forms into modern and (as proponents saw it) more individualistic L- and T-shaped plans. On the practical side, set-back ells suggested a location for porches on these relatively small houses: a sitting porch on the front, as well as one or more service porches where deliveries could be made and household chores performed.

Interiors of irregular houses

were more easily separated into public, family, and work areas. The kitchen and pantry were usually at the rear or in the ell, while the ceremonial entrance and the parlor dominated the front of the house. Most bedrooms were upstairs, away from public contact. Porches and an abundance of windows and doors opened rooms to nature, in line with the cherished moral and aesthetic precepts of the day.

*Authors' note: An excellent, detailed discussion of these house types and other common forms can be found in Common Houses in American Small Towns: The Atlantic Seaboard to the Mississippi Valley, by John A. Jakle, Robert W. Bastian, and Douglas K. Meyer (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1989).*





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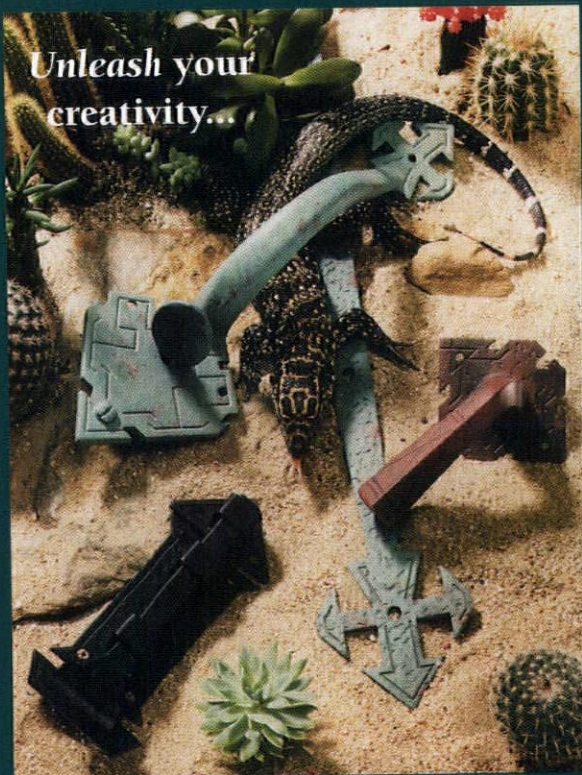
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# Getting Neighborly About Preservation Regulations

## An Rx for Historic District Anxiety

by Sanford Johnson and the OHJ Staff

**I**N A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT, TOWN officials decide what homeowners can do to their old houses. That means folks can't necessarily add on as the family grows, or alter the façade to their tastes. It may mean red tape. All of this can worry househunters, gnaw at homeowners planning additions, and even cause epidemic anxiety in neighborhoods going to the polls to vote on a new historic-district ordinance.

Relax. The reality is that historic districting creates an amenable situation for homeowners sensitive to the goals of preservation. If you're concerned with things like neighborhood integrity, living in a historic district should be painless, especially since regulation is usually limited to maintaining the original exterior as seen from the street. District newcomers just need a dose of information to cure their worry.

### Neighborhood Preservation

THOUGH HISTORIC DISTRICTS ARE AS VARIED as they are numerous, they share the goal of maintaining the neighborhood's architectural character, whether it's a colonial-era village center or a 1910 working-class

block. Regulations protect the buildings' original appearance and the district's historic culture. Early agricultural land may continue as a working farm, or an old Main Street may remain commercial.

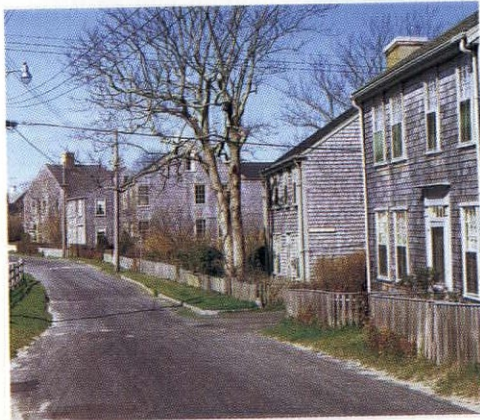
Regulations can block, or at least delay, demolition of a building or a wing.

Some unscrupulous property owners try to circumvent this with "demolition by neglect"—intentionally allowing an old building to fall into such disrepair that it eventually collapses or is condemned, clearing the way for a new development. To prevent this, many districts enforce a minimum maintenance requirement. Districts also limit new construction on undeveloped land

and provide specific guidelines for the design of new structures.

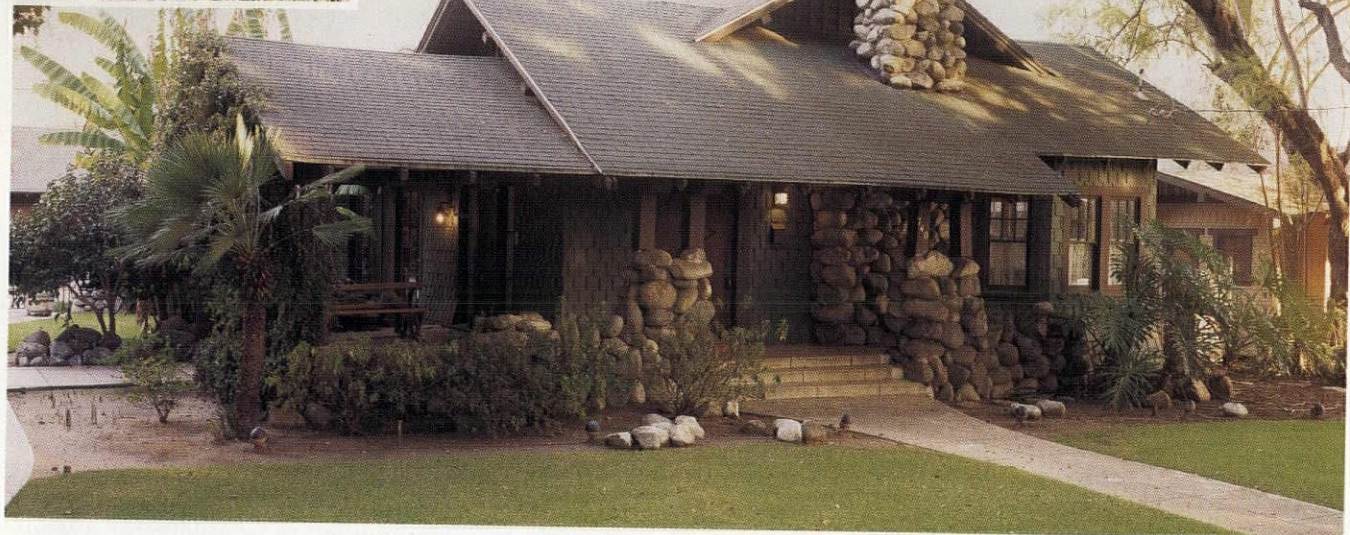
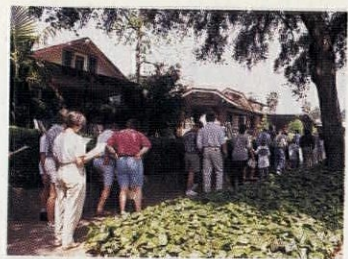
Most commissions also regulate how old-house owners can alter their buildings. This is what causes anxiety, because it apparently restricts property owners' control. It can also potentially delay construction projects for months as meetings, hearings, site visits, and deliberations proceed.

Yet local historic districts generally limit their regulations to the house's exte-



**Historic districts are often thought to be urban phenomena, or to apply only to colonial-era or Victorian neighborhoods. In truth, they're as varied as these two in New York City's Greenwich Village (opposite) and on Nantucket, off the coast of Massachusetts (above).**





The latest trend in historic districts: 20th-century neighborhoods such as Pasadena's Bungalow Heaven Historic District, where house tours are sold out.

rior, and usually only the façade or areas visible from the public way. The district may prohibit or limit changes in materials (such as siding and windows), changes in form (such as added dormers or garages), and removal of historic elements (such as decorative brackets, regardless of how hard they are to paint). Such alterations irreversibly destroy building fabric. Many districts require a historically appropriate paint scheme—but few actually dictate specific colors. And

lots of districts do not regulate paint colors at all because they are entirely reversible. Some districts even permit vinyl siding.

### The Historical Architecture Review Board

WHEN A PROPERTY OWNER WITHIN A DISTRICT submits construction plans to the town, the historic preservation officer reviews them. Generally, the officer can approve plans that clearly abide by the district guidelines; he or she refers questionable projects to a historical architecture review board, a committee of professional designers, planners, builders, lawyers, architects, historians, or other concerned citizens.

In some cases, the board is essentially toothless. It advises homeowners, but cannot regulate building treatment. In other districts, the board consults to zoning or planning officials who hold decision-making power and may or may not abide by the district board's wishes. Most often, the board itself must issue a certificate of approval for proposals before construction commences.

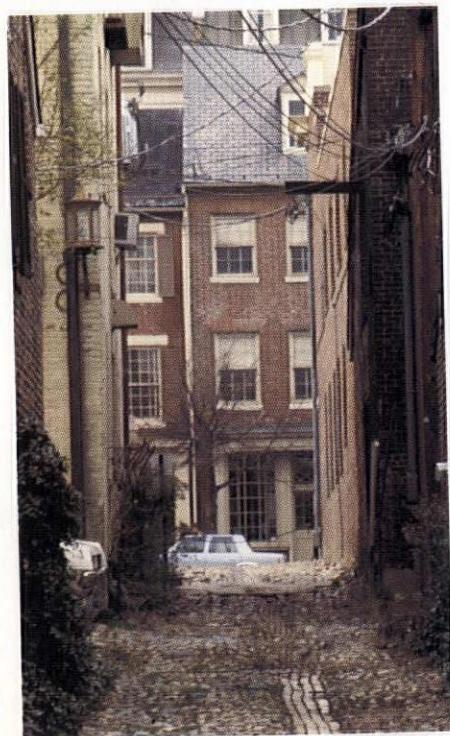
**Designation as a local historic district promotes neighborhood survival. This block in the Ridgeland Historic District (Oak Park, Ill.) today looks much the same as it did when this photo was taken in 1926.**







No one would dare complain about ordinances that have preserved this vignette, the meeting of two centuries and a preservation icon.



An alley is part of the townhouse layout of Alexandria, Virginia.

## Everyday Houses

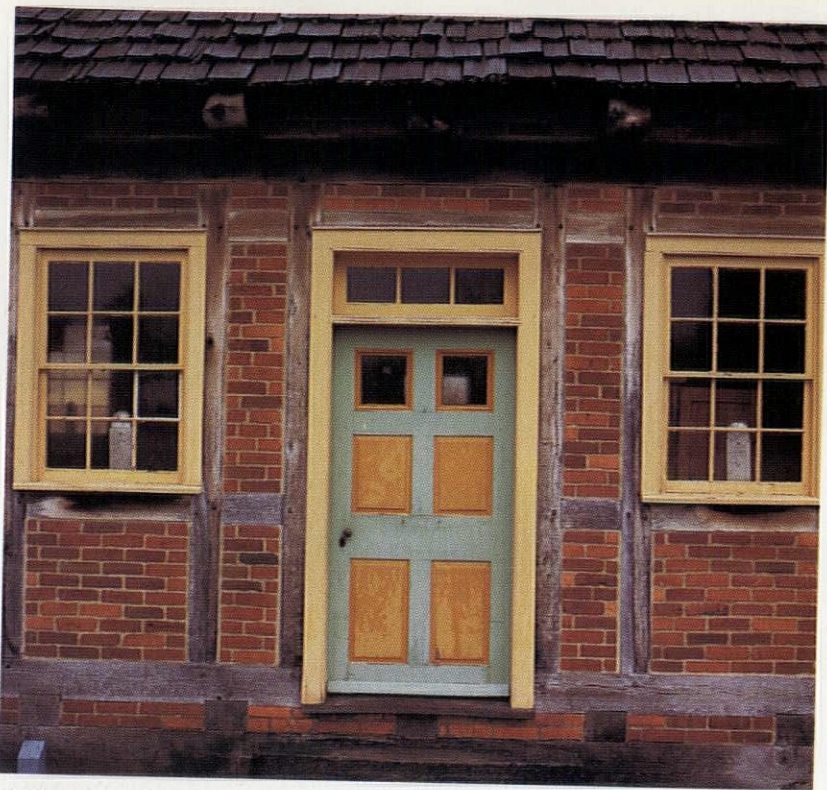
Not all historic districts are jaw-dropping examples of pristine architectural history. Such were the earliest local historic districts. And yes, because they delineate very cohesive and important environs, they tend to impose stringent controls on homeowners. These first districts were created before federal or state laws had enacted legislation to guide such policy. The city of Charleston, South Carolina, created the first districts in 1931; the Vieux Carré district in New Orleans followed in 1937.

After World War II, many historic districts were created. Some notable examples: Alexandria, Virginia, in 1946; and Beacon Hill, Boston, in 1955. Then, the federal Historic Preservation Act of 1966 set out guidelines for the creation of local historic districts. (It also created the National Register of Historic Places.

Often confused with local historic districts, the Register is the list of America's most significant cultural resources. It's primarily an honorific listing. Unless a proposed development is federally funded, listing does not protect historic properties from alteration or demolition. See "Making the Honor Roll," Jan./Feb. 1993.)

A wave of historic districts came after the Tax Reform Act of 1976, which used tax credits to foster rehabilitation of historic buildings and discourage demolition. (Much of the tax incentive has been eliminated.) The most recent districts tend to be much larger and to encompass homes of many eras and styles. These everyday districts may include hundreds of houses and buildings of less-than-landmark importance. And they tend to be aimed at general protection for the integrity of the buildings, with less stringent guidelines.





*Fachwerk*, or German half-timber construction, in historic Zoar, Ohio, is the vernacular treasure that led to preservation.

## The District's Goals

The power that a local historic district wields has a lot to do with what sort of architecture it protects. Districts can oversee landscapes, industrial buildings, wilderness, and archaeological remains. Some historic districts conserve an agricultural section of town, and might impose a right-to-farm law to preempt complaints by neighbors about dust, machinery noise, or other nuisances related to farming. The two main types of historic districts, though, protect commercial and residential areas and have very different goals.

A historic district in a commercial area may be more concerned with economic development than period architecture. By establishing a district, the commission may become eligible to receive grant money and other pecuniary benefits. These funds can be converted to low-interest loans or other financial incentives for businesses that locate within the district. The primary goal is to encourage occupation of buildings in the district, which protects the old storefronts on Main Street from new development and abandonment for suburban malls. Historic districts designed for these purposes tend to have only moderate regulations about building treatment.

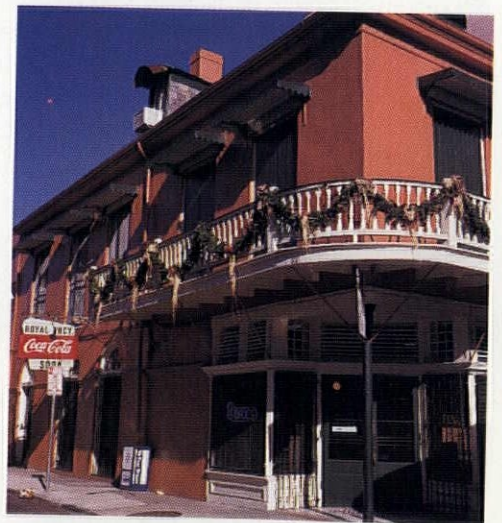
More common, and significant for homeowners, are districts that protect the historic architectural character of a residential neighborhood. These typically seek to maintain visual continuity. This may be accomplished by prohibiting alteration of building exteriors. In the case of a neighborhood of landmark-quality residences, the restrictions may be most specific. In districts consisting of up-scale homes in pure and pristine architectural styles, restrictions may ban any changes to the visible areas of the exterior, extending to even paint schemes and landscaping.

The board's decisions may be appealed through the courts or through a local process (which helps avoid legal battles and associated fees). Violations of the board's rulings may result in fines, sometimes calculated on a hundreds- or even thousands-of-dollars-per-day basis. The board may also force violators to reproduce building fabric that's been destroyed.

### How to Gauge the Regulations

THE BEST RESOURCE ABOUT THE HISTORIC district is the preservation officer. This staff person can answer questions about the district and help you determine the acceptability of alterations you're considering. The officer can also refer you to the district's guidelines, which set down in ink the goals and regulations of the district. Beyond that, determine stringency by reading minutes of past meetings and press coverage of the formation of the district or recent disputes. If there have been major conflicts, speak to the players involved.

You can learn a lot—especially in new districts, where there may not be much of a public record—by taking a look at the district's historic building survey. This inventory identifies the architectural and historical qualities of buildings that should be preserved. Read the entry about your address. It may rate the house's significance and indicate such things as whether an early addition to the structure—say, a sagging rear ell—is considered essential.



Historic districts often embrace commercial structures, for economic reasons as much as for historic preservation goals.




## How to Present Your Plans

PLANNED ADDITIONS, ALTERATIONS, RENOVATIONS, and upgrades can be rejected for incompatibility with the building or the neighborhood. The board will consider the quality and appropriateness of the project's design, scale, and building materials—goals most sensitive homeowners already share.

It's also possible that a building plan can be rejected for *excessive* compatibility. If a proposed alteration looks too much like the original structure, it may mislead observers and obscure the historical record. Avoid this offense by establishing a clear line of demarcation between old and new construction. Refer to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties [Supt. of Documents, Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250, 202-512-1800], frequently the model used by historic districts.

The stringency of the review depends

upon the legal powers granted to the board by the ordinance, the money available for legal battles, and, as with all human endeavors, upon the personalities of current board members. Attend some meetings before your date to get a sense of the board.

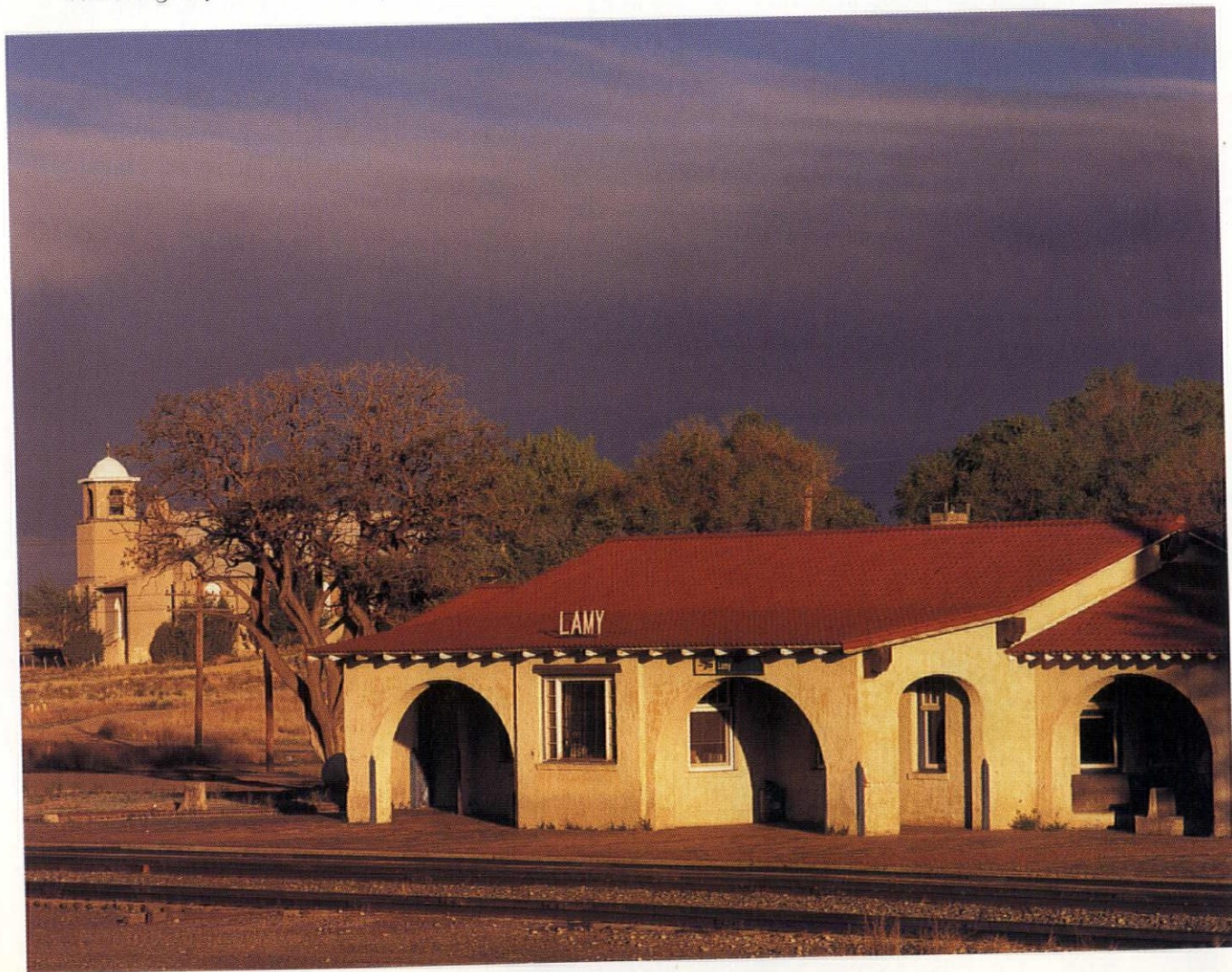
Presentation is crucial. Make it clear that a historically appropriate addition or alteration is *your* goal, too. Anticipate questions and be prepared with answers. It's a good idea to use a preservation architect or a consulting architectural historian. If you do, by all means bring these professionals to the commission's hearing. Provide the board with several detailed, full-color renderings of the finished project from different perspectives, especially as it will be seen from the public way. Your obvious familiarity with the district, the style and period of your home, the history of architecture, and with local regulations and procedures certainly helps your case. 

## RESOURCES

**National Alliance of Preservation Commissions**  
Hall of States, Suite 342  
444 North Capitol Street  
Washington, D.C. 20001

**National Trust for Historic Preservation**  
1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
(202) 588-6000

**A preservation effort on behalf of one building—say, a train station—often raises consciousness about other structures or even an entire residential area. This station is in Lamy, New Mexico, near Santa Fe.**





HOW TO

# RADIATOR CITY

## STUDY HALL

A Q&A Seminar with Dan Holohan

If someone were to write a manual on the care of vintage steam and hot-water radiators, he wouldn't make a fortune, but he would make a lot of friends. Old-house owners love these cast-iron behemoths so much, questions about their maintenance and repair are as common as water-hammer and squirting air vents. Here, Dan answers the questions readers keep asking.

### ReUse & Assembly

**Q** WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO DISCONNECT, MOVE, AND RECONNECT RADIATORS FOR, SAY, FLOOR REPAIRS?

**A** FIRST, BE GENTLE AS YOU WORK ON those old, brittle pipes. If you attack old pipes with a single wrench, the torque your massive arms and shoulders create can—and probably will—break the pipe. (If that happens you'll wish you never bought an old house in the first place!) Instead, make sure you use two wrenches when you're loosening the union connections. Assume the position, then turn one wrench while holding back with the other. Don't take any shortcuts!

A hand truck with a few strategically placed blocks of wood will help you move the old beast out of the way. If you're planning to take that old radiator down a flight



of stairs, proceed cautiously and with plenty of help because an antique radiator can weigh hundreds of pounds. Many an old-house owner has inadvertently discovered, to his or her horror, the dubious sport of radiator lugging.

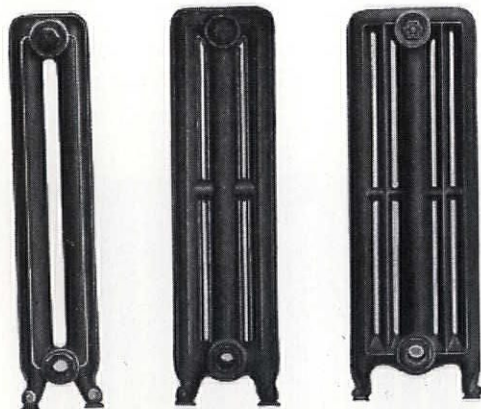
### IF I DECIDE TO MOVE A CAST-IRON RADIATOR, WHERE SHOULD IT BE REINSTALLED?

Ideally, a cast-iron radiator should be located under a window—that's where the greatest heat loss occurs. The radiator should be as wide as the window and its top should never peek above the window sill because this lessens the convective movement of air around the radiator. Speaking of which, for maximum convective efficiency, the radiator should be 2½ inches away from the wall. It took the old-timers years to figure that out.

### CAN I SUCCESSFULLY CUT DOWN THE SIZE OF AN ANTIQUE CAST-IRON RADIATOR?

Maybe—it all depends on how the long-gone manufacturer assembled the radiator. A cast-iron radiator is made up of sections, like slices in a loaf of bread. Each section attaches to the next with round metal fittings called nipples. Each nipple looks like a very short piece of pipe, which may or may not have threads on the ends.

Threaded nipples are unusual in that one side has a left-hand thread, while the other side has a right-hand thread. As the manufacturer assembled the radiator, he



Two-column Three-column Five-column  
PRINCESS DIRECT RADIATORS

By the time these standard "sanitary" radiators appeared in the 1926 Sweet's Architectural Catalogue, ornament was gone.

rotated the nipple in one direction so that it pulled both sections tightly together. After a few years of normal use and corrosion, the threaded nipples and radiator sections became one, never to separate again. Because of this, threaded nipples aren't available anymore. If you're looking to reduce the size of one of these old beauties, you're out of luck.

Push nipples, however, are still available. A push nipple is a smooth piece of pipe that's beveled so that the nipple is wider in the middle than it is at either end. Rather than screw the sections together, manufacturers who used push nipples pushed one radiator section into the other, taking advantage of the nipple's bevel to create a tight seal.

If your radiator has a threaded rod running through its sections, rest assured it is assembled with push nipples. To cut it down all you have to do is get the beast apart. First loosen and withdraw the threaded rod. Next, apply equal parts of penetrating oil, pry bar, patience, and elbow grease. If you're careful and persistent you should be successful.

Remove the offending section and reassemble the radiator. If the old push nipples don't look so hot, get new ones. Once you get the new push nipples in place, tighten the threaded push rods and pull the radiator sections back together.

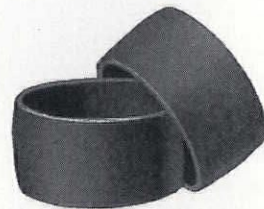
If you wind up in the market for new push nipples don't waste time shopping around because there's only one place you can go: Oneida County Boiler Works (611 Mortimer St., Utica, NY 13501; 315-732-7914). Send a sample of the old nipple—no matter what its condition—to Bob Brown. Bob regularly helps people all across the country, and he assures me Oneida is the only company around that still supplies these fittings. "If people could get 'em any closer to home, they wouldn't be calling me!" he says.

### WHERE CAN I BUY ANTIQUE RADIATORS?

You can take pot luck at your local junk yard, or you can call Fran Fahey at A-1 New and Used Plumbing & Heating Supplies (30 Prospect St., Somerville, MA 02143; 617-625-6140). Fran operates a veritable super-market of antique radiators in all shapes,



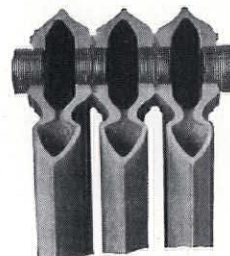
The secret of a perfect radiator



### Kewanee Extra Heavy Malleable Nipples

We call particular attention to our extra heavy malleable iron push nipple for connecting radiator sections.

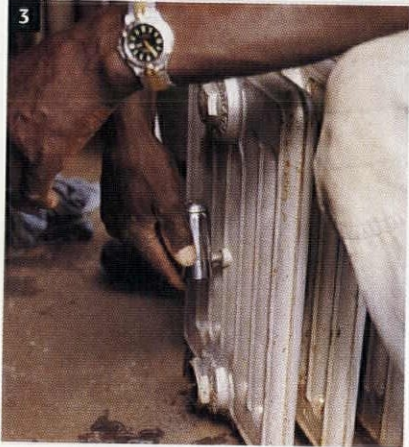
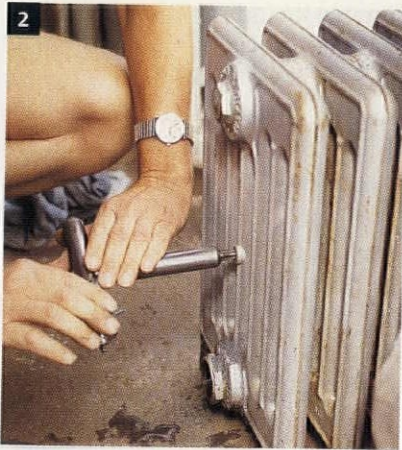
Makes a perfect iron-to-iron joint which water can not get through.



Detail view of threaded nipples in place

Illustrations from old trade books show a threaded nipple, push nipples, and a section through a radiator fitted with threaded nipples.





How to switch from a hot-water to a one-pipe steam system: 1) Bore a hole for the air vent, roughly halfway on the column. 2) Tap the hole for the appropriate thread (usually 1/8" NPT). 3) Test the vent. 4) Insert a plug in the hot-water outlet.

styles, and sizes. He assures me he has repaired and pressure-tested every radiator so they are truly in A-1 shape. Fran will also fix your old radiator or remove a section (providing it has push nipples, not threaded nipples) and can work with you on shipping.

### Steam vs. Hot Water

#### WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A STEAM RADIATOR AND A HOT-WATER RADIATOR?

The difference is in the way the radiator

sections go together. They may be nipped together at both the top and bottom, or just connected at the bottom.

Older steam radiators have nipples across just the bottom portion of the sections. This is because steam is lighter than air. When the steam enters the bottom of a radiator (as it always will in a one-pipe steam radiator), it flows upward into the sections, displacing the air as it goes.

Hot-water radiators, on the other hand, have nipples across both the upper and lower portions of the radiator sections. Even though hot water rises, it doesn't move as quickly as steam. The double set of nipples encourages better circulation of the hot water across the entire radiator and leads to greater efficiency.

Around 1905, when two-pipe steam became popular, contractors began to use hot-water radiators on steam systems. The old steam radiators with their single set of bottom nipples quickly faded and became obsolete.

#### WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A ONE-PIPE STEAM RADIATOR AND A TWO-PIPE STEAM RADIATOR?

As the name implies, a one-pipe steam radiator has just one pipe connected to it, and that pipe is always at the bottom. Both steam and condensate (the water that forms when steam condenses) share this pipe. One-pipe steam systems can use either steam or hot-water radiators, however.

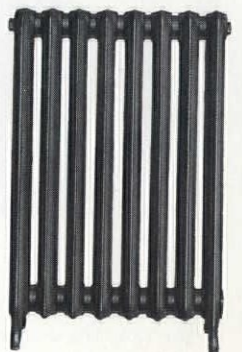
Two-pipe steam systems usually have the steam entering through a pipe at the top of the radiator. The condensate leaves the radiator through a pipe at the bottom. Since the steam moves across the top of the radiator, and the condensate drips down along



PRINCESS TWO-COLUMN STEAM RADIATOR



PRINCESS TWO-COLUMN WATER RADIATOR



STEAM OR WATER RADIATOR



the radiator's inside passages, two-pipe radiators generally provide a more uniform sense of warmth.

There will usually be a steam trap (an automatic, temperature-sensitive valve) at the point where the radiator and the condensate pipe come together. You should check these with a thermometer once a year. You're looking for at least a 10-degree drop in temperature across the trap. If the trap's not working, you can replace the internal parts (see "Adventures in Steam Heating," S/O 1991 OHJ). Any good plumbing supply house will be able to get the parts for you.

A two-pipe steam system will almost always use hot-water radiators. There is one notable exception, though, and it's called the two-pipe, air vent system. You'll know you have one of these if you see two pipes, one on each side of the radiator (at the bottom), and both pipes have hand valves. These radiators also have air vents. From a historical perspective, the two-pipe, air vent system is the missing link between one-pipe steam and two-pipe steam.



FIG. 80.—HORIZONTAL CHECK WITH BALL    FIG. 81.—HORIZONTAL CHECK VALVE.    FIG. 82.—SWINGING CHECK.

**Weird gizmos might be critical.**

**DOES A TWO-PIPE STEAM RADIATOR HAVE TO HAVE A STEAM TRAP?**

No, but it has to have something to keep the steam from entering the condensate return lines. That something may be an internal orifice, a tiny check valve you can't see, a hidden metal ball, or a water seal.

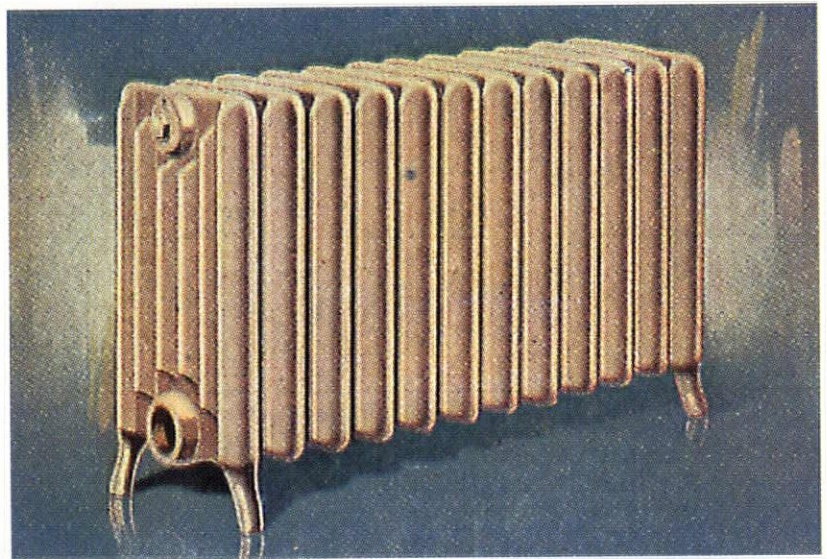
There were about three dozen companies doing business between 1905 and 1930 that made these steam-stopping gizmos. Those companies are all out of business now. So do not remove any potentially critical, weird-looking device until you've answered three essential questions: 1. What is it? 2. What does it do? 3. What the heck happens if I take it out? If you can't answer those questions, put your hands in your pockets, and back slowly away from that radiator.

**WHERE DOES THE AIR VENT BELONG ON A CAST-IRON STEAM RADIATOR?  
HOW ABOUT ON A HOT WATER RADIATOR?**

The vent for a one-pipe steam radiator belongs on the side that's opposite the pipe. Because steam is lighter than air it will head first for the top of the radiator. This means you should install the air vent about half-way down the radiator— not at the top.

Two-pipe steam systems (with the exception of that "missing link" one-pipe, air-vent system) should not have air vents on the radiators. If the two-pipe radiator won't heat without an air vent, check the steam trap. Misapplied radiator air vents can lead to nightmarish system problems.

Each hot-water radiator should have an air vent at the top, on the side opposite the inlet pipe. You'll use this vent to "bleed" air from the radiator when you're first starting the system.



**DO I NEED TO FLUSH MY RADIATORS FROM TIME TO TIME?**

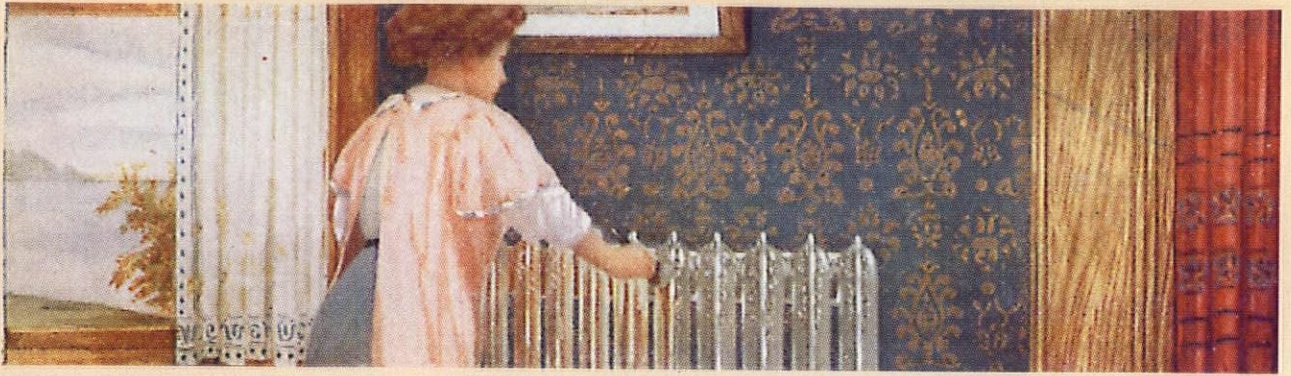
No. Hot-water radiators operate within a "closed" system where there's little or no corrosion taking place. Flushing these radiators will only cause you to add more water to the system, which will create more corrosion, and so on, and on. Why cause problems?

Steam systems are open to the atmosphere so the radiators do see more corrosion than their hot-water brethren. However, cast-iron radiators come with their own dirt-storage compartments, and these can hold many year's worth of scale and rust.

Take a look at the way your radiators

**The Peerless Window Radiator for steam or hot water from The American Radiator Company, 1925.**





**Painting**

**DOES THE TYPE OF PAINT I USE MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE AMOUNT OF HEAT A RADIATOR PROVIDES?**

Without a doubt! Typically, a cast-iron radiator puts out about 60 percent of its heat by convection—that is, by heating the surrounding air. The hotter air rises and the cooler air at the floor level moves in to take its place. Before long, you have a “Ferris wheel” of air moving around the room. The remaining 40 percent of the heat leaves the radiator by radiation—the direct emission of heat energy as waves. Radiation is very different from convection because energy is transmitted directly from the source. That’s why a radiator makes you feel so cozy when you walk by; as the name implies, it is literally radiating heat at you!

Back in the 1920s, engineers discovered that certain types of paint can affect the radiator’s performance in heating a room. Specifically, any paint whose pigment contains aluminum or bronze flakes can reduce a radiator’s ability to radiate by as much as 20 percent. The paint has no effect whatsoever on the convective currents around the radiator, and it’s only the final coat that counts. In other words, you could put 10 coats of aluminum paint on a radiator, but if your 11th coat is, say, white, the radiator will radiate to its fullest capacity.

Aluminum- and bronze-colored paints do have their uses, though. Old-timers often used these colors

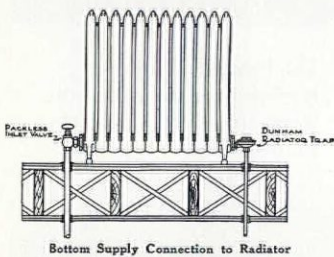
as a final coat over a primer to tame the heat output of an oversized radiator. Strangely, paints with lead, zinc, or other metals have no effect on the radiator’s ability to radiate.



In case you were wondering, the many layers of paint you’ll find on old radiators have no measurable insulating effect. That heat just conducts right through the paint and leaps off the radiator’s surface into the air. If you want to sandblast those old beauties for aesthetic

purposes go right ahead, but you won’t add a single BTU to your home.

**Radiators before 1920 seem to beg for a decorative paint scheme (inset). The illustration above is from the Acme Quality Painting Guide of 1916.**



Steam is conducted through one system of piping from boiler to radiator. Return water and air are conducted through another set of pipes.

connect to your pipes. Notice how the inlet valve or outlet steam-stopping device is always a bit higher than the bottom of the radiator? This is true even when the valve is installed near the bottom of the radiator. Any scale and rust settles into that low-slung “pocket” and stays there.

Keep this in mind if you decide to pitch your one-pipe steam radiators back toward their inlet valves to give you better condensate drainage. Take care not to pitch those old beauties too much. If you do, you just might slosh 100 year’s worth of sludge into that inlet valve. You’ll know you made this mistake by the water hammer that pounds on your pipes and the condensate that squirts from your air vents

onto your ceiling. That’s when it’s time to flush the radiator!

**CAN I TAKE OUT A STEAM RADIATOR AND PUT IN A HOT-WATER RADIATOR?**

Yes.

**CAN I TAKE OUT A HOT-WATER RADIATOR AND PUT IN A STEAM RADIATOR?**

You can if it’s a one-pipe steam system.

**Repairing Leaks**

**CAN I REPAIR A LEAKING CAST-IRON RADIATOR?**

It’s all a matter of where the leak occurs and how bad it’s leaking. Steam radiators are eas-



ier to fix than hot water radiators because they're under much less pressure. To begin, determine where the fault is located. This, of course, is easier said than done. Go to your local hardware store and buy an inspection mirror—a little looking glass on the end of a wand. It will allow you to see around corners and up into radiator spaces no eyes have viewed in the past 100 years.

If you find a pin-hole leak at a push nipple, you can, as you now know, replace the push nipple. However, if the radiator is cracked—say, after a hard freeze—you may not be able to repair it at all. Success is subject to the severity and location of the crack.

Fran Fahey says he would never bother trying to fix a cracked radiator. "Cast-iron flexes too much when it heats and cools," notes Fran. "Trying to patch a cracked hunk of cast iron that's expanding and contracting is like trying to keep a Band-Aid on your elbow." A trick of the trade, though, could save the day according to "Professor" Fremont Lobbstaël of Ann Arbor, Mich. He told me that when he was a lad, a plumber would often tamp lead wool into a minor radiator leak. Fremont explained that, unlike steel wool, lead wool isn't brittle; it packs well and stays put. If you can find some lead wool at a plumbing supply house, you might give this remedy a try.

#### ARE THERE STOP-LEAK PRODUCTS FOR CAST-IRON RADIATORS LIKE THOSE MADE FOR AUTOMOTIVE RADIATORS?

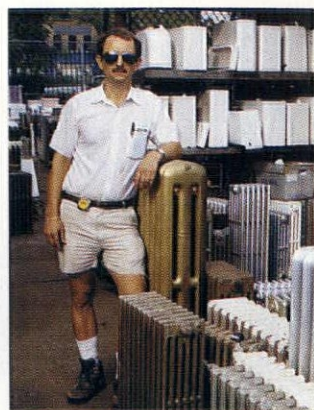
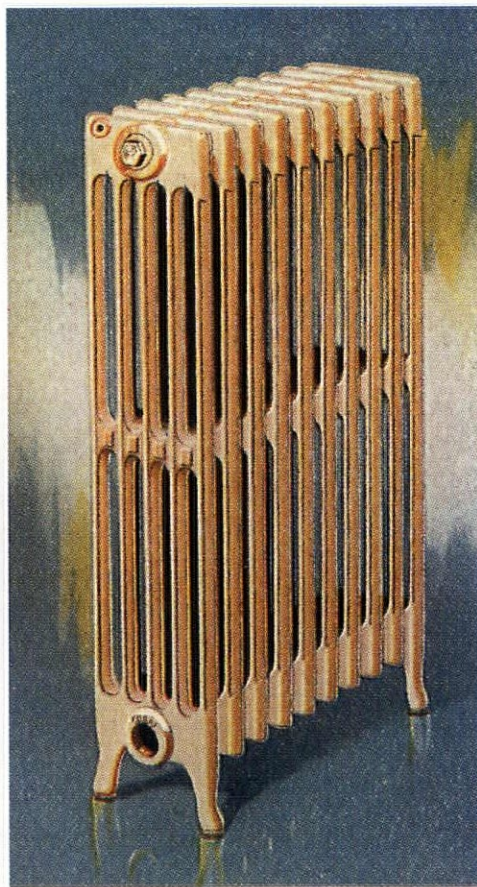
None that you can pour into the radiator, but Kerry Potts of J-B Weld Company (P.O. Box 483, Sulphur Springs, TX 75483; 903-885-7696) may have the answer. His company's literature states that the City of Dallas, Texas, used J-B Weld to repair a cracked Caterpillar engine block. That sure got my attention! Old-house owners have reported similar success. "Just this past spring I had four people tell me they used the product to repair their cast-iron radiators," Kerry said.

Kerry says J-B Weld softens imperceptibly when heated, allowing it to move with the expansion and contraction common in cast-iron radiators. The product is good to 600 degrees—nearly three times the temperature you can expect from a radiator. So if you can get to the leak, it sounds like this stuff will work.

Before you start celebrating, remember that getting at a leak is most of the work. First you have to drain the radiator and remove any paint, primer, or rust. Next, you must thoroughly clean the surface with a non-petroleum-based cleaner such as acetone or lacquer thinner to remove dirt, grease, and oil. Then you need to rough up the cast-iron surface with a file before applying the patching product. The challenge is that an antique radiator can have more nooks and crannies than a Thomas' English muffin, and a good leak knows where to hide. If it's a great old radiator, it's certainly worth a try.

#### DID FOLKS REALLY ONCE USE HORSE MANURE TO SEAL LEAKS?

According to "Professor" Lobbstaël, they sure did! However, horse manure was used to seal boiler leaks, not radiator leaks. "That stuff would go right for the leak and plug it up for a while," Lobbstaël told me. "The action of the water in the boiler shoved the manure into the hole. I've never seen it used in radiators, though, and I don't think it would work too well." I don't either, and there's always the issue of fragrance. 🐾



#### SUPPLIERS

##### A-1 NEW AND USED PLUMBING & HEATING SUPPLIES

30 Prospect St., Dept. OHJ  
Somerville, MA 02143  
(617) 625-6140  
Antique radiators and repairs.

##### J-B WELD COMPANY P.O. Box 483, Dept. OHJ Sulphur Springs, TX 75483 (903) 885-7696

J-B Weld, sold retail at automotive and hardware stores.

##### ONEIDA COUNTY BOILER WORKS 611 Mortimer St., Dept. OHJ Utica, NY 13501 (315) 732-7914 Push nipples for radiators.

DAN HOLOHAN writes about older heating systems from his consulting firm: Dan Holohan Associates, Inc., 63 North Oakdale Ave., Bethpage, N.Y. 11714; (516) 796-9276.



# Folding Furniture and



*You know how common built-ins were in the cottages, bungalows, and apartments of the early-20th century. Modern ingenuity and a fad for mechanical efficiency took the idea beyond bookcases and inglenooks during the 'teens and 'twenties. Some of those innovations, including dumbwaiters and Murphy beds, are popular again today.*

**BY GORDON BOCK**



# Secret Stairs

**F**IXED-IN-PLACE CABINETS, dining-room sideboards and living-room bookcases, inglenooks and window seats were distinguishing features of houses big and small in the early decades of this century. Part of a novel aesthetic—one clean and functional in design—built-ins also were “scientific.” They saved space as well as eliminating dust-catching surfaces, supporting the hygiene craze in the early days of the sanitary era.

Remember, the 1910s and '20s saw the automobile and electric light, the radio and motion pictures. “Built-in” conjures up images of stationary cabinetwork, integral and immovable, but the idea also took an ingenious turn with a wide range of hand-powered, mechanical conveniences designed to do more with less, and then roll, tilt, or wheel out of sight. Some were short-lived novelties, but the best are still with us today.

**CONCEALED BEDS** If futon couches left their mark on the 1970s, and convertible sofa-beds



Ingenious hardware of the 1920s tilted the Murphy Bed up, then swung it into a closet for safekeeping.

were icons of the 1950s, then beds that folded up into a wall are indelibly associated with the 1920s. In fact, the folding-bed idea dates back to at least the 1880s. Disguised as pianos, bureaus, or ersatz desks, mattresses that collapsed into an armoire-like cabinet were patented to provide more sleeping space in tenements. By 1925 improved technology, such as metal frames and strong springs, made possible close to a dozen competing brands.

The key to in-a-door beds, the most popular type, was hardware that allowed the bed to pivot out of the way on the door jamb of a dressing closet. Pioneered in 1918 by William Murphy, who established the legendary Murphy Door Bed company, such tilt-up beds circumvented the need for an extra room in the reduced living areas of new apartments and bungalows. For the well-to-do, their easy upkeep even offered a partial solution to the pernicious “servant problem.” Tilt-up beds were also thought to be blessed with sanitary advantages because bedclothes hung to air in a protected space.

Not all beds were tilters. Where the house plan allowed, they might roll into the wall like a drawer to hibernate beneath the raised floor of the adjacent room. Some could even trolley through an outside wall to the invigorating air of a sleeping porch.

The 1950s and '60s were not boom decades for the wall-bed industry; affordable houses and post-War affluence made saving space less of a priority. Today, however, the emphasis is again on maximizing the use of existing structures. Concealed beds are back as strong as ever, with the Murphy Bed and its competitors still available.

**DISAPPEARING STAIRS** Inevitably, perhaps, the quest to eliminate “space devouring” interior features was headed upstairs. If one could gain occasional access to attics with-



Sliding or folding stairs that stored in the ceiling came of age in the Roaring Twenties, and were among the most mechanical of built-ins (above). Rolling, tilting, sliding, and folding out of sight, mechanical space-savers like disappearing beds brought early-20th-century ingenuity to the built-in era (opposite).



## Care for Disappearing Stairs

Advice by William T. Cox Jr., Memphis

In old houses, disappearing stairs take their biggest beating from poor maintenance and rough handling, not age. If attic stuff is stored on the floor space reserved for the stair section of a sliding stairway, the door will not close properly. Forcing the door splits a stringer (one or two long wooden rails) along the guide channel. Slamming the door will also cause the stringers to split, cables to unwind, and the door to fall apart over time—just like repeatedly slamming a wooden screen door. If a cable turns loose, the spring will become back-wound, causing the spring to break.

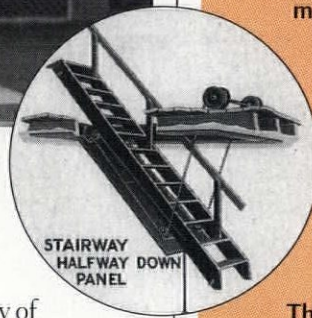
There are no generic parts for disappearing stairways, so they cannot be repaired if factory parts are unavailable. (Manufacture a part yourself and you have created your own stair, taking on all liability.) If stringers have split where they slide on the guidebars, it may be more practical to replace all hardware, wooden treads, and stringers. Most rough ceiling openings are standard and can be fitted with new stairs while saving the old trim. If the paneled door is in good condition and fits into the jamb, it can be reused.

companies merge or cease business, disappearing stairs that slide, fold, and scissor (in aluminum as well as wood) are still widely popular and available from long-time manufacturers—including Bessler.

**HIDE-AWAYS** “Well placed conveniences in the kitchen,” according to C.E. Schermerhorn in the 1913 *Bungalows, Camps, and Mountain Houses*, “consist of such things as a properly designed kitchen dresser, ironing board hinged and folded into a wall closet . . . a folding wall table and other accessories.” Which came first—a board for



Many a disappearing-stair company built its business on bungalows by saving space downstairs or opening the attic for living. Inset: Disappearing stairs that do not collapse in some way feature continuous stringers that slide down to the floor and tip back into the attic.



out committing a half hallway of carpentry to a full box staircase, a small house would reap a windfall of space. Stairs that swung into the ceiling did the trick.

One of the original disappearing stairways was the Bessler, first patented in 1910. It used spring-loaded drums wrapped with cables to counterbalance a door and single-piece stairway. When the door was lowered, the stairs slid out of the attic at 57 degrees—an angle that allowed the user to walk up as on a fixed staircase. When not in use, both stairs and door folded back into the ceiling. Other designs and manufacturers were quick to follow. Presto Disappearing Stairs did their best to clone the spring-and-cable idea, while the Marschke Company used hinged stairs that collapsed back on the door before folding skyward.

Bungalows, with their semi-second storeys, found a particular friend in disappearing stairs, and the feeling was mutual. Disappearing-stair manufacturers pushed the idea of attics as spare bedrooms, dens, offices, playrooms, and sewing rooms. A shop or storage loft was more practical than ever above that new satellite structure, the garage; you could even shut the door behind you by pulling up the stairs.

Although the 1990s have seen several



**TELEPHONE NICHE:** The “disappearing built-in” idea could be turned to hiding almost any device. A telephone niche keeps “all the ugly accessories out of sight,” yet “provides a definite place for the phone.”





Dining nooks that worked like a folding ironing board were out of the way when meals were done (above). "Convertible furniture economizes space," advised one '20s tastemaker. The folding ironing board was a favorite in servantless houses and apartments (right).

ironing or one for eating—is undetermined, but the emergence of a standardized, prefabricated cabinet industry make it all possible.

When electric irons became common after 1905, that chore was free to move from basements to friendlier rooms such as kitchen or bedroom. Since the board had to be stored in a cupboard anyway, it was soon hinged for speedy pressing and compact storage. The concept took off. For example, a "disappearing wall seat is handy in the bathroom or kitchen—it eliminates the necessity of a chair, which is always in the way," touted one manufacturer.

The kitchen breakfast nook, already "a modern, space-saving necessity" in the post-Victorian house of fewer, smaller rooms (and next-to-no servants), became even more efficient when it could be stowed out of sight after meals. Shipped ready for "instant installation," the typical nook was a 4"-deep cabinet designed to fit into standard stud spacing, so that frame sat flush with the wall.

Disappearing kitchen nooks and seats



sometimes pop up as custom cabinetry in such places as college dorms. The hide-away ironing board remains an popular prefab item for houses and apartments alike.

**DUMBWAITERS** Hand-operated dumbwaiters date to at least the mid-Victorian era, yet concealed in a wall they found a natural place among the mechanical built-ins of the early-20th century. Where the kitchen is in the basement and the dining room above, an "arrangement specially frequent in city houses," the dumbwaiter made quick, unobtrusive work of transporting meals and dinner ware. Between kitchen and basement, the cargo would be ice or food for storage. Dumbwaiters today are still manufactured by a half-dozen specialty companies. 🏠

## SUPPLIERS

**BESSLER STAIRWAY CO.**  
3807 Lamar Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Memphis, TN 38118  
(901) 360-1900  
Sliding and folding  
disappearing stairs.

**IRON-A-WAY, INC.**  
220 W. Jackson St.,  
Dept. OHJ  
Morton, IL 61550  
(309) 266-7232  
Ironing centers and other  
appliance built-ins.


**MILLER MANUFACTURING**  
165 Cascade Ct., Dept. OHJ  
Rohnert Park, CA 94928  
(800) 232-2177  
Manual dumbwaiters.

**MURPHY BED CO., INC.**  
42 Central Ave., Dept. OHJ  
Farmingdale, NY 11735  
(516) 420-4337  
Concealed wall-beds and  
cabinets.

**WAUPACA ELEVATOR CO.**  
P.O. Box 246, Dept. OHJ  
Waupaca, WI 54981  
(800) 238-8739  
Manual dumbwaiters.

**WHITCO/VINCENT  
WHITNEY CO.**  
P.O. Box 335, Dept. OHJ  
Sausalito, CA 94966  
(800) 332-3286  
Manual dumbwaiters.



A man in a red polo shirt and light-colored pants is shown from the side, focused on applying a roll of white tape to the green frame of a multi-paned window. He is holding the roll with his left hand and pulling a strip of tape with his right hand towards the window's sash. The window is set in a brick wall. The scene is well-lit, suggesting an indoor or sheltered outdoor environment.

If there's a wind-chill factor around your windows, use a gun-grade caulk for the frame and try a removable tape or rope caulk for the sash. If you've got access inside the walls, use an expanding foam insulator.



# Caulking about the Weather

How to choose and use adhesive sealants

*What if there were a substance that would boost heating and cooling efficiency and control moisture in kitchens and bathrooms, all while beautifying the old house? What if this product sold for only a few dollars at every hardware store and required no great skill to install? Chances are it would be one of the most common projects undertaken by homeowners.* **BY JOSH GARSKOF**

**T**HIS WINTER YOU'RE finally going to caulk the drafty frames around your doors and windows. At the supply house, you're confronted with hundreds of caulks, each promising better results than the last. With a shrug, you pick a good-looking one, take it home, and set to filling cracks. You fill and fill, wipe, and clean. The work looks good, but your pride wears off a year later when the caulk begins to crack and peel.

Because caulking is such a unceremonious, garden-variety chore, even the most diligent workers—homeowners and professionals alike—don't give it much thought. Yet it's not child's play. Sometimes you get away with the undisciplined approach, sometimes you don't. For all those caulkers out there, here are the fundamentals of elastomeric sealants, from picking the right caulk to creating a flexible, durable seal.

## Inside and Out

BEFORE WE GET TO THE NITTY GRITTY, let's review where caulk should be used on an old house, and where it

**With more than 200 U.S. manufacturers offering proprietary products, just figuring out which is right for your project is a daunting task. The best rule of thumb: spring for a high-end product and one with specs printed on the cartridge.**

shouldn't. Caulk can help insulate and weatherize, but this should be done from the inside. If the exterior is sealed up tight, humid interior air—filled with moisture from showers, food preparation, and houseplants—won't be able to get out. It may condense and puddle inside walls, ruining the caulk and worse. The interior of these walls should be sealed tighter than the exterior. That inhibits migration through the walls, but when some air inevitably gets through, it finds an easy exit.

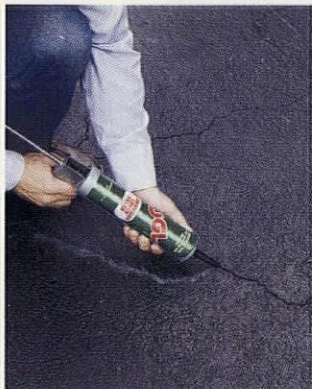
For the exterior, caulking should be limited to preventing rainwater infiltration. Caulk around windows

and doors and anywhere siding meets trim. Caulk the seams between dissimilar materials, such as chimney-to-siding joints and sill-to-foundation joints. Caulk cracks and water-faucet penetrations in clapboards and other siding, seams in gutters, splits in driveways, and around triple-track storm frames. Do not caulk the horizontal seams where clapboards overlap, between the boards that comprise the soffit, or anywhere else that's not subject to water infiltration.

Inside the house is where caulking can reduce heating bills. Thoroughly seal around windows, doors, vents, outlets, switches, fixtures, base-







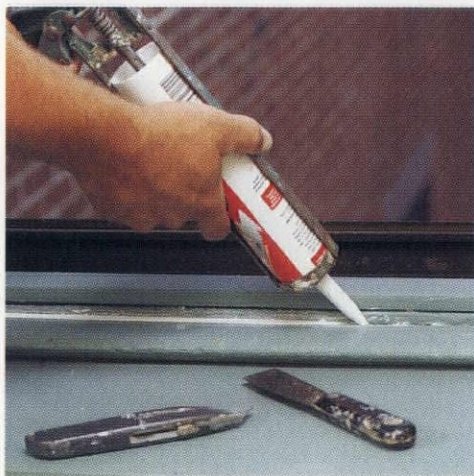
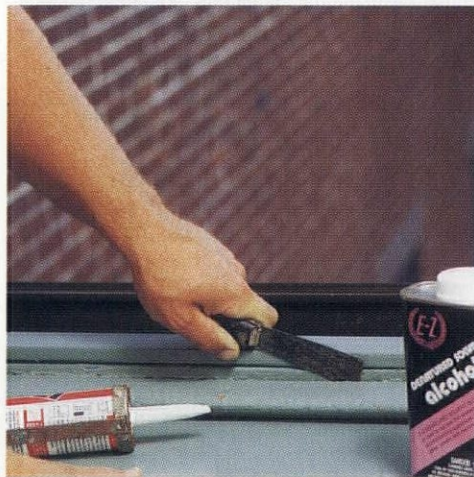
Butyl rubber and polyurethanes are preferred caulks for driveways and walkways where cars and people will abrade them.

boards, between floorboards, and any other place where heat and moisture can escape the living space. Also seal masonry basements—especially around pipe holes, sump pump covers, and where the floor meets walls—to block heat loss, moisture infiltration, and possibly radon gas. Caulk seams around fixtures and between surfaces in the kitchen and bathrooms to seal moisture out of walls and floors. In apartment houses, a good caulk job in the kitchen can keep roaches out.

### Stalking the Caulk Aisle

THE HARDEST PART OF THE JOB IS PICKING the right caulk. Early caulks consisted of mud, straw, sticks, or sod, then came putties made from animal fat or linseed oil, often mixed with lime or lead. Today, shelves are stocked with caulks made from latex, acrylics, butyl rubber, silicone, polyurethane, and specialty items with the very latest in promising polymers.

Technically, these substances are



Most of the heat that's lost through windows doesn't go out through the glass. It escapes through gaps and cracks in the window frame. Top: Make sure to clear out any old caulk or filler, and loose paint and dirt. Bottom: The "pushing" technique, where you caulk away from your body, takes practice, but produces an effective joint.



Use of an air regulator on the compressor or the line is highly recommended for pneumatic caulking. Too much pressure can be explosive.

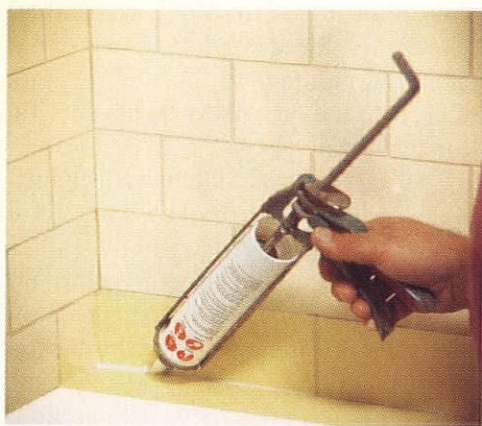
sealants: they adhere to both sides of a gap to create a watertight bond. To work, a sealant must flex as the two sides move. Buildings (and the earth itself) shift, building materials shrink and swell with changing temperature and humidity levels, and old-house residents cause its parts to move. Caulk must stretch and compress to handle this movement without pulling off the substrate or ripping.

Exteriors need the most flexible caulks because temperature and humidity vary the most, causing gaps to grow and shrink. This is especially true when you're sealing dissimilar materials because they react differently to climatic changes. The caulk must be moisture and mildew resistant and must perform well under ultraviolet light exposure. You also may want a product with rust inhibitors to prevent leaching of rust from nails and flashing.

Interior woodwork generally doesn't need a super-duper caulk. The material will not be subject to the extremes of the outdoors, and will generally be painted. Painters often use a vinyl latex caulk, an inexpensive option that doesn't offer high flexibility or moisture resistance. If you're sealing near heat or cold sources or in moist areas, go for a better product.

Kitchens and bathrooms require a material that adheres to the non-porous surface of tiles and porcelain fixtures and possibly also to porous woodwork and plaster. It should resist moisture and mildew. And the caulk will need at least moderate flexibility to handle temperature and humidity changes, especially in bathrooms.





### Getting Preppy

CAULK WON'T ADHERE TO A DIRTY SUBSTRATE. Good prep work is at least as important for caulking as it is for painting.

Concrete and mortar should be fully cured and dry. For old stone, brick, and concrete, remove dirt and efflorescence by wire brushing. Remove all protective coatings and water repellents. Clean stone and metal with a solvent such as methyl ethyl ketone, but do not use solvents on concrete because they can just push dirt into the pores. A powerful vacuum or oil-free compressor is useful to clean out loose dirt. Some caulks require a special primer to prepare a porous substrate (check the cartridge).

Glazed tile and glass should be dry and free of old caulk, soap scum, dirt, and mildew. Washing with soap and water leaves a residue of its own. Better is a solvent such as isopropyl alcohol. Always wipe away solvents with a dry rag before they evaporate. Remove mold and mildew with a solution of one part bleach and two parts water.

Wood should be dry and dust-free. Any loose paint or old caulk should be

scraped away with a paint scraper, window bar, or razor blade. Stubborn caulks and putties can be softened with a heat gun or a hair dryer. For weathered wood, and other highly porous materials, sand or wire brush to provide a sound, clean substrate.

### Moving with the Groove

FOR WORKING JOINTS (WHERE THE SUBSTRATE WILL MOVE), caulk should be able to flex 25%. That means the material will stretch or compress for a total of 25% of the original joint width. It's best to create the joint when it's about halfway between the extremes. This means in the spring or fall (or at least in moderate temperatures) for exterior work and some interior weatherizing. For the seam around the top of bathtubs, consider filling the tub halfway with water before laying the bead. This weighs down the tub, expanding the gap to about its midpoint. (This approach does make applying it more interesting.) Caulk it and let dry 24 hours before draining the water or using the tub.

It's important to get the dimensions of the joint right. For a 1/4" to 1/2" wide gap,

**Above:** For a neat caulk joint, especially in kitchens and bathrooms and other areas where it won't be painted, mask the gap to prevent sealant smears on exposed visible surfaces. (It's especially tough to get caulk off porous surfaces like the grout between tiles). **Top left:** Lay masking tape along each edge of the gap, so that the full width of the seam is exposed, but not the surface. **Bottom left:** Be sure to remove the tape before the caulk begins to skin over.



the sealant should be  $\frac{1}{4}$ " deep. For a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 1" joint, it should be half as deep as it is wide. For gaps in masonry wider than 1", the caulk should be no greater than  $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick. For wider masonry gaps and gaps more than 1" between other materials, consult the caulk manufacturer.

For working joints, the caulk joint should have an hourglass shape. That pro-

vides thickness at the sides where it adheres, and a thinner middle, which can expand and contract. If the middle is too thick, the product will not be flexible. Too thin and it will tear.

It's also crucial that the caulk adhere to each side but not to the substrate behind the gap. Caulk is flexible when it can expand and contract between two points. But if it's attached to a third, it's prevented from stretching, and it may rip or pull away from one side.

You can best achieve both an hourglass shape and two-sided adhesion by using a backer rod, a polyethylene or polyurethane foam dowel. Select a slightly oversized backer rod so it stays put. An alternative to backer rod is filling the void with fiberglass insulation. Where the gap is too shallow for a filler, but three-sided adhesion is a concern, use bond breaker (polyethylene tape).

### Gun Control

TIME TO POP A CARTRIDGE INTO YOUR CAULK gun and go to work. Cut the tip at  $45^\circ$  so you can hold the gun comfortably at an angle and the tip will be parallel to the surface. Cut the tip where its diameter matches the diameter of the gap your filling. (If the gap is wider than the nozzle, chances are it's too wide for the product.)

Do not apply caulk when the temperature is below the recommendation on the cartridge (generally  $40^\circ$  to  $50^\circ$ ). In conditions cooler than that, caulk doesn't gun or adhere well. Also the joint may contain moisture in the form of frost. If you have no choice but to caulk in cold weather, store the cartridges in a heated area at working temperature for at least 16 hours before use.

Manufacturers recommend "pushing" the caulk into the joint, working away from yourself. This has the advantage of forcing the caulk into the gap and creating a nice bead. Yet most professionals seem to prefer "pulling," starting at the far end and working toward the body. This feels more comfortable (especially to novices) and allows you to see ahead of the caulk. Either way, the key is to squeeze out an even, full bead of caulk, free of air bubbles and with a uniform volume. Then, at the end, release the pressure just at the right time to complete

## Guns for Hire

For tiny projects—say, caulking around a tub or a window—caulk is available in toothpaste tube-like containers that hold 2 to 6 ounces. At the other end of the spectrum are bulk-loading guns (above) and 5-gallon and larger tubs of caulk that are dispensed through industrial pneumatic systems. For most old-house projects, the standard 10-ounce cartridge is the best caulk system. It's convenient and economical for anything from caulking a bathroom to completely weatherizing the old house. It requires a caulk gun. Aside from hand-strength and experience, the biggest determining factor in laying a nice caulk bead will be the quality of the gun.

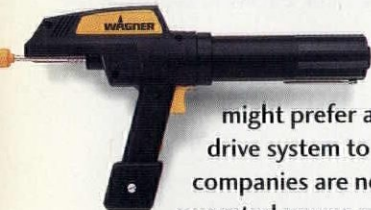
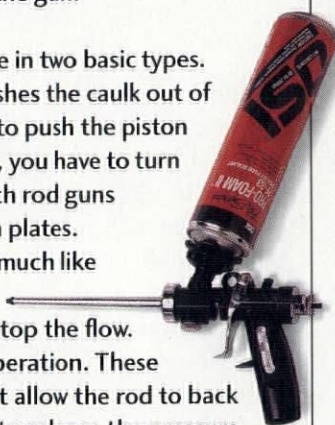
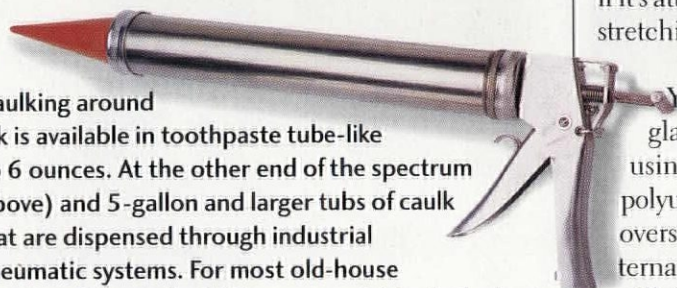


**HAND GUNS** Hand-operated guns (above) come in two basic types. Ratchet guns (top) have a notched piston that pushes the caulk out of the cartridge. Squeezing the handle causes a dog to push the piston forward. To stop the caulk flow after laying a bead, you have to turn the piston so the ratchet disconnects. With smooth rod guns (bottom), the piston is activated by metal friction plates. Squeezing the handle moves them along the bar, much like the operation of a bar clamp. These guns have the advantage of a quick-release thumb plate to stop the flow.

The latest in hand caulking guns is drip-free operation. These guns have rubber sleeves in their mechanisms that allow the rod to back up slightly after each squeeze, so you don't have to release the pressure by hand. Other options include either a cartridge cradle (inexpensive) or parallel frame (lies flat in tool bag). Foam insulating caulks are sprayed into voids from pressurized canisters (above).

**AUTOMATIC WEAPONS** For big jobs, you might prefer a power caulk gun, most of which use a screw drive system to dispense caulk without any muscle. Many companies are now offering battery-

operated power caulkers with rechargeable battery packs (left). You can also get pneumatic guns that operate with a small compressor. At least one company is selling a caulk gun that operates as an attachment to a power drill (right). Whatever power caulk you select, make sure it offers variable-speed caulking and that it has an automatic system that eliminates spillage.





## A STICKY SUBJECT

Caulk chemistry improves every year, with longer-lasting, more flexible materials and easier application. Many manufacturers offer unique, proprietary products with their own mixtures of standard or unique ingredients. The following are the most common caulks for old-house use.

	BEST USES	FLEXIBILITY	ADHESION	DURABILITY	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
LATEX	Interior wood	± 5%	Porous materials	Fair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paintable</li> <li>• Water cleanup</li> <li>• Fast-curing</li> <li>• Inexpensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't use for moist or high movement joints</li> <li>• Poor bonding to non-porous surfaces</li> </ul>
ACRYLIC LATEX	Interior and exterior wood	± 20%	Porous materials	Very Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paintable</li> <li>• Water cleanup</li> <li>• Fast-curing</li> <li>• UV resistant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not for moist areas</li> <li>• Fair adhesion to non-porous materials</li> </ul>
SILICONE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glass, porcelain, metal and other non-porous materials</li> <li>• Primed wood</li> </ul>	± 25% - ±50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-porous materials</li> <li>• Painted/primed wood</li> <li>• Effective for adhesive uses</li> </ul>	Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best adhesion and flexibility</li> <li>• Handles temperature swings</li> <li>• UV resistant</li> <li>• Non-shrinking</li> <li>• Applies below freezing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-paintable</li> <li>• Doesn't adhere to porous materials</li> <li>• Solvent cleanup</li> <li>• Not for use on masonry</li> </ul>
ACRYLIC LATEX W/SILICONE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All purpose caulk</li> <li>• Interior/exterior</li> <li>• Kitchens &amp; baths</li> </ul>	± 25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Porous &amp; non-porous</li> <li>• Effective for adhesive uses</li> </ul>	Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paintable</li> <li>• Water cleanup</li> <li>• UV resistant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less effective than pure silicones for non-porous materials</li> </ul>
POLYURETHANE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All purpose caulk</li> <li>• Interior/exterior</li> <li>• Kitchens &amp; baths</li> <li>• Walks and drives</li> </ul>	± 25% - ±50%	Porous & non-porous	Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paintable</li> <li>• Seals wide gaps</li> <li>• Moisture &amp; UV resistant</li> <li>• Handles abrasion</li> <li>• Low shrinkage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard to apply</li> <li>• Solvent cleanup</li> </ul>
BUTYL RUBBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exterior metal &amp; masonry</li> <li>• Gutters, foundations</li> <li>• Walks &amp; drives</li> <li>• Flashing, chimneys</li> </ul>	± 10%	Porous & non-porous	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paintable</li> <li>• Handles temperature extremes</li> <li>• UV resistant</li> <li>• OK for below grade use (not below waterline)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard to apply</li> <li>• Solvent cleanup</li> <li>• Doesn't produce finish-quality joint</li> </ul>

the joint without squirting out excess caulk. Caulk enough joints and you'll get the touch (so start with less visible areas).


### Tooling Along

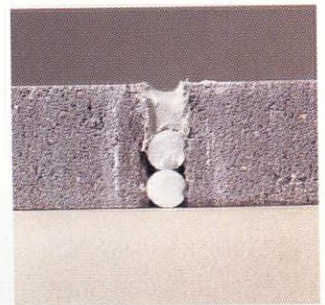
MOST CAULKS SHOULD BE TOOLED. THIS IS more than wiping away messy excess. It forces the material into the gap, fills voids, pushes it against the sides for good adhesion, and produces a concave surface. Tool the joint before it skins over, generally 5 to 15 minutes.

The most obvious, and most common, object used to tool the joint is a wet finger. It's the perfect size and shape, and it's handy. Yet you'll run out of clean fingers quickly and it's a slippery slope to spreading caulk where you don't want it. Also some caulks contain toxins, and some bond amazingly well to skin, making cleanup difficult. The best tool is a caulk spatula, es-

sentially a metal putty knife with a rounded end. Otherwise, use a plastic spoon, wood tongue depressor, or metal butter knife. For those who can't resist the finger technique, wrap your digit in a rag or plastic food wrap, or wear rubber gloves. No matter what tool you use, dipping it in water will make the process easier and less messy.

Tool the joint only once. Don't dab at the caulk, but tool it smoothly from end to end. Rather than tooling toward your previous work, as with painting, work away from it. Press the caulk in place as you go. For porous materials especially, the caulk must be pressed against the substrate to adhere.

After the caulk has cured for 24 hours, clean excess and spills with a razor blade. Your well-engineered seals are going to last, and you won't have to break out the caulking clothes again for a while. 



**Backer rod assures that the caulk joint is not too thick. Plus, it provides insulation, prevents excessive caulk use, supports the bead during tooling, and prevents sagging of the caulk as it dries.**



# Power Drill Tune-Up

by Gordon Bock



COMMUTATOR

CHUCK

GEARS

BEARINGS

COOLING FAN

UNIVERSAL AC MOTOR

BRUSHES

VARIABLE SPEED SWITCH UNIT

A professional-quality  $\frac{3}{8}$ " corded drill may cost over \$100. Take care of it: failure of any of its parts can make it worthless.

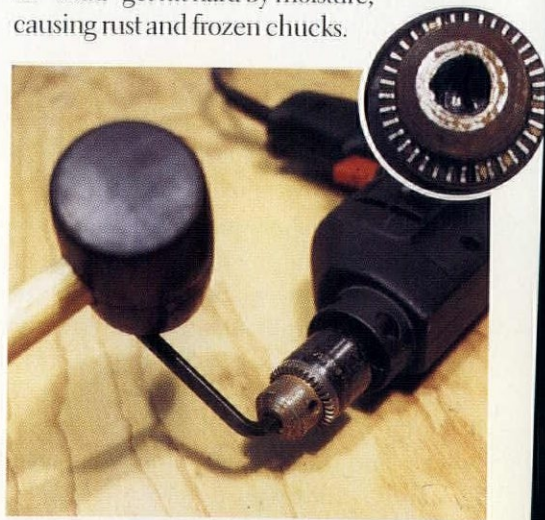
**P**OWER DRILLS OF ONE breed or another are essential for restoring old houses, but what about the upkeep and and up-grade of power drills? Unfortunately, they're usually treated like disposable tools. This is too bad because most professional-quality power tools are built to be repairable. Manufacturers recommend that you take your drill to a factory representative for major service. Before you do, some simple practices will help keep it drilling.

## Blowin' in the Windings

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO ENHANCE the life of your drill is to regularly blow the body free of dust with a blast of compressed air from a can or hose. Dirt that accumulates near the cooling fan or covers the motor's field coils reduces the air flow so the drill doesn't cool properly or run well. Plaster dust is a particular problem in drywall drivers.

## Check-Up for Chucks

IF THE MOTOR IS THE HEART OF AN ELECTRIC drill, the chuck—the device that centers and holds the various bits—is certainly its hands. An occasional touch of light oil, such as WD-40, will keep jaws moving freely and guard against rust. Most important, keep the chuck away from water. Drills used by plumbers or for mixing cement or plaster "mud" get hit hard by moisture, causing rust and frozen chucks.



A hex wrench will unthread a chuck. If the retaining screw (inset) won't budge, first try slightly tightening the chuck on the shaft.



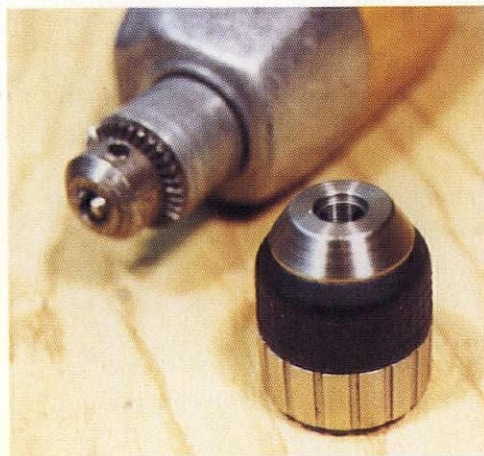
When jaws wear beyond the point of gripping, it's time for a new chuck. First unplug the drill or remove the battery. Next, open the chuck so the jaws are at their widest and remove the reverse-thread retaining screw in the center by turning it clockwise while you hold the chuck steady. (It's usually slotted; note, too, that some chucks mount on a tapered, unthreaded shaft and have to be wedged off.) Save this screw.

Then unthread the chuck from the spindle. A good way to initially "break" the threads is to chuck a hex wrench in the drill, place the tool on a workbench, then strike the wrench with a rubber hammer so the chuck turns counterclockwise. To install a new chuck, thread it on clockwise and replace the screw using a little Loctite.

The original Jacobs chuck should last the life of a professional-quality drill. However, you may want to remove a geared chuck to update with a keyless chuck. "It's hard to find a cordless drill without a keyless chuck these days," notes Leslie Banduch of Porter Cable tools.

### Brushing Up on Brushes

BRUSHES ARE LITTLE SPRING-LOADED BLOCKS of carbon on opposite sides of the drill housing that supply the rotating motor armature with electricity. "Brushes last a long time in the direct current produced by batteries," reports Kent Sparks at Hitachi Power Tools, so they're rarely a maintenance item for cordless drills. On corded drills, however, alternating current eventually takes its toll. When a brush wears out, an automatic safe-



Although keyless chucks are larger and don't reach some of the tight places a geared chuck can go, they are easier to use.

guard such as a moving insulator or wire tether prevents the last piece of carbon from falling out of the holder (an Underwriters' Laboratories safety requirement). The brush can't make contact with the armature either, so the drill stops working.

Most brushes have a life of 100 to 300 hours—the equivalent of 3 to 5 years of active drill use. Drill brushes were once a common user-serviceable part; today few manufacturers design housings with external brush covers for easy access. Since you'll have to go to a service center for exact replacements anyway, it often pays to have them change the brushes, too. Also, they can clean and relube the gears and check the bearings on the armature (closest to the air vent).

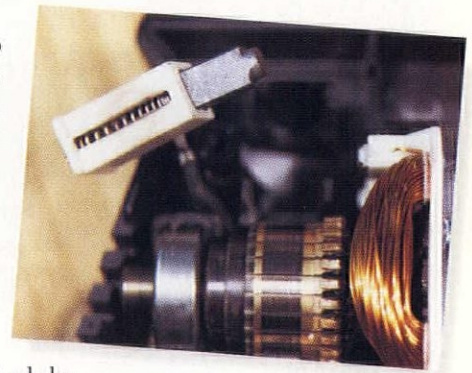
### Electrical Advice

REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT OF THE ELECTRIC power cord remains the top maintenance item on corded drills. Double insulated drills (those with non-conducting plastic housings) take a grounded plug. Drills with metal housings—which still meet safety codes if the tool is in good condition and plugged into a proper power source—must be grounded through a three-conductor power cord and plug. If the insulating jacket is cut or crushed, it's best to replace the entire cord, especially if you can upgrade the original plastic power cord with a more flexible rubber version.

Don't ignore extension cords, either. Regularly powering a drill through a long cord can cause a voltage drop at the tool, particularly when the cord runs other tools or the wire size is skimpy. "Power tools are designed around 120 volts; even a 10% voltage drop accelerates wear on the drill as a whole," according to Albert Kunz of Skil-Bosch Tools. The motor spins slower so there is less air through the tool, and the motor draws more current so it runs hotter. Stick to at least 14-gauge wire for cords 50 to 100 ft. long (safe for 13 amps), and check the owner's manual for recommended lengths based on the drill's current rating.

One of the best drill maintenance steps is just using the tool. Idle power drills collect dust and corrosion on metal parts, internally as well as externally.

Springs help brushes keep their continuity with the moving armature commutator; in many drills they are replaced as an assembly.



### Chuck it Right

Although the machine world has several different kinds of drill-bit shanks—tapered, keyed, Morse—and an assortment of chucks to hold them, the standard three-jawed chuck used almost universally on portable power tools is the Jacobs chuck. The beauty of this design is that it securely grasps a wide range of bit diameters—but only if you use it correctly. You must tighten each of the three holes on the chuck rim. That's right, they're not just there for convenience. When you tighten only one hole, you're pressing against the shank of the drill with just one jaw.



# Coming Home

*An American architect leaves Paris for her hometown*

BY REGINA COLE

**T**HIS OLD-HOUSE OWNER IS AN architect known for her avant-garde projects around the world. How would she approach an aging brick house in a historic neighborhood in Rochester, New York? More to the point, why would an architect with an international clientele move from Paris to Rochester?

After living in Europe for most of her adult life, Marga Jann moved to her childhood home of Rochester for two reasons: to establish an American office for her architectural firm, Poetic License, and to give her two teenaged daughters the benefit of life in America. Now Marga's home and office are in a house in a historic district that she considers one of this country's best-kept secrets.

"Initially, I considered moving to New York City or San Francisco," Marga says. "But I wanted a relatively quiet urban community. I just loved all the ma-



jestic mansions along East Avenue in Rochester, and the sidewalk cafes of nearby Park Avenue were reminiscent of Paris." She points out that Toronto and New York, "two of the western hemisphere's great cities," are readily accessible from Rochester.

The house she picked was built ca. 1910 for the chancellor of the University of Rochester. East Avenue has been called "two miles of what is possibly the best-preserved turn-of-the-century boulevard in the United States." There are 68 mansions within that two-mile stretch, including the George Eastman House (as in Eastman-Kodak) and

a classic Prairie-style home by Frank Lloyd Wright.

One of the East Avenue mansions, the big old house was spacious enough to house both her office and her family. "I wanted to be close and available for my French-speaking daughters," Marga explains. "When we first got here in 1992, they spoke perfect English, but they hadn't yet learned to read or write the language."

## A Little More Than Cosmetic

THE MOVE PRESENTED A FEW NEW CHALLENGES TO AN architect more accustomed to planning new construction. "This house had been let go about 20 years too long," says Marga Jann. "It had all the usual problems: plumbing that didn't go where it was supposed to, wiring about to burn the house down, terrible bathrooms. In addition, there were bats, rats, and pigeons in residence."

Along with infrastructure decay and non-human inhabitants, however, the once-elegant house offered mosaics, relief carvings, moulded details, big windows, and spacious, well-proportioned rooms. Its basic structure was sound.

"This house was built like a fort," says Marga. "We did enormous amounts of cosmetic work, but nothing structural at all."

**Left: Built during the first decade of this century, the house is elegant and substantial. Above: Marga Jann.**

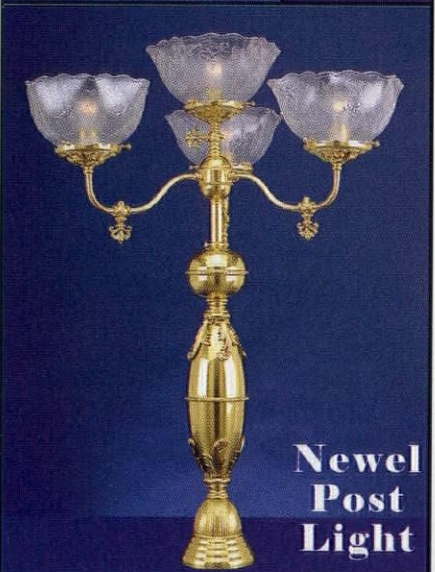
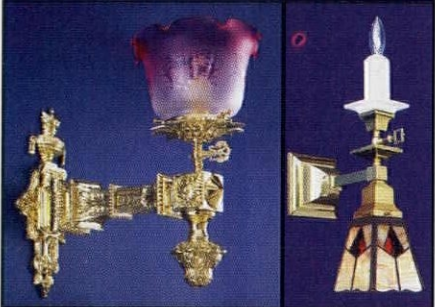
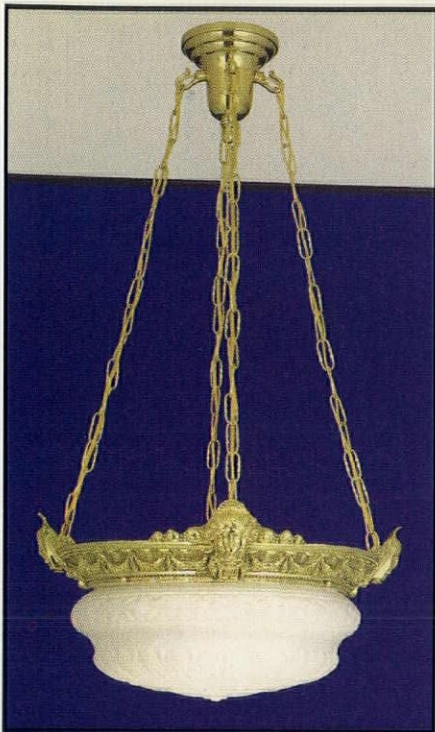






A view of the living room shows some of the beautiful interior details that survived years of neglect.





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Turning this house into a home was a different sort of project for this architect. Marga Jann has designed hotels and resorts in Johannesburg and Morocco, a museum in Kuwait City, a cultural and recreational center in Paris, and the U.S. ambassador's residence in Moscow. Working on the East Avenue house required sensitivity to its mature charm.

"We used quilts and family heirlooms to cover large walls and to disguise uneven walls and floors. We found furnishings and equip-

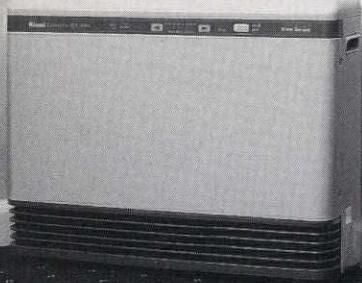
ment, scavenger-style, at flea markets and antiques fairs."

Jann's house has not been identified by architect or builder. Nor is it a premier example of any particular style. "It's not one of the more arresting houses in the neighborhood," she laughs. "I think of the style as sort of Swiss Tudor."

It may be undefined by style. But the American home of Poetic License and Margo Jann's family is a decidedly American old house, situated in a graceful old neighborhood.



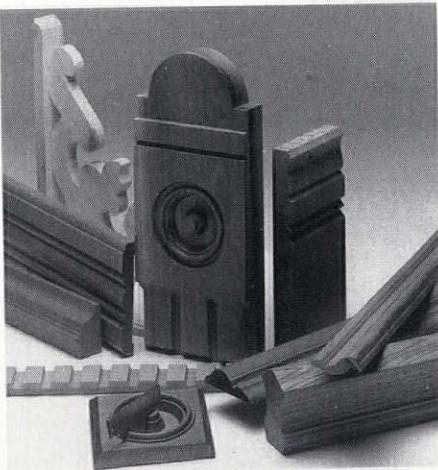
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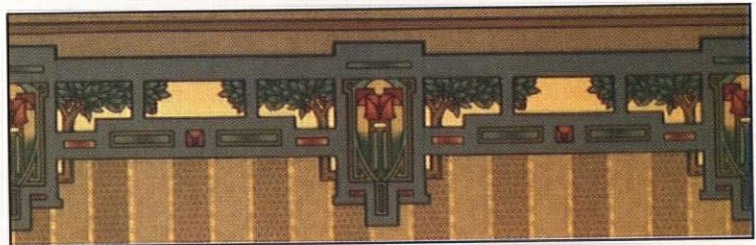
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# Three for Style Sense

BY PATRICIA POORE

**W**HEN YOU BUY AN OLD HOUSE TO RESTORE IT, you naturally take some interest in its history. What's original and what's been added? What's missing? What style is my house, you ask (and does it *have* a style?). The answers are easier to come by if you live in a landmark Federal or a perfect Italian Villa. Most of us, however, live in houses that defy neat categorization. We need help understanding the influences behind the way our houses look. My own house, for example, is best described as Shingle style owing to its 1904 date and its seaside New England location. But one façade is heavily Tudor influenced, one is Colonial Revival, and the whole package is eccentric because of the site and changes made during construction.

Back in the 1970s, when I was learning about old houses, most architectural style books were heavily academic, with hardly any pictures. Today you can buy everything from pocket field guides to expensive coffee-table books. I can't pick just one as best for everybody—but I offer you this triumvirate. Read all three and you'll be an expert.

*House Styles in America* may be my sentimental favorite, and not just because it was I who commissioned it from *OHJ* contributors Jim Massey and Shirley Maxwell. I also love its reason for being. The authors' knowledge of old buildings is neither academic nor elitist, but rather springs from an insatiable interest in real houses, in regional variants, in the delightfully messy architectural record.

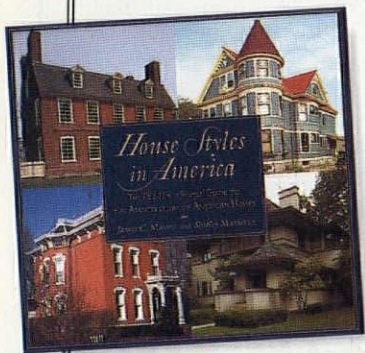
This is the first guide to combine social and architectural history in readable chapters illustrated with full-color photos. You'll probably skip straight to the chapter that describes your house, of course. But then please open to the Introduction and read the

whole book like the story it is. Twenty-one approachable chapters cover 300 years, from first-period houses in the Virginia Colony and Massachusetts Bay, through the colonial period, Federal and Greek Revival, Victorian styles, Arts & Crafts, the Romantic Revivals, and even modern styles. In their articles for this magazine as in their book, Jim and Shirley have dealt seriously with vernacular structures; they have explained the difference between a cornice and a corbel; they have made it okay to love your old house even if it isn't a textbook example of "style."

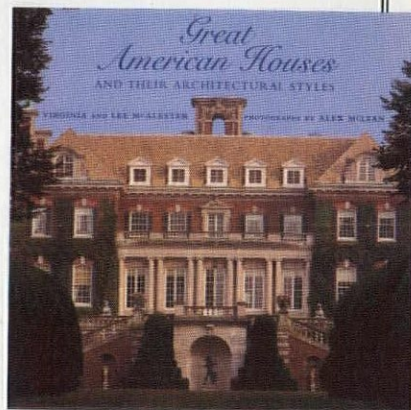
These architectural historians take seriously, too, the houses of the early 20th century: American Foursquares, Bungalows and Craftsman houses, transitional Free Classics, Tudor Revival houses. From the beginning, Jim and Shirley have encouraged *Old-House Journal's* foray into this uncharted architectural territory, contributing their own insights in a decade of articles. This book chronicles the first generation of scholarship on the subject.

IF YOU ARE A NOVICE AT OLD-house watching, you'll have approached the Massey-Maxwell book as a pictorial introduction to styles. In fact, few are the real houses that fit neatly into a category of style; most buildings exhibit a range of influences. It's time to graduate to a "field guide" that

[continued on page 54]



PENGUIN, 1996. 262 PAGES, HARDCOVER. THROUGH BOOKSTORES, OR BY MAIL FROM OLD-HOUSE BOOKSHOP: ORDER ITEM #R112, \$36.95 PPD., (800) 931-2931.



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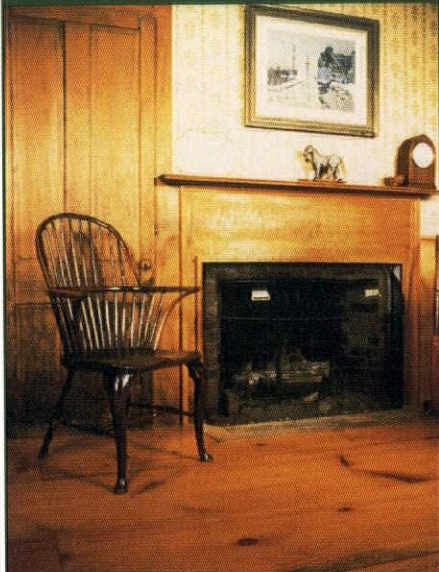


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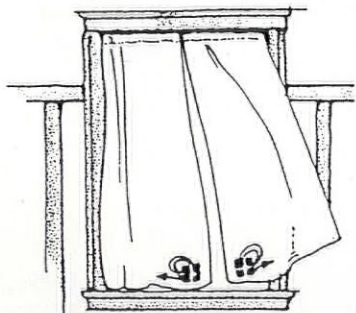


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[continued from page 52]  
takes apart buildings by year and by region and by stylistic details. At *OHJ*, we've been using the McAlesters' book as a desk reference since its first publication years ago. I might pick it up to help me date a questionable building, or to look up a dormer type or cornice detail. A *Field Guide to American Houses* explains style in depth, looking at both massing (or shape) of the building and its details (such as windows

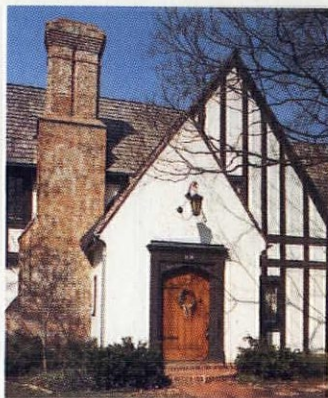
and doors, porch trim, and so on). Simply scanning the thousands of thumbnail illustrations makes you better able to "read" buildings.

In each chapter, a large drawing highlights the style's identifying features; this is followed by smaller drawings of subtypes and typical details. The text is easy to understand, discussing essential styles and anomalies. Generic drawings then give way to black-and-white photos of real buildings, with locations and dates of construction. I learned much about regional variants here. It's a welcome dose of reality, too; very often, real buildings in a particular style were built a good decade after style books say the fashion faded!

THIS LAST BOOK MAY SEEM AN ARCAIC luxury: sixty dollars to read about twenty-five fancy houses. It is, however, a masterwork, and everything about the book makes you want to own it. It is comprehensive, surprisingly; it is perfectly organized, beautifully written (by the McAlesters of the *Field Guide*), gorgeously photographed, and full of thought-

ful "gifts" for the avidly engaged reader (such as elegant and educational line drawings).

When I first read this book, I had a picture in my mind of an architectural illiterate getting hold of it and being won over: "My goodness," anyone with an ounce of sensibility would think, "these houses are *national treasures!*" In that respect, *Great American Houses* is a general-interest landmark, like a book on the National Parks. But it will be treasured



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even more by those already versed in style, for it presents a sumptuous record of America's icons of residential architecture, in full color and accompanied by text and drawings that provide context. You've been invited into the great houses, you may linger over the details, you may go back as often as you like.


The 25 houses are presented to you by styles within periods. The range is magnificent, from a first-period English house in Saugus, Massachusetts, to the International-style Walter Gropius house, and from Maine to California. Most are familiar: Lyndhurst, A.J. Davis's Gothic castle on the Hudson; Chateau-sur-Mer in Newport; the Gilded-Age Mark Twain house; mysterious Vizcaya in Miami, Florida; the Gamble House in Pasadena by the Greene brothers. But you'll be happy to discover several houses that are less well known. All are open to the public.

These books prove that American houses, from the great to the vernacular, are indeed a subject worthy of study, not to mention a source of great pleasure.






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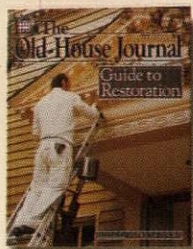
# OLD - HOUSE

## OLD - HOUSE JOURNAL TITLES

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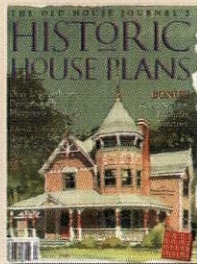
### NEW!!

#### House Styles in America

by James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell—Neither an academic treatise nor a tour of the "great houses," this useful, full-color guide looks at house types from early settlement days through the building booms early in this century and beyond: saltbox to split-level. The focus is on typical houses in neighborhoods across America.

Of special note is the discussion of post-Victorian types: Foursquares and homesteads; Colonial, Spanish, and Tudor Revivals; Bungalows; mail-order houses. The coverage of Victorian house types, from Greek and Italianate through Shingle style, is comprehensive. *Hardbound, 262 pages, 200 color plates.*

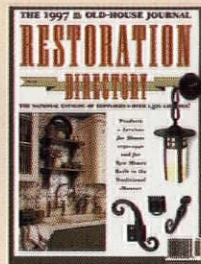
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The best selection of authentic, period house plans from the colonial, Victorian, and early 20th-century eras. OHJ plans are drawn by reputable architects across the country who specialize in reproduction houses. Authentic exteriors are combined with gently updated floor plans. In typical OHJ fashion, we describe every plan's style and original date, region, and special features. Styles include farmhouse and saltbox, Queen Anne and Mansard, gambrel and Georgian, Tudor and Craftsman, plus Tidewater, Creole, etc. Garages and gazebos are included. 100 sources for reproduction building materials that lend authenticity. *Softbound, 154 pages.*

#ND0083, \$14.50 ppd.



### UPDATED!

#### The OHJ Restoration Directory

Twenty years of contacts have resulted in this comprehensive directory

of suppliers who make everything from parquet flooring and hand-operated dumbwaiters to Empire sofas and Craftsman hardware. Building materials (antique brick), parts (cornices and fretwork), fixtures (copper bathtubs), decorative accessories (embossed wallcoverings), and furnishings (Victorian chandeliers and Stickley sideboards)—it's all here. A Yellow-Pages type listing is organized by product; addresses and phone numbers of over 1,500 companies selling nationwide through mail order or distributors. If you're looking for the stuff "nobody makes anymore," or you want the top of the line, this is for you. *Softbound, 258 pages.*

#ND0067, \$14.95 ppd.

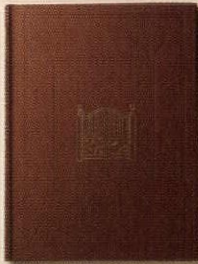
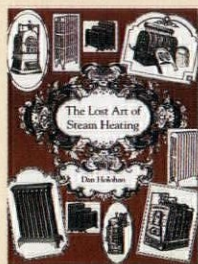
## BEST-SELLING HOW-TO BOOKS

### The Lost Art of Steam Heating

by Dan Holohan—OHJ subscriber and frequent contributor Dan Holohan "wrote the book" on steam heating, a superior method of central heating that nevertheless provides plenty of headaches for old-house dwellers. This is the kind of manual we love: a serious treatment of a specific topic, well organized, clear, and concise, but delivered with ease and humor. It's a personal, idiosyncratic publication that will truly help you with your steam heating woes.

Dan takes you into the whys and how-tos pretty quickly with helpful drawings along the way. Chapters include those on one-pipe and two-pipe systems, traps, and how to size replacement steam boilers. The plumbing information is first-rate. *Softbound, 296 pages.*

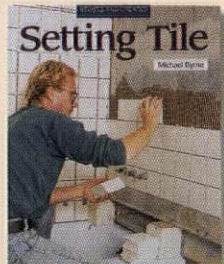
#ND106, \$37.50 ppd.



### Fences

by Peter Joel Harrison—OHJ reader Harrison produced this hardbound pattern book as a labor of love. Illustrated with line drawings on matte paper, it's a reminder of days when fence-building was architecture. Chapters: posts, pales, pickets, board fences, piers, caps, urns, and balls for posts and piers. If your house was built before 1860—or is a later classical revival style—this book will give you authentic designs for a reproduction fence. *Hardbound, 156 pages, 92 illustrations.*

#ND107, \$29 ppd.



### Setting Tile

by Michael Byrne—This book can save you money on labor even as you use high-quality materials. It's a very nicely illustrated how-to book that takes you through the process, from layout (even multi-room layout) through grouting. Both thinset and mortar-bed applications are discussed in detail. Floors, showers, countertops, and fireplaces are covered. A section on repair work is included, too. A beginner will understand the techniques presented in this book. More advanced tilers will learn about modern waterproofing materials, etc., and pick up a few innovations from the author, a professional tiler and consultant. *Softbound, 232 pages.*

#ND104, \$22.95 ppd.







# RESTORATION

## BRUSH OFF

MOST HOME CENTERS don't carry specialty paint brushes for old-house jobs, such as oval brushes for painting divided-light sash or hockey-stick brushes for getting behind radiators. Yet Torrington Brush Works has been selling quality brushes since 1907, and their mail-order catalog contains any brush you'll need for your old house: synthetic and china bristle paint brushes, wire brushes, soldering brushes, glue brushes, and window cleaning brushes. The sash brushes shown cost from \$1.64 to \$5.41 depending on their size. Torrington Brush Works has two distribution centers: P.O. Box 56, Dept. OHJ, Torrington, CT 06790, (800) 262-7874 and 4366 Independence Court, Dept. OHJ, Sarasota, FL 34234, (800) 525-1416.



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## ARTS & CRAFTS PRINTS

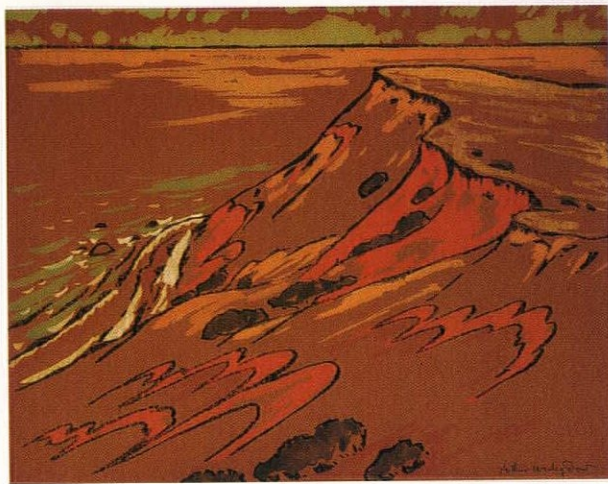
STEVEN THOMAS BUYS AND sells period artwork. He offers a host of American and European prints, paintings, and posters from the 1880s to the 1950s, but specializes in woodblock prints from the Arts & Crafts period. Many are still in their original frames. The antique, one-of-a-kind stock





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in the characteristics you need for a project (strength, hardness, color, weight, etc.), and the program will specify woods that fit the bill. You can even see a color picture of the wood on screen. The disk costs \$99. A smaller version lists the 35 most common North American species for \$9.95. Another is available on floppy disk for \$19.95. Order from Tree Talk, P.O. Box 426, Dept. OHJ, Burlington, VT 05402, (800) 858-6230.





# HOW TO ORDER OUR PLANS



Mail-order plans have a long history in shaping the residential architecture of the country. Of the thousands of house plans available today, few exhibit good design and a grasp of historical proportion and detail. So, in response to requests from OHJ readers, the editors have "done the homework": We've hand-picked plans. In each issue, we offer the most attractive, authentic, and buildable of the historical designs, from all periods of American architectural history. Let us know what plans you're looking for.

You can order actual blueprints for all the houses featured. These plans are designed to conform to national building-code standards. However, the requirements of your site and local building codes mean you'll probably need the assistance of a professional designer (your builder may qualify) or an architect.

For the houses shown in this issue, blueprints include:

- Detailed floor plans showing dimensions for framing. Some may also have detailed layouts and show the location of electrical and plumbing components.
- Interior elevations are included in some plans, showing interior views of kitchen, bath, fireplace, built-ins, and cabinet designs.
- Building cross sections: cornice, fireplace, and cabinet sections when needed to help your builder understand major interior details.
- Framing diagrams that

show layouts of framing pieces and their locations for roof, first, and second floors.

- Energy-saving specs, where noteworthy, are included, such as vapor barriers, insulated sheathing, caulking and foam-sealant areas, batt insulation, and attic exhaust ventilators.

- May include foundation plan for basement or crawl space. (Crawl space plans can easily be adapted for full basements by your builder.)

Why order multiple sets? If you're serious about building, you'll need a set each for the general contractor, mort-

gage lender, electrician, plumber, heating/ventilating contractor, building permit department, other township use or interior designer, and one for yourself. Ordering the 8-set plan saves money and additional shipping charges.

**Other notes: (1) Plans are copyrighted, and they are printed for you when you order. Therefore, they are not refundable.**

If you would like information on ordering more than eight sets of the same plan, please call our Customer Service Department

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(2) Mirror-reverse plans are useful when the house would fit the site better "flopped." For this you need one set of mirror-reverse plans for the contractor; but because the reverse plans have backwards lettering and dimensions, all other sets should be ordered right-reading.

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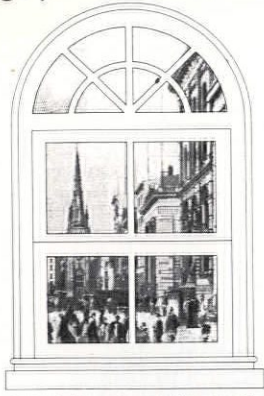
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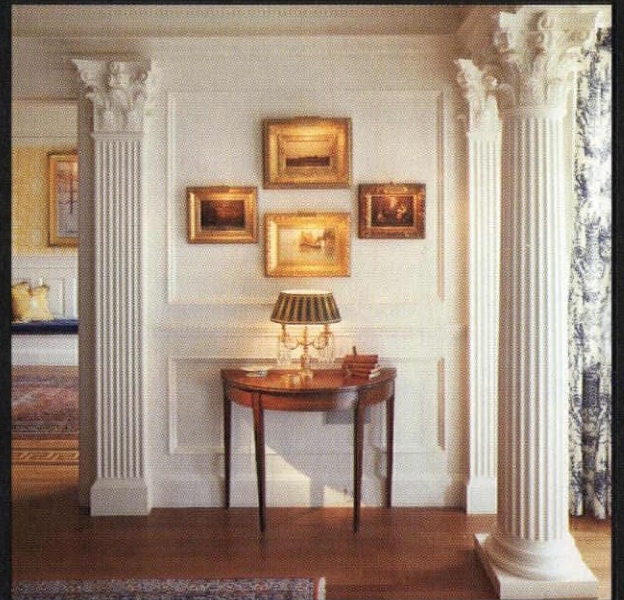
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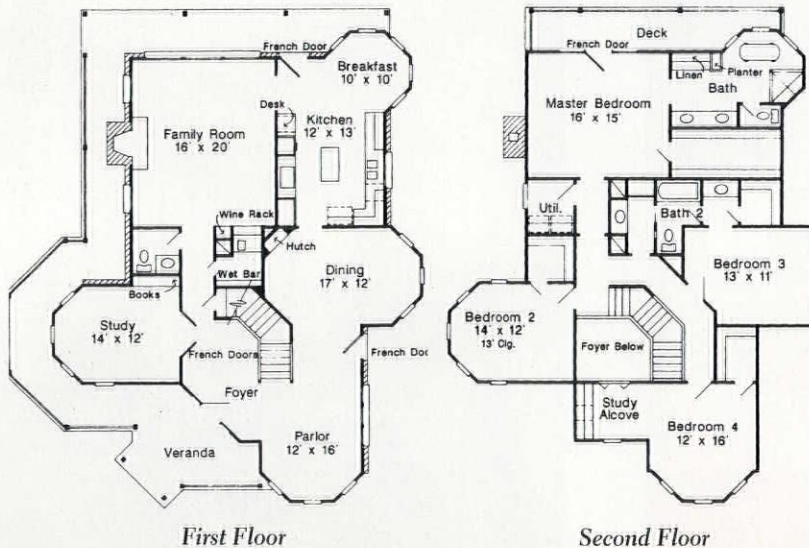


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Bedrooms	.....4
Bathrooms	.....2½
Square Footage	.....3,163'
First Floor	.....1,565'
Second Floor	.....1,598'
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First Floor	.....9'
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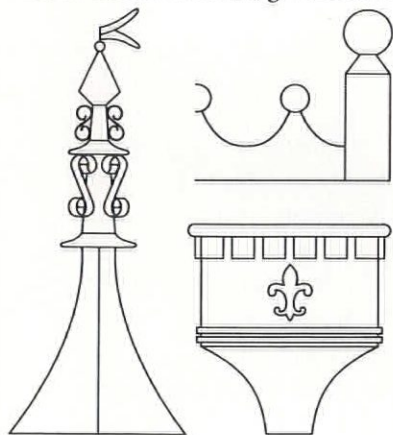
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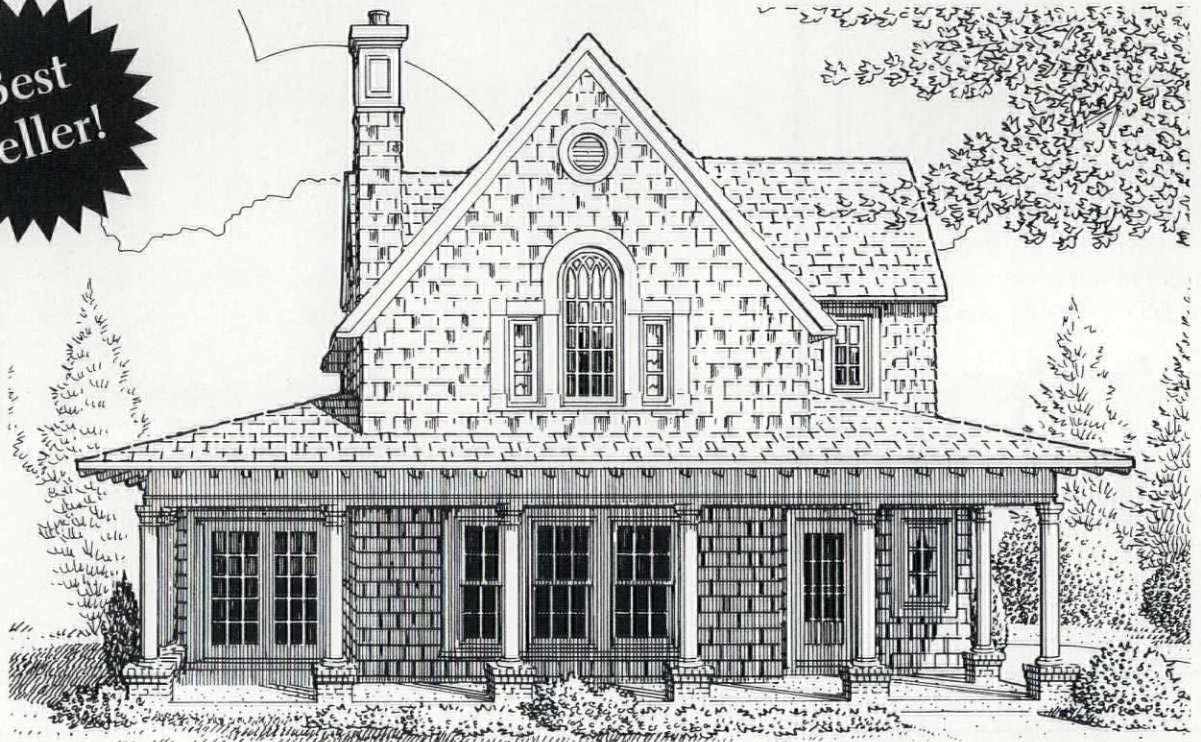
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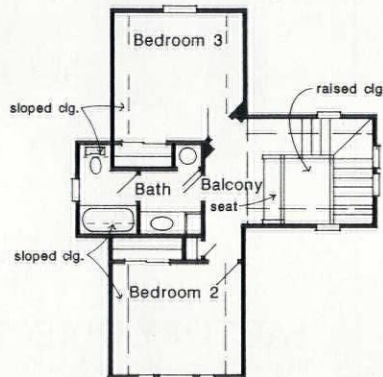


**L**IKE MANY BUILDERS AT THE TURN OF THE century, the architect of this pretty cottage drew on a number of influences. The cross-gabled form with wrap-around verandah relates to Queen Anne. The Palladian window, classical porch columns, and shingle siding are Colonial Revival and

Shingle-style accents. Inside, a dramatic two-storey foyer and staircase open into a generously sized living room with a wood-burning stove. Sliding french doors in the dining room offer access to the screened back porch and verandah. This compact floor plan includes three bedrooms and two full baths.



First Floor



Second Floor

**Plan LG-II-VI**

Cost .....	\$170
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Set of 8 .....	\$270
Bedrooms .....	3
Bathrooms .....	2
Square Footage .....	1,442'
First Floor .....	978'
Second Floor .....	464'
Ceiling Height	
First Floor .....	9'
Second Floor .....	10'
Overall Dimensions	
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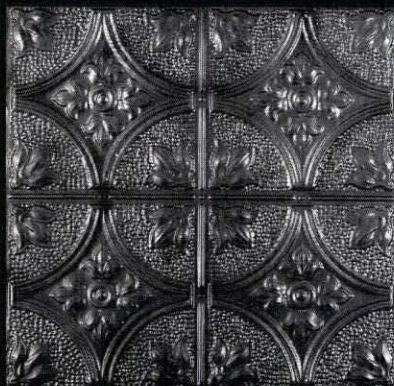
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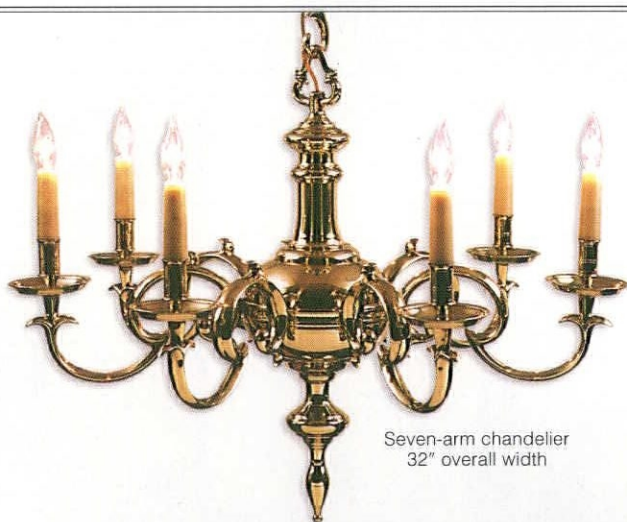
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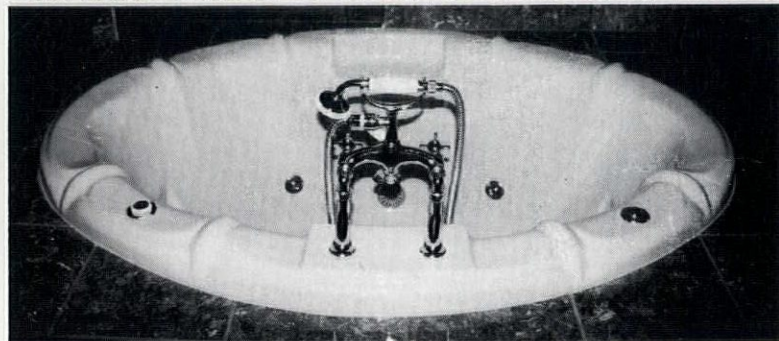
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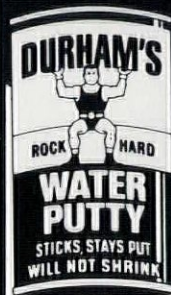


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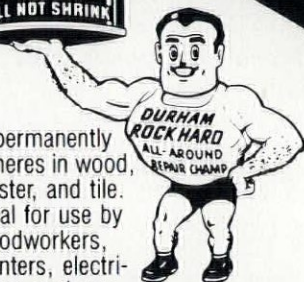
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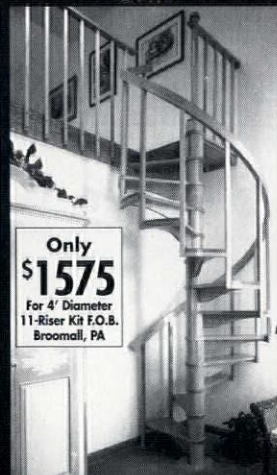
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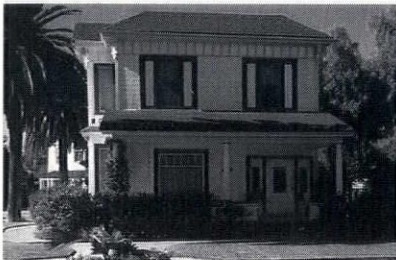


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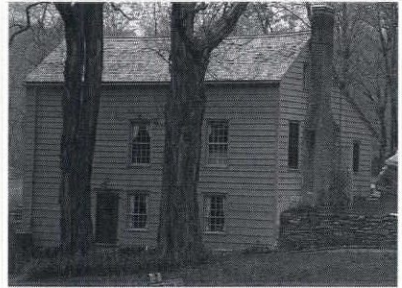
**PLAINFIELD, MA**—Old Jackson Place, mid-19th century, 2 bdrm wood house needs heavy restoration. Seven acres near Amherst on Rte. 116. Spectacular views of Pioneer Valley; town untouched by modern intrusions. Mr. Andrews (212) 239-9094.

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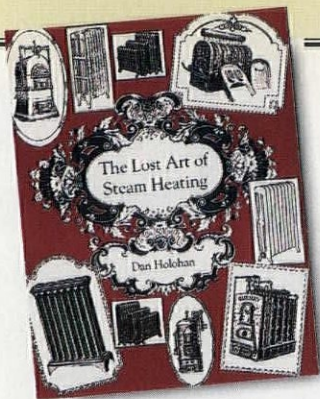
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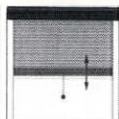
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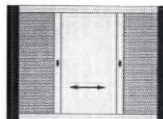
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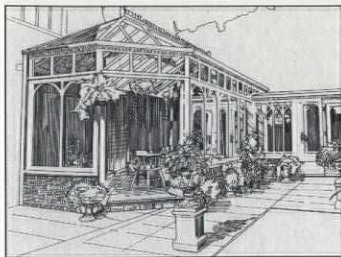
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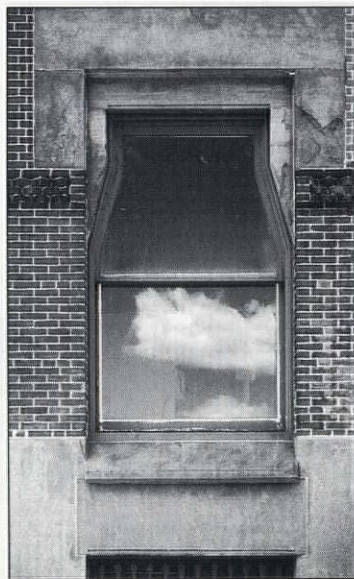
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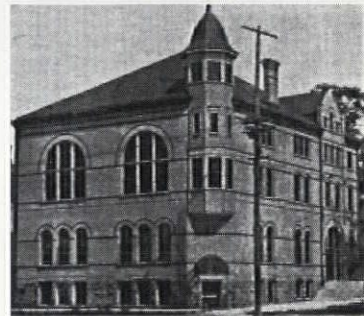
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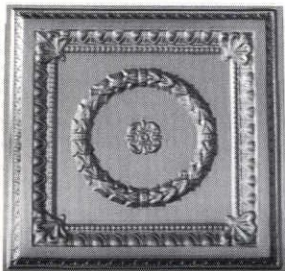
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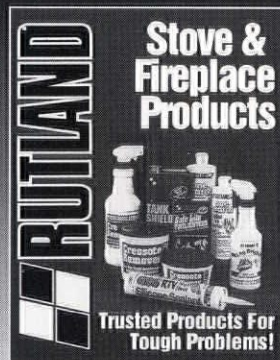
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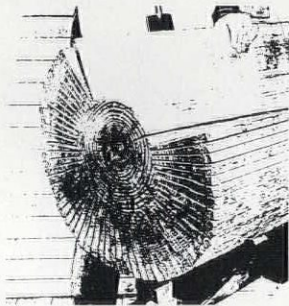
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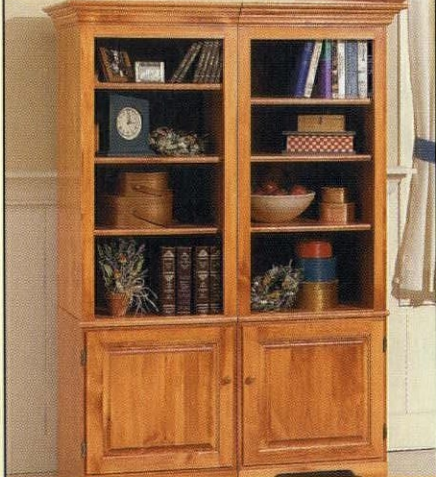
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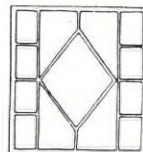
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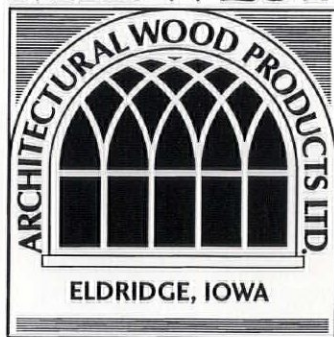
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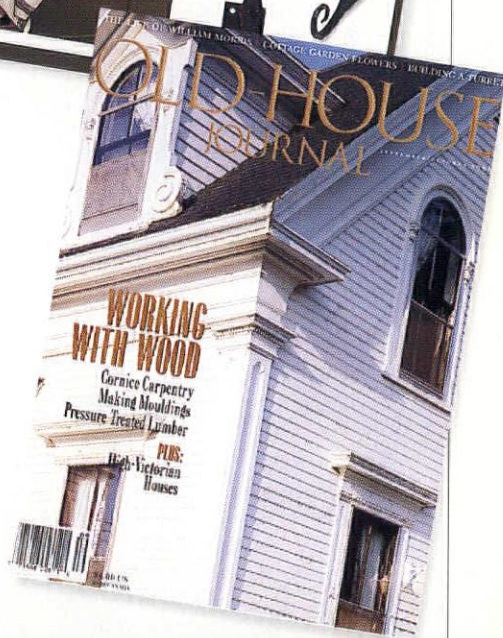
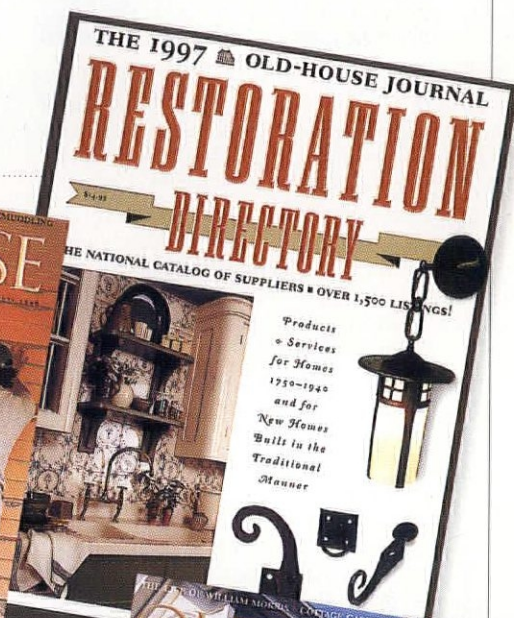
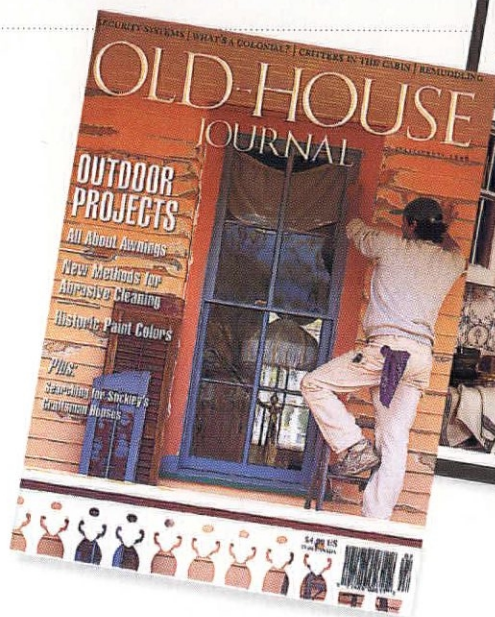
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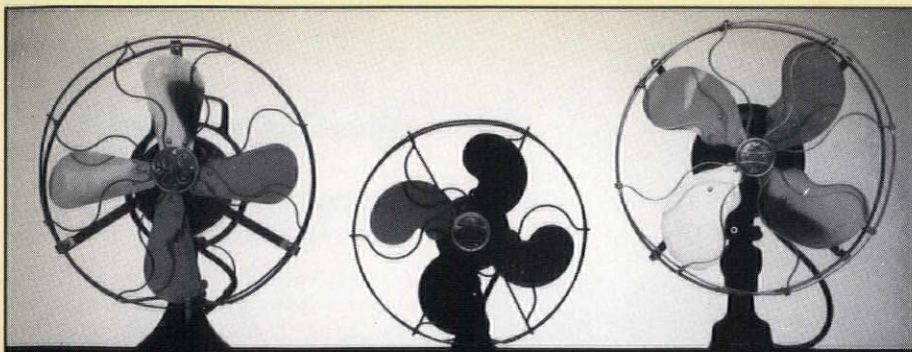
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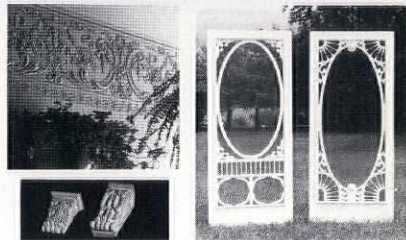


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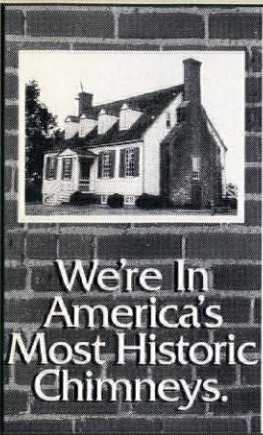
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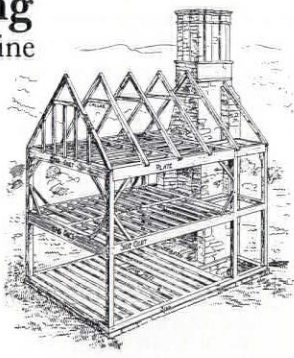
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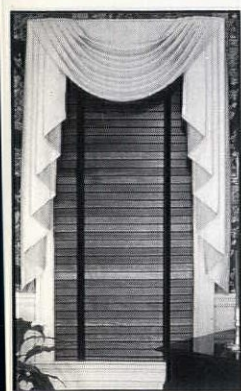
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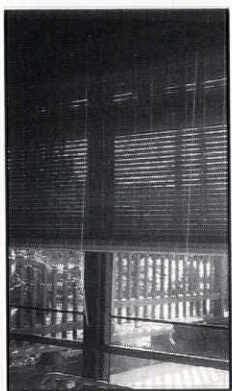
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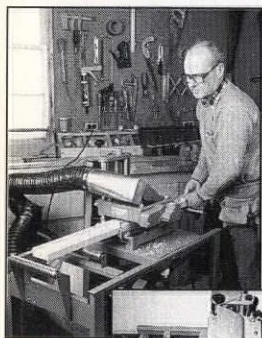
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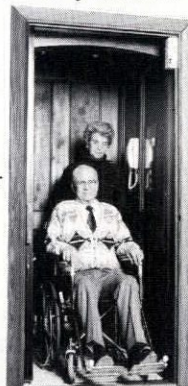
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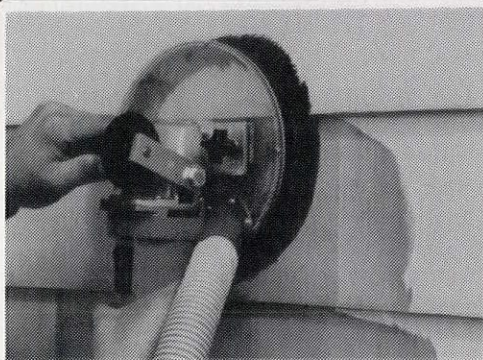
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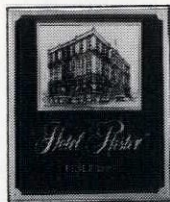


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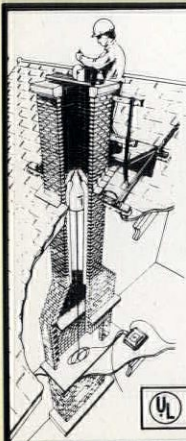


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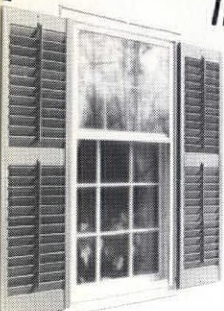
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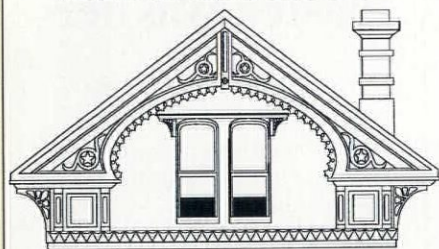
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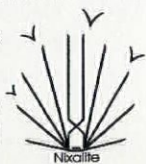
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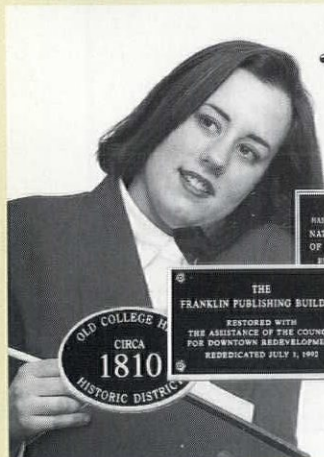
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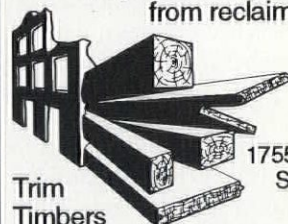
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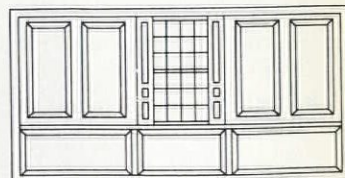
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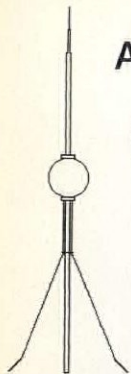


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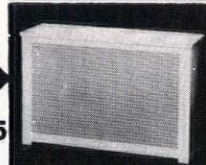


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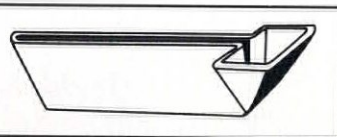


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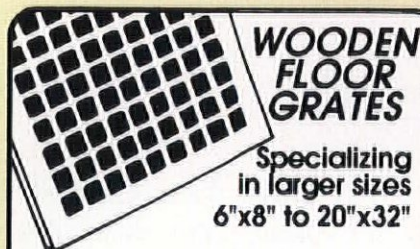


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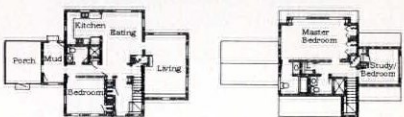
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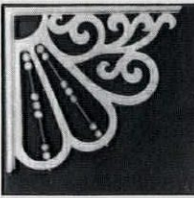


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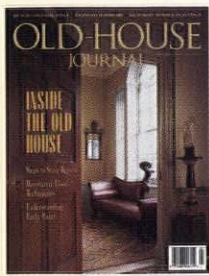
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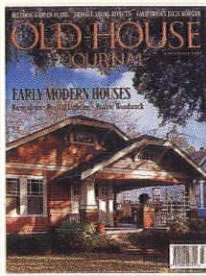
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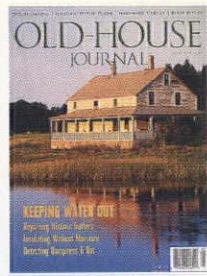




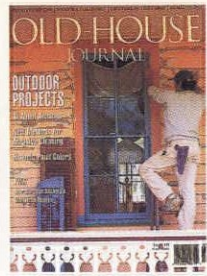
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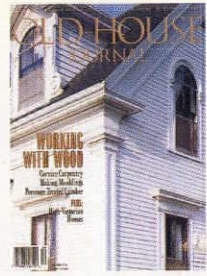
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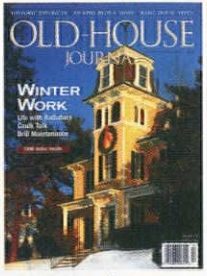
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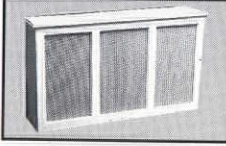
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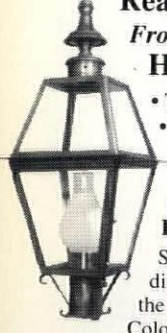
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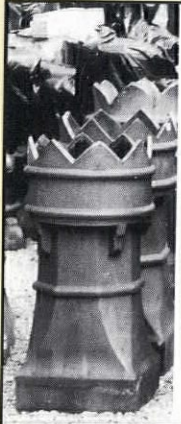
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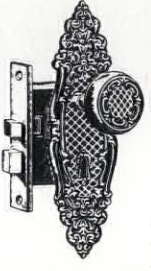
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# REMUDDLING

OPINION



## Pre-Ordinance

“THESE ARE ROW HOUSES IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD,” writes architect Daniel J. Miller of UrbanWorks in Chicago. “Not too charming.” Agreed; and not too subtle, either. This example brings up that uncomfortable question of exactly what a private owner

should be allowed to do. We all have to look at it. More to the point, neighbors end up paying

for highly visible remuddlings through lowered property values.

In fairness, we should tell you that this travesty happened a long time ago, probably before 1957. That was “pre-ordinance,” before there were zoning rules to control this sort of thing. The reason for the addition is familiar: money. It turned a smallish row house into two separate flats. For the good of one, to the detriment of many.

We all know people don't do things like this anymore. Right?

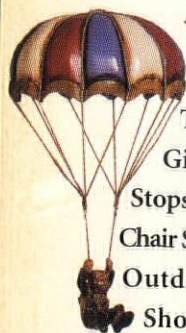
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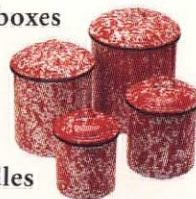
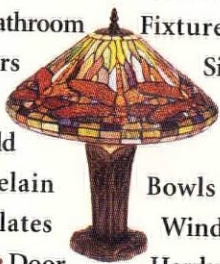


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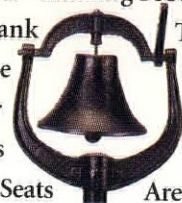
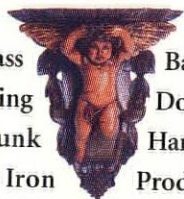
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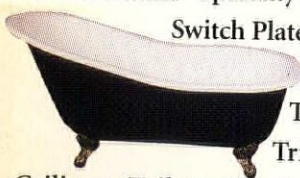
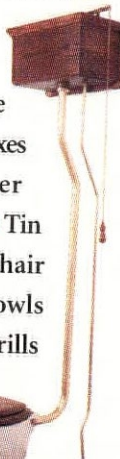
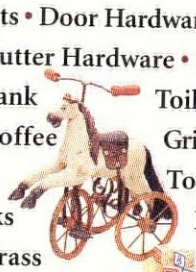
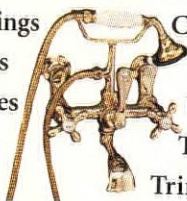
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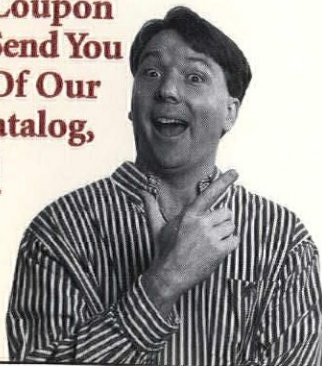
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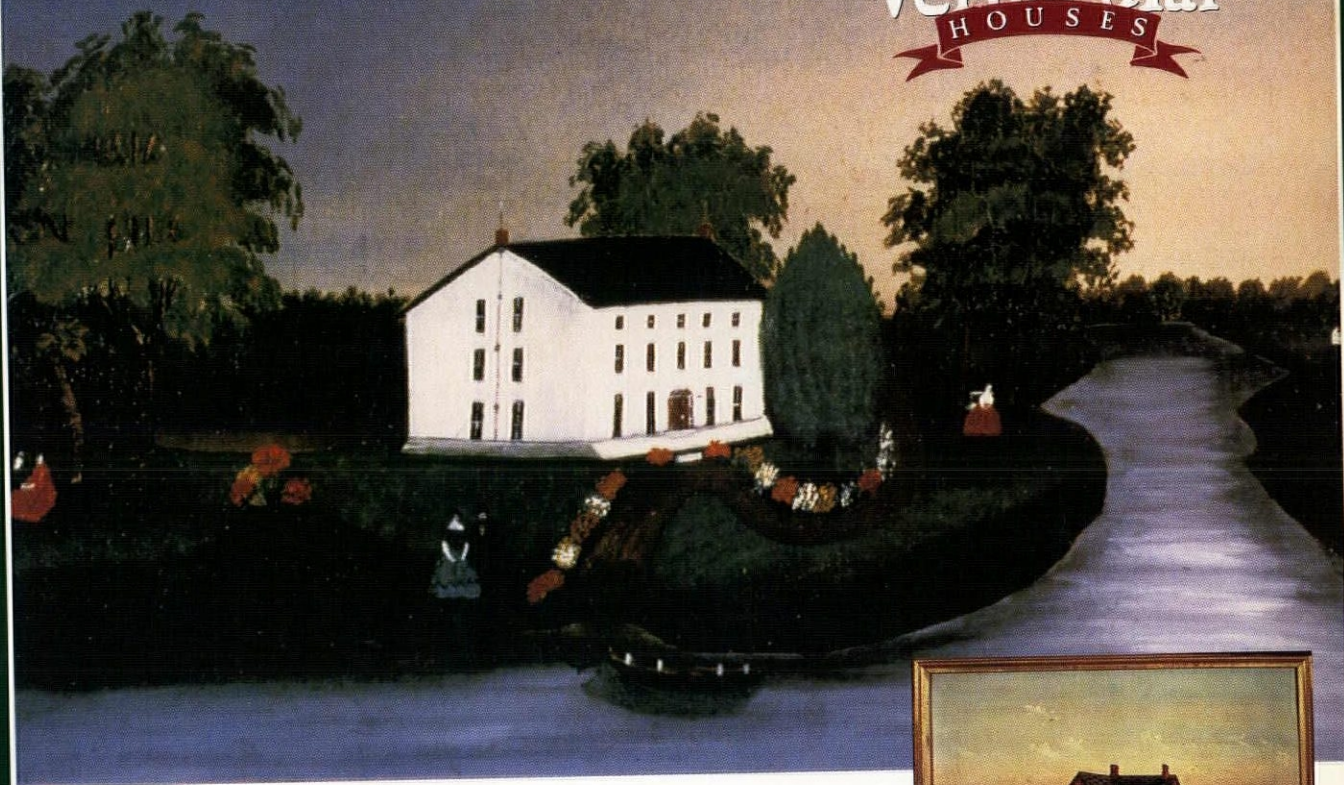
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appearance. About this time architectural folk art began to flourish as proud homeowners commissioned house portraits in paintings, overmantels, fireboards, and wall murals. Women started to stitch images of



residences and public buildings into their samplers, or paint them on sewing boxes, worktables, and other small decorative pieces. For young America, these portraits were statements of freedom and the triumph of the democratic process.

Architectural folk art has always tended to reflect the exceptional rather than the mundane. Those who could afford paintings of their homes and land-holdings also

owned property worthy of attention. Nevertheless, the majority of structures are typical of a period, place, and form, providing insights into the common solutions that underly vernacular architecture or “architecture without architects.”

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