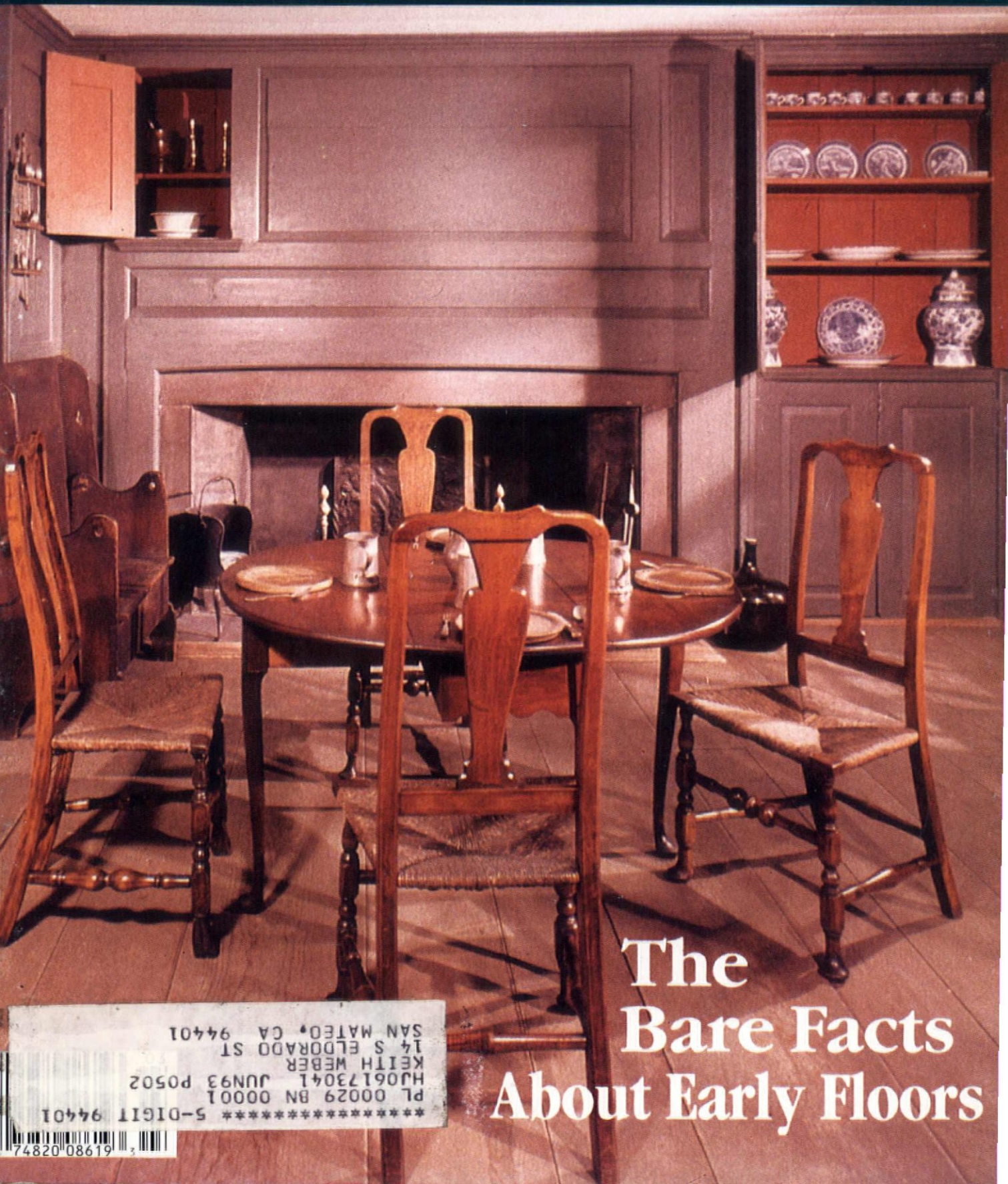


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CONTENTS

Vol. XVI No. 2 March/April 1988

A Victorian Apartment House	18
<i>How to afford old-house living</i>	
Georgian and Federal Houses	22
<i>American architectural styles, 1740-1820</i>	
Basics of Plaster Restoration	29
<i>. . . because everybody has some bad plaster</i>	
Bare Facts on Early Floors	36
<i>History, finishes, coverings — & some suggestions</i>	
Repairing Antique Floors	43
<i>Techniques for pre-1850 wood floors</i>	
Whatchamacallits	46
<i>Finding your way around a hardware store</i>	
The Japanese Influence	48
<i>East meets West in post-Victorian interiors</i>	

Editor's Page	2	Good Books	64
Letters	4	Emporium	66
Ask OHJ	14	Product Network	76
Restorer's Notebook	16	Ad Index	79
Restoration Products	54	Remuddling	80

Cover: The Nicholas Schenck House, 1750,
originally in Canarsie, N.Y. Courtesy of The
Brooklyn Museum.

Fifteen wonderful years have fraced by since the founding of The Old-House Journal in the basement workroom of my 1883 Brooklyn brownstone. The time has come to transfer the mantle of leadership to my partner and a new generation of managers at OHJ. But before heading off to pursue some long-deferred personal plans, I couldn't resist reflecting on the amazing changes that have taken place since OHJ first burst on the American scene.

It's hard to imagine now how different America was in 1972 when the foundation stones for The Old-House Journal were laid. In those dark ages, historic preservation was a curiosity. There was no practical help for the homeowner who wanted to rehabilitate an old home to preserve its original charm and character. Lots of books and magazine articles would help you remodel. Or modernize. But there was literally no how-to-do-it information on restoration or sensitive rehabilitation.

In those days . . .

- ☞ The term Victorian was a synonym for bad taste;
- ☞ Most people regarded any house built after 1840 as a white elephant;
- ☞ Fewer than 100 companies nationwide had any interest in the old-house market.

If you look at 1972 issues of *House Beautiful* or *House & Garden*, you'll find articles showing home makeovers of the sort OHJ later christened "remuddlings." In that era, a typical headline from the shelter magazines was "Gloomy Old Victorian Transformed Into Cheerful Contemporary."

Astonishingly, the old-house movement sprang up in this inhospitable soil. In cities and towns all across America, a new generation of homebuyers began to take a second look at our stock of decaying old houses. And they were delighted with the architectural treasures they discovered.

In Brooklyn, this movement took the form of the Brownstone Revival.

15 Historical Years



*Hmm . . . time
for a change.*

With no how-to books to fall back on, owners of old brownstones began a self-help network. It was this network that gave me the original inspiration for The Old-House Journal.

OHJ started life as a 12-page newsletter with a paid circulation of three! Today, we're a national magazine with a paid circulation of over 125,000.

I'm proud of the role The Old-House Journal has played in changing the way America regards its old houses. OHJ was in the vanguard of

the Victorian Revival. In the past five years, OHJ has led the way in creating awareness and appreciation of post-Victorian houses.

The annual OHJ Catalog — first published in 1976 — actually created and defined the old-house marketplace. The first edition contained 205 suppliers; the brand-new 1988 edition lists 1,533.

More important than numbers, however, are people: you and the hundreds of thousands of other readers OHJ has touched. During the past 15 years, you've told us — in your letters, phone calls, and in person — how OHJ changed the way you look at your house and the built environment around you.

You've told us that OHJ cheers you up in those moments when the house is gaining on you. You've said that by showing that others have survived disasters worse than yours, OHJ gives you the courage to go on.

You've reported that we have an uncanny knack for coming up with the right article just when you need it. You've told us that without all of the down-to-earth information in the issues and Yearbooks, you'd have never survived.

And it has been a two-way street: You've shared your hard-won know-how with other readers through articles, tips, and letters you've sent over the years. Without this pooling of information, The Old-House Journal would not have been possible. So heartfelt thanks to all of you.

I'm proud to have been a part of the old-house revival. But there's plenty still to be done. My love of preservation will never diminish . . . and I expect to be at the center of exciting preservation projects in the future.

To Patricia Poore, who is now both Editor and Publisher, and to the whole gang at OHJ, I extend my best wishes for the next 15 wonderful historical years.

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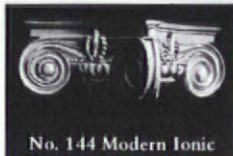
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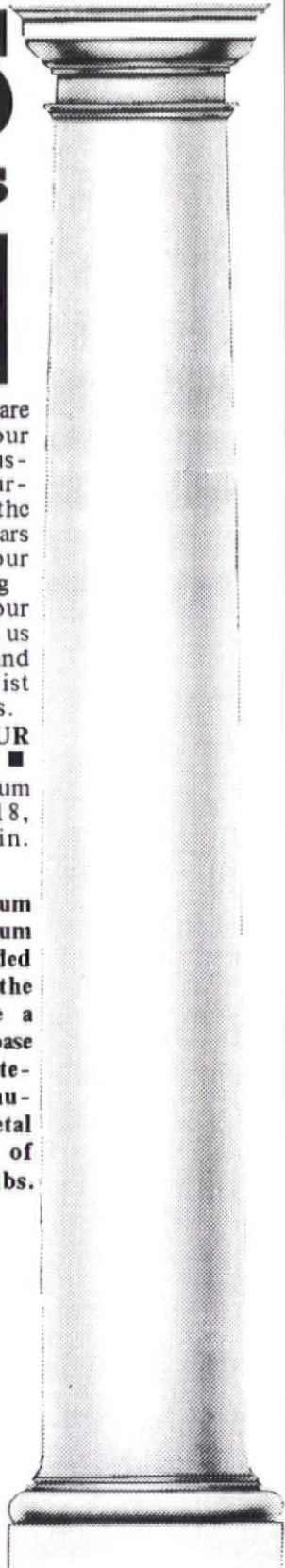
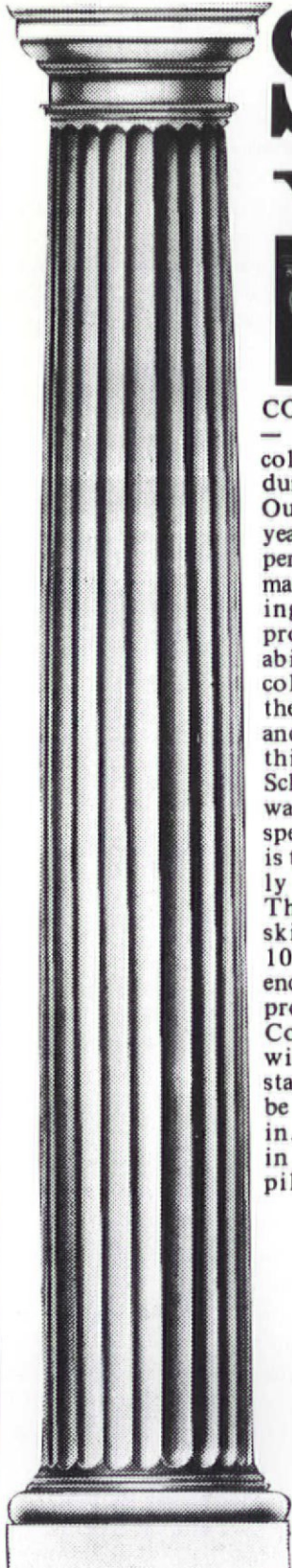
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Government Doorknob

Dear Ms. Poore,

In the November/December 1987 issue, you featured a chronological style chart on page 42, which traced the history of American doorknobs and latches. Perhaps you would like to know that the example selected to illustrate "Decorated Victorian Metal" was never intended for residential use; it is, in fact, a government-issued doorknob designed for use in buildings under the control of the Department of the Treasury: customs houses, branch mints, sub-treasuries, and the like.

The knob and accompanying backplate were designed by the staff of the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury, during the tenure of Alfred B. Mullett (1866-1874). Faced with a mounting work load — by the 1870s, his office was designing and constructing 40 new federal facilities per year — Mullett had his shop design a standard doorknob that could be used interchangeably in any of the Treasury buildings. Conspicuously placed on the knob was the Treasury seal, featuring a shield divided by a chevron containing 13 stars (representing the 13 original states), separating a scale above from a key below. The Treasury seal was originally designed in 1780 by Francis Hopkinson, who is also credited with the design of the American flag; the doorknob may have been the work of Richard von Ezdorf, a German-trained designer employed by government architectural offices for nearly half a century.

One of the last known Mullett-designed buildings to feature the Treasury-seal doorknob was the Port Huron Customs House in Michigan, completed in 1877 and still in use by the U.S. Customs Service.

— Mark Walston
Historian, U.S. Customs Service
Washington, D.C.



Building an Old House

Dear Editor:

I was excited to see your recognition of "new old houses." My wife and I looked for more than a year for an old house to restore. But the prices for even modest old houses were crazy — old houses are no longer orphans, they are boutique items.

Still, we looked. And looked. And looked. And the more discouraged we got, the more attractive an "old" house became. We ended up buying a piece of land just outside of the Mystic Historic District. We came up with our own design by studying and measuring our favorite houses in town. The style is a simple Carpenter

Gothic (which I tell people is a working man's Victorian) with bits of trim and one frivolity: a little square "tower" on the south with, we hope, a view of the river.

A new house may seem to some like an easy way out, but a new house can be as much work as an old house. The headaches just come *before* you start to build, not *after* you move in.

The toughest part is that the aesthetic of an old house is a century or more old, and few people are willing or able to work with that aesthetic. Architects all seem to have their personal (read "modern") vision, builders think of expediency and convenience, officials have to be sure that you meet the code. And then we, the owners, add our own provisions: passive solar possibilities, decent views, well insulated and ventilated, and, above all, not too expensive. Keeping the old-house aesthetic in the face of these competing interests is a task only for the strong of heart.

Compromises must be made. Not everyone is able to afford the perfect job. But why is one compromise in a restoration (or a new construction) better than another? Are authentically shaped *polymer* mouldings better than "real wood" lumberyard *stock* mouldings? Is the difference between quarter-sawn and flat-sawn oak worth the extra cost? Which is better: authentic divided-light windows with combination storms or insulated glass with snap-in grills? Do these things matter?

More and more new houses in our area are intended to be "old style." But too often the similarity between a "new" Victorian and its older neighbor is in name only. The roof pitch is too shallow, the windows are the wrong shape, the trim is non-existent or ill proportioned, the porch railings boxy and awkward. These "replications" are well

continued on page 6

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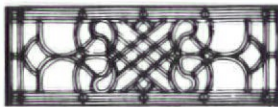
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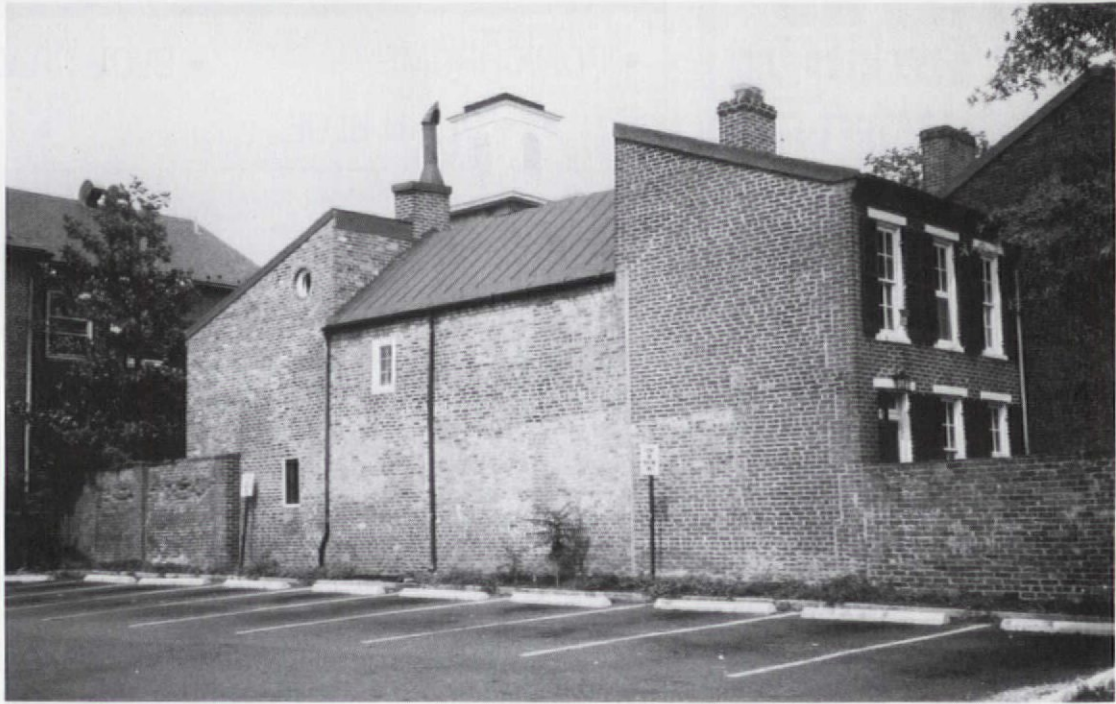
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Two "flounder houses" in Old Town Alexandria, not quite back-to-back.



(Photo: Hal Feldhaus)

intentioned, but instead of blending in with the old-house neighborhoods where they are most often built, they end up "remuddling" the neighborhood with their awkward attempts at period flavor.

Our new house will not be fancy or unique; it will not win any awards or be featured on your cover. But with luck, in one or two years it will be indistinguishable from other neighboring houses of earlier vintage but similar design.

If the new breed of new old houses is to be anything like that of the *old* old houses, builders will need guidance in making their compromises. How about a department on "New Old House Aesthetics," or a regular feature similar to *Wooden Boat's* "A Matter of Detail," where you would photograph and describe particularly elegant work?

Whatever direction you take, it is important that we all address these issues. The character of our old-house neighborhoods will suffer if we don't.

— Guy S. Hermann
Noank, Conn.

A Flounder Theory

Dear OHJ,

With regard to that interesting back-cover article on "Flounder Houses of Old Town Alexandria" [*"Vernacular Houses," November/December 1987 OHJ*]: The answer to Hal Feldhaus' question of "why half-houses sprang up in the Colonies" can be found in his own account. He says, "its high side is blind and normally falls smack on the property line." Clearly, that was with the expectation that the owner of the adjoining lot would build the other, corresponding half. The result would be a whole house with two owners, a commonplace in England where many a semi-detached house shows two distinct color schemes for the separately-owned halves.

Flounder houses had the great merit of avoiding any roof-drainage problems, and it seems quite possible that there was an 18th- or early-19th-century ordinance requiring that houses built against the property line be so roofed.

— Edward V. Lofstrom
Minneapolis, Minn.

Hold On to Your Dream

Dear Patricia:

I have been a fan of *Old-House Journal* for the past ten years and have found in it a real source of information — and hours of reading pleasure. (My only suggestion would be to include more photos of unique old houses built during the Victorian era; I am particularly fond of the Greek Revival, Queen Anne, and Second Empire styles.)

Perhaps my writing may be a "lesson learned" for some of your readers who are considering selling their old houses because of the inconveniences. Ten years ago we began our first adventure in restoring an old house; a Classical Revival/Queen Anne, three-storey red brick, with nine tall fluted columns with Corinthian capitals gracing verandahs on either side. The house was loaded with extras, including stained and leaded windows, handsome carved woodwork, beautiful staircase, four ornate fireplace mantels, parquet flooring, stencilled murals, Lincrusta wallcoverings, pocket doors, and

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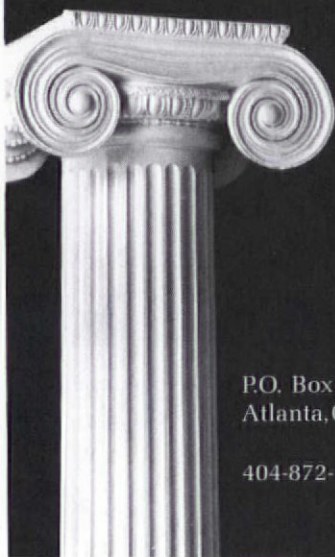
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LETTERS

much more. The house sits on half an acre, completely surrounded by ornate wrought-iron fencing.

Restoring this old house was a real labor of love for me; every spare moment of my time was spent on one project or another. The extensive work was given a lot of attention by the local media, and in 1979 the property was listed in the National Register. The work was finally completed this year, and our dream house became a reality. It was one of the finest Victorian houses in the city.

Two years ago, I accepted a transfer in my job to a neighboring city, and I commuted back and forth. Our two children graduated from high school and went off to college, leaving my wife alone each day in a big house. A few months ago, during a weak moment, we decided to sell the house and move closer to my job. We listed it with a local realtor,

PVC vs. BUGS

Dear OHJ,

I am writing in response to reader John Cipolaro's letter regarding PVC lattice [*"Ad Ethics," November/December 1987 OHJ*]. While I share Mr. Cipolaro's concerns *vis-a-vis* the unnecessary use of modern as opposed to traditional building materials, there are situations where new conditions may dictate appropriateness.


We live in a neighbourhood now dangerously prone to termite infestation, a condition which did not exist 100 years ago when our house was built. Fortunately, we have never had termites. However, conditions in certain areas of this city are so bad that both the municipal and provincial governments offer grants to assist homeowners in both soil treatment and wood/soil-contact removal, regardless of whether or

thinking it would be months before it sold. Exactly one month to the day, we received an attractive offer and signed the contract. Two weeks later we closed on the sale and a moving van pulled up in front of the house. It all happened so fast — we were in a daze the whole time.

We are now renting a newer bi-level in a nice neat subdivision, and hating every moment of it. We may never again have the opportunity of owning and living in such a grand house. We are looking, but nothing comes anywhere close to what we had.

My advice to your readers is to think twice before giving up something you have because of its minor inconveniences. Once it is gone, you can never recapture those moments — and may end up living with only memories.

— Kermit R. Clay
Pueblo, Col.



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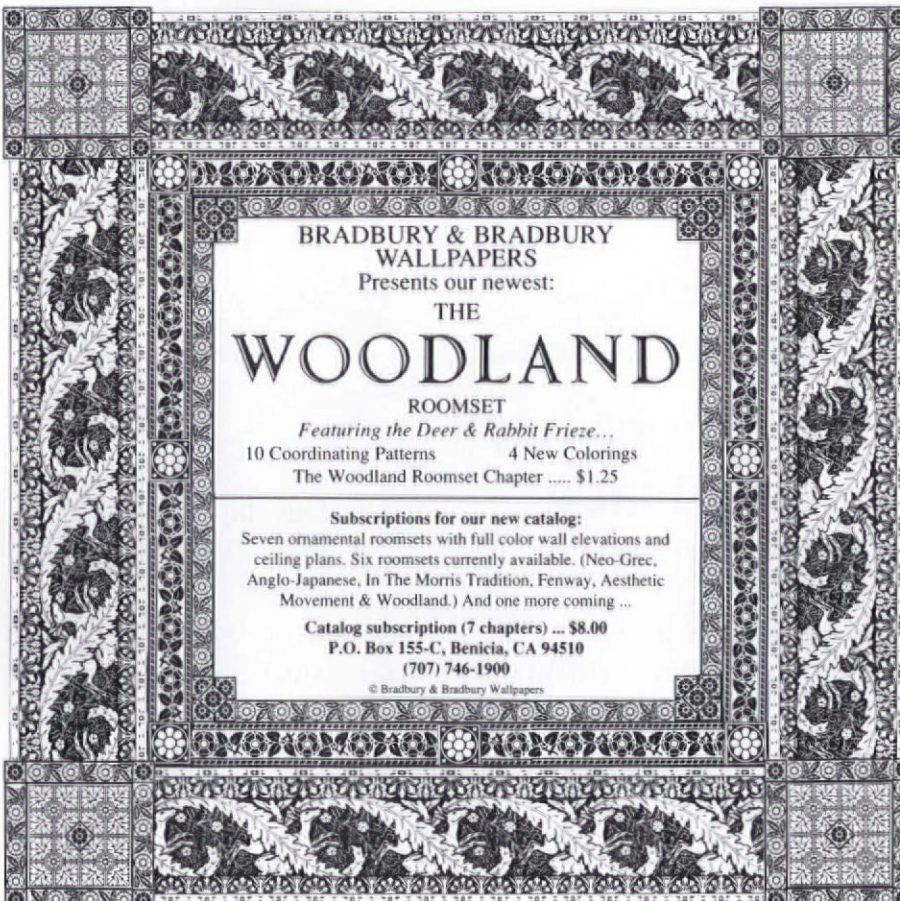
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LETTERS

not the property has been affected. Following treatment, the requirement is that there be no wood members for a distance of one foot up from the ground, unless such wood is covered by a concrete parge. Obviously, wood lattice placed in an area under a porch is totally unpermissible.

In light of these limitations, I obtained samples of PVC lattice, and found the product surprisingly acceptable. Unfortunately, it is not available in Canada, and the cost of transporting the product from the U.S. is quite prohibitive.

In this case, it is impossible to justify the use of wooden lattice when the structural safety of our house could be at risk. For the time being, the gaping hole under our porch is going to remain just as it is — our only other choice is to fill the cavity with concrete block, which we refuse to do. However, I keep checking the advertisements in OHJ

in the hope that eventually a supplier in Buffalo will decide to stock the product.

— Jeri Danyleyko
Toronto, Ontario

Fan Mail

Dear OHJ,

Just a note to say how much my husband and I enjoy OHJ: both the changed — pretty, coffee-table-quality covers and color photos inside, and the unchanged — excellent, informative, detailed, how-to articles and the entertaining old-house living experiences. (After ten years in our 1914-vintage house, we too discovered the Mushroom Factor, but never put that perfect name to it.)

I wish we had discovered OHJ and the fantastic heat gun before stripping our dining room china cabinet and the (mercifully small amount of) beaded kitchen

wainscoting with the help of only a putty knife. I can't stand chemical stripper, so we used it only for the final clean-up. Judging from the layers of paint, the previous owners must have painted in lieu of cleaning the woodwork!

It's about time to repaint and paper, and your series of articles on post-Victorian interiors will be my valued reference for ideas and atmosphere. I thank you for these articles — some of us had felt a little jealous of the lucky owners of "truly old" houses that you've featured. (To tell the truth, I am still jealous — but there aren't too many 18th-century houses in California.)

I wait for my issues and begin to read them on the way up from the mailbox. Unlike many other magazines, they are often browsed and reread but never discarded!

— Margaret Carlson Lew
San Francisco, Cal.

continued on page 12

Save hours of tedious work scraping old paint.



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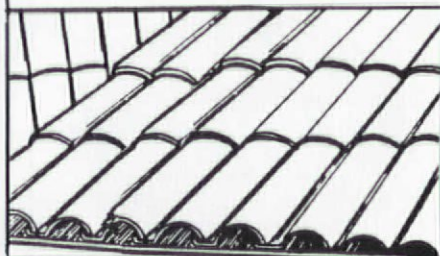
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Tile roof problem?



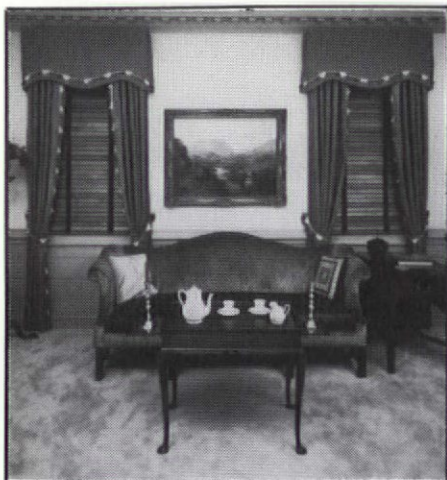
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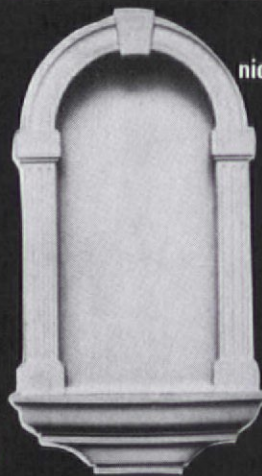
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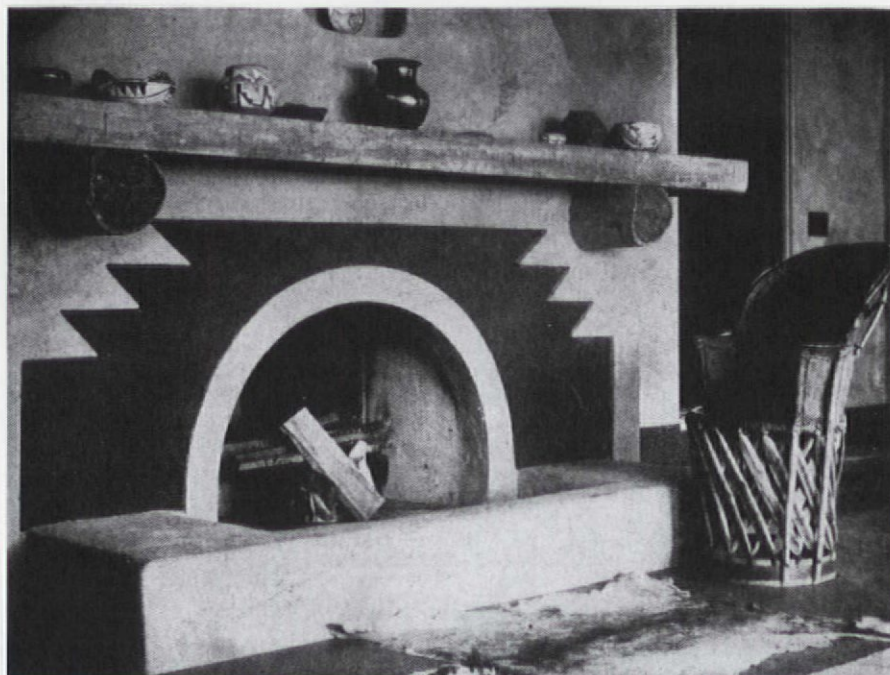
Sincerely, Steve Wolf

S. Wolf

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From the July 1916 issue of *The Craftsman*: fireplace in a modern Hopi house.

Better Late . . .

Dear Editor-n-Boss,

Wouldn't you know it, while I was researching this issue's article on Japanese design influences, I found the perfect illustration for last issue's Southwest-Indian-influence article. It seemed just too good to pass up. Am I too late?

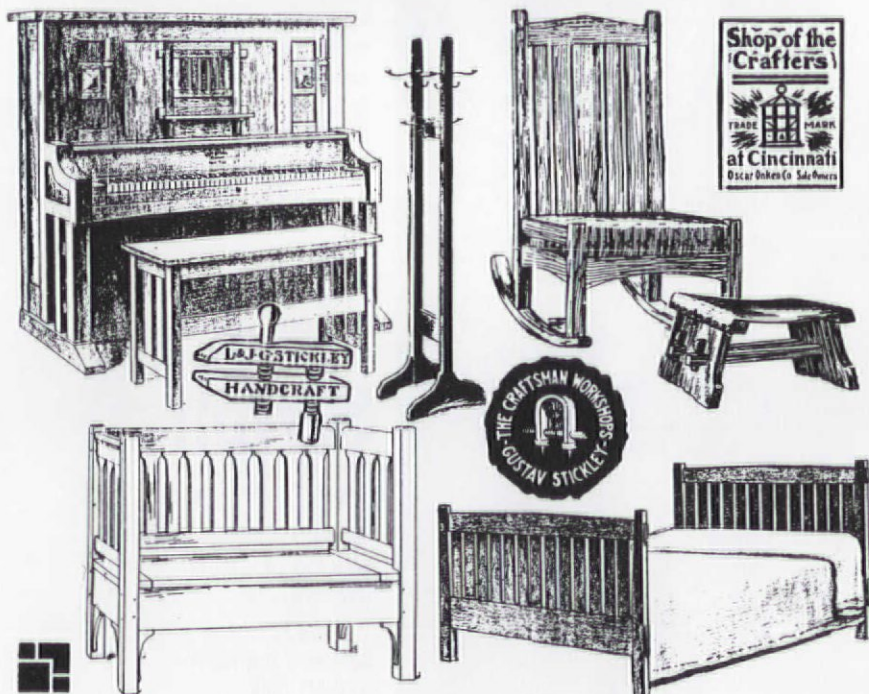
Visually,
Bekka Lindstrom
OHJ Design Director

Dear Bekka,

Beautiful example! I think there's room on page 12.

Editorially,
P. Poore

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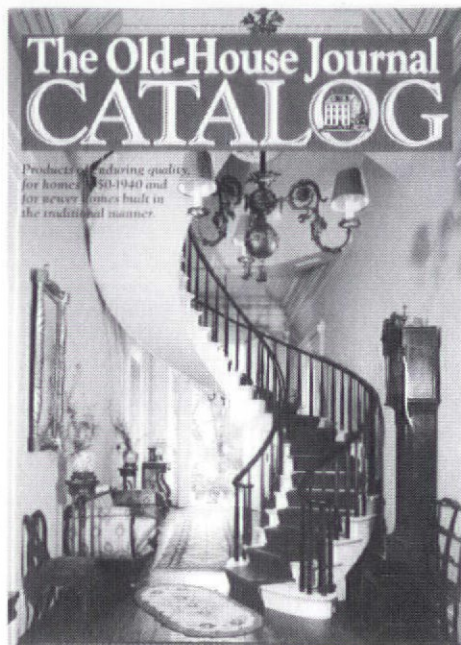
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whether you live in Manhattan or North Dakota.

We personally contacted each company listed to make sure that this, our largest catalog ever, is also our most accurate. Each company entry includes complete address, phone numbers, and availability of literature. Three indexes make that wealth of information easy to work with. The first, the Catalog Index, has been meticulously cross-referenced; if you're trying to find, say, "ceiling rosettes," it tells you that the item can be found under "ceiling medallions." The second Index lists all the product displays, where you can find additional information on specific companies. The third Index groups all companies by city and state, so you can quickly locate the old-house suppliers nearest you.

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Selective Stripping

Q *This photo shows the results of my attempts to take off layers of paint to reveal underlying grained painting on a stairway stringer. The photo shows the best results I had after trying various marginally-successful methods — using chemical strippers, a heat gun, etc. These results were obtained basically by simply scraping off the overlying paint layers with a sharp paint scraper. This takes forever, mars the graining (especially when I slip), and still leaves a film.*

Is there a better way to do this? The graining is only on the stringers, but it seems best to preserve it.

— Joan Milgram
Wallkill, N.Y.

A "Selective stripping" is the toughest paint-stripping task there is! It's possible, if you work very carefully. If a clear finish — shellac or varnish — was present over the graining, that barrier should make it possible to remove the overlying paint without going down to the grained layer. The only way you'll know what will work is to test methods, as you've done. You might try using a very liquid, volatile chemical stripper (such as Red Devil's). Al-

low the stripper to work only until the first layer of paint starts to wrinkle. Then, with a plastic spray bottle (the kind you might use to mist your house plants), rinse the remaining stripper. Immediately wipe up any effluent. The uppermost layer of paint should now be loose enough to carefully remove with a scalpel or razor knife.

Working very carefully and patiently, it's often possible to remove paint without doing irreparable damage to underlying marbleizing, graining, or stencilling. Minor damage can be touched up.



Whatever method you use, you're not going to be left with a like-new graining job. This is not a particularly noteworthy graining job, and stair stringers aren't a highly visible feature. Maybe you should save all that stripping time for another project. For the best results, you'd fully strip the wood and redo the graining; it would take less time and look better.

Bungalow, But. . . .

Q *I am having difficulty finding the architectural style of my house, built around 1910. It seems to be a cross between a Craftsman Bungalow and the Prairie style — I'm not certain. (The house has also been remodelled several times, including the front porch and its roof line.) Could you please help?*

— Mark R. Rasco
Tulsa, Ok.

A This house is certainly influenced by the tremendously popular Bungalow architecture of the time. The porch, with its low peaked roof, wide span, and blocky, tapering columns, is typical of the California Bungalow. But because your house has a second storey, it's technically not a Bungalow — call it a Craftsman cottage, or a Bungalow-era house.

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RESTORER'S NOTEBOOK

Scrubbing Up

A painter friend showed me how I've been wasting many cans of D&L Handcleaner over the years. I'd been using it for washing my hands of normal grease and grime. I wasn't giving it time to work on such things as oil-based paint. All it takes is about five minutes of working it in to dissolve the paint. Barn-red paint came off beautifully and completely without turpentine odor or dried-out skin. My hands were soft and smelled nice. It also eliminated the hassle of getting rid of a real fire hazard — solvent-soaked rags.

— Elaine M. Czora
Ontario, N.Y.

[Absolutely! There's no point in purposely soaking your skin in solvents; restoration work exposes you to enough potentially dangerous chemicals already. See "Restoration Health Hazards" in the January/February 1988 OHJ. — ed.]

Treading On Tiles

Your extensive and excellent treatment of tile roofing [September-October 1987] was very interesting. For years I worked in central California and had to find out many of these things for myself. A trick I learned to get around on these fragile tiles might be helpful to others. After breaking an unnecessary number the first time out, I found an old pair of bearpaw snowshoes (I was a transplanted New Yorker at the time) and attached 2-inch-thick foam rubber to them — this spreads the weight enough to practically eliminate breakage, even on the very old red tile. A 12- \times -20- \times - $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch plywood oval with shoe attachment straps would do as well.

The only precautions, other than those normally used on roof work, are to attach your shoes by the toes *only*, and watch for wet spots! These are great on dry roofs even at a steep

pitch but become very uncertain on wet tiles. Foam about 2 inches thick is also a great ladder pad; cut a piece and attach it to the ladder with a string tied around a couple of rungs.

— Michael P. Lawton
Port Townsend, Wash.

Tin Ceiling Tips

Thanks for the informative article on installing tin ceilings. Unfortunately, it was a few issues too late to help me, but like most enterprising "old housers," I came up with a few installation ideas I'd like to share:

1. As you put up those furring strips, follow OHJ instructions, but when it comes to securing them, try your screw gun instead of a hammer. A 2½-inch drywall screw will go through furring strip, plaster, lath, and about ¾ of an inch into the joist without pre-drilling. The drill and screw will gently pull sagging plaster back into place — which is better than knocking it down on your head with the blows of a hammer.

2. By all means, prime both sides of the tin before installing. In fact, put on your *final* coat of paint as well. After the job is done, touch up the nail heads with an artist's brush and you're done. Even if a few edges have to be hammered down, it's easier to spend some time touching them up than to spend a few hours with your head tilted back playing Michelangelo.

3. As for the painting method: Lay the sheets down flat, apply the paint with a roller, then go back and brush out the bubbles with a good-quality brush. Brush gently in one direction for a smooth finish.

4. To hang the sheets with or without a partner, make a tall T-brace out of two pieces of furring strip. Put diagonal braces connecting the vertical to the horizontal member. To raise a sheet, hold the painted tin against the top of the T-brace as you stand it up and press the sheet

against the ceiling. The brace should be cut tall enough to hold the sheet against the ceiling while you climb your ladder, jockey the tin into position, and put in that all-important first nail. I did my first tin ceiling alone with this method and it worked like a charm.

— Tom Flagg
Jersey City Heights, N.J.

Shade Stencilling

I was thrilled to see your article on "Painted Window Shades" in the September/October 1987 issue, as I have done both painting and stencilling on window shades for years. Not only do the shades add to privacy at night, but they also are attractive when drawn during daylight hours.

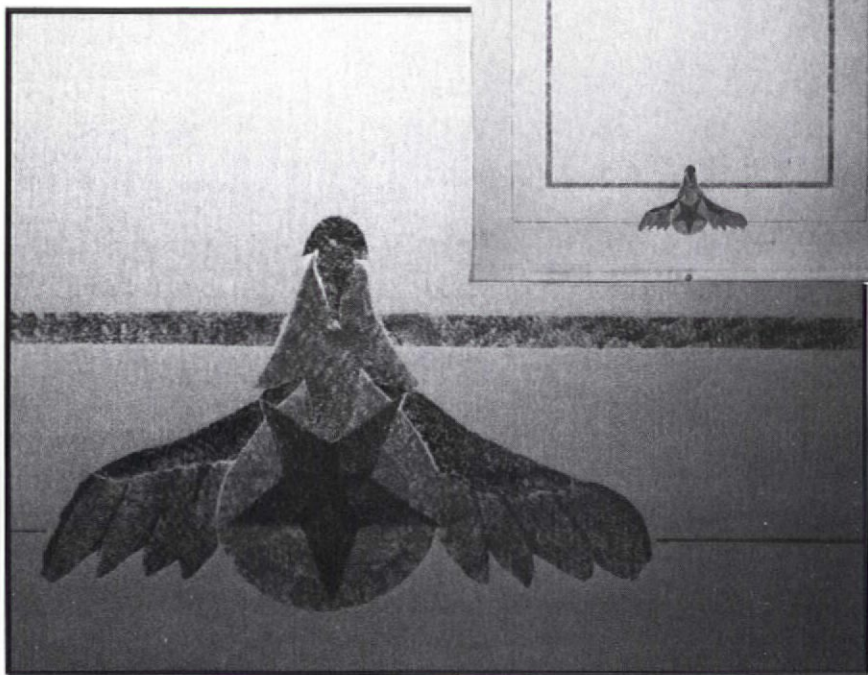
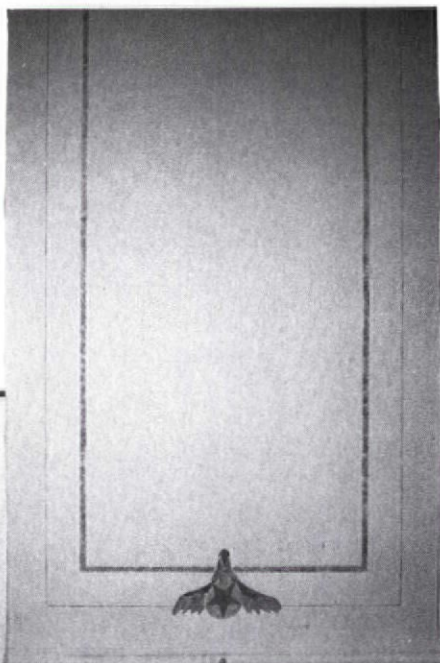
I first saw painted window shades at a museum in Genesee County, New York. I knew I wouldn't be able to paint scenes on my shades as I had seen them, so I decided to keep it simple and stencil the shades.

Using my Bradbury and Bradbury wallpaper frieze as a pattern, I cut stencils out of Mylar and proceeded to apply the designs to my shade

with artists' acrylic paints (being sure to use very little paint on the brushes, as in the normal stencilling technique). By the way, the shades were specially ordered from a drapery/curtain shop, and they have a partial cotton content. As recommended in your how-to article, I ordered them a bit long and used the top 10 inches for experimentation.

I found in the process that I could stencil most any design or part thereof, including borders about 1 inch wide, which serve to outline the shade. The appearance of the shade is professional, and I have been very pleased.

— Sue Schubert
Wallingford, Penn.



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HOW TO AFFORD OLD-HOUSE LIVING:

The Victorian Apartment House

by Jackie Craven

Three years ago I could barely afford to rent a two-room apartment in a remuddled townhouse. Today I live in a Victorian with gleaming woodwork, spindled porches, and stained glass windows. Did I win the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes? Snag a rich husband? Land a six-figure grant?

Unfortunately, no. What I did do was become a landlady! Despite a lifetime of living in modern constructions and apartments that I couldn't find the will to unmuddle, I was an old-house lover. One day I'd had enough. I wanted a place of my own, a good old-fashioned fixer-upper where I could paint and putter, where I could stay forever and not worry about yearly increases in rent, and where I was no longer at the mercy of a landlord's home improvement projects: walling in porches, tacking on kitchens, chopping spacious rooms into efficiency apartments, or adding dropped ceilings.

As I embarked on my quest for a house of my own I was struck by the easy life my landlord seemed to live. As a freelance writer and high school teacher I made very little money, but what if I added to my income by renting out part of my house? It seemed the perfect solution. And I wouldn't allow myself to fall into the pattern of so many landlords — I would respect the integrity of my old house. So, with some trepidation and high hopes, I began shopping.

I probably would have bought a house much sooner than I eventually did, but my sales agent, Florence, assumed I wanted to make an intelligent investment which meant: low maintenance siding, separate furnaces for each apartment, and a good roof. We shopped for a year, touring seventy-five





1056 Gillespie Street (above) as it looked the day I found it . . . and (below) after a new paint job that brought out all its charm.

buildings, before we realized that I didn't want an aluminum-sided duplex "just right for a single lady." Instead I craved "an estate sale . . . big old place . . . terribly run down. . ." Finally, on a brittle February afternoon, I found it.

Number 1056 Gillespie Street was a half block from the manicured grounds of Union College in Schenectady, New York. Pea-green and peeling, the house seemed drab, just another gable-front folk building with odd Queen Anne touches. But when I stepped through the heavy oak door into the entry hall, my soul soared! Cherry woodwork, stained glass windows, and a vaulted ceiling — this was the house for me.

The place was enormous and, miraculously, the ceilings, walls, floors, windows, and siding were all original and in good shape. This was no remuddled mansion, but a Victorian two-family, built during Schenectady's boom years when people flooded the city to work in the newly formed Edison Electric Company (now General Electric). For 80 of its 90 years, the building was owned by the same family. The first floor layout had an entry foyer, two parlours, three bedrooms, a dining room, a bathroom, and a large kitchen. The second floor was the same with a den instead of a foyer. The third floor had been the servant's quarters and had a small kitchen and bath. I loved it; I wanted it. But could I afford it?

The house was listed at \$34,900. To beat out other investors, I did the unthinkable — I offered \$100 over the asking



price. Then I begged, borrowed, scraped, and emptied out my bank accounts, gathering enough cash to cover closing costs and a modest down payment. With little money left for renovations, I would have to cut corners: painted woodwork wouldn't be stripped; circa 1950 wallpaper would stay; and

the worn roof wouldn't be repaired until it leaked. These things could be tackled later on, but for the first few years, the house, which ought to be a showplace, would become merely clean and safe enough to rent.

Two strokes of good luck made my venture into real estate more affordable: the furnace broke and the pipes froze and burst — before the closing.

"Now you can legally back out of your agreement," Florence sang. "We'll even refund your deposit." Her desire to sell me a house was overwhelmed by her fear that I was headed for catastrophe, but I had my heart set on this house. When my lawyer instructed the bank handling the estate to repair the damage, new copper piping was installed and the ceilings were freshly painted. The bank refused to replace the heating system, but there too I encountered good fortune.

The repairman shoved back his cap and thumped the furnace. "Looks like you need a new valve here," he said.

"Is that expensive?"

"About thirty-five dollars."

I was speechless. I had budgeted \$2000.

Luck like this could not continue. Although structurally sound, the house screamed for attention. I bought ten gallons of discontinued paint and got my local hardware store to give me a contractor's discount. Then I took out \$9000 in home improvement loans and was ready to get to work.

To save costs, I became a do-it-yourselfer. I subscribed to *The Old-House Journal*. I learned to install doorbells, wire lighting fixtures, and change faucets. I learned important lessons, such as: 1) Don't buy ten gallons of discontinued paint — unless you *want* a polka dot effect when you do touch-ups; 2) Don't buy 99¢ screwdriver sets, not to screw *real* screws with; 3) Don't even think of patching walls with genuine plaster of paris. It dries — fast! 4) Don't rip up the kitchen linoleum until you are very, *very* sure there's solid oak flooring underneath.

Obviously, I needed experienced helpers. I began collecting estimates. Carpenters, painters, and plumbers alike had the same pressing concern: "Is your husband home?"

Some were hesitant to quote prices to a woman. Others thought I might be more vulnerable than a man to a strong sales pitch. Dozens of salesmen with once-in-a-lifetime offers of sale-priced vinyl siding and aluminium storms and screens warned me that I'd tire of spending \$100 and up to change the big wood windows every spring and fall. They also cautioned me that over a fifteen-year period, paint and maintenance would cost more than vinyl siding.

They were right. But though this was investment property, money wasn't really the issue. A lifestyle was.

Finally, I hired four friends to paint the house.

"The Sandpiper is for the clapboard," I told them, "but the Navajo White is for the mouldings and the eaves."

"Then what's the Hickory for?" they wondered.

"The fishscale."

"Then you won't be needing the Deep Russet."

"Oh, yes. That's for the sashes."

"I thought the sashes were Navajo White. . . ."

For eight days I hovered on my lawn, fearing that if I so



Turn-of-the-century diplomas on foyer wall were found tucked away in an old china cabinet.

much as blinked, I'd end up with Hickory sashes and Russet eaves. Miraculously, the painters got the colors right and the combination was everything I had hoped for.

That winter the roof leaked. Water seeped between the walls, causing the fresh paint to peel in sheets. (Repainting is *this* spring's project.) The entire roof, four layers of asphalt shingles and the original wood shakes, had to be peeled off and a new plywood underlayment put down before any shingles could be replaced. If I'd been wealthy, I'd have replaced the original cedar roof. Being poor, I ordered brown fiberglass. Writing up the \$5,000 contract, the roofer cast nervous glances about my parlour. "*Is your husband home. . . .*"

That summer, five bronze-backed men climbed atop my house, hurled down truckloads of cedar and asphalt chips, and sent up clouds of dust that coated the Navajo White eaves. But I did have a new roof.

While the house was being painted and reroofed, I had begun my new life as a landlady. After two weeks spent scrubbing, patching, and painting the second-floor flat, it was habitable enough to attract a young couple who stayed a year, then left to buy an old house of their own. I scrubbed, patched, and painted some more. In no time the flat was snapped up by the director of the Schenectady Museum. Bill and his wife Abbie arrived with a vanload of Victorian furniture and a never-ending tolerance for noise, rubble, and plumbing disasters. Their rent helped but, to meet my expenses, I really needed to find a tenant for the little apart-



To keep my old windows, I'll gladly change storms and screens each season.

ment on the third floor.

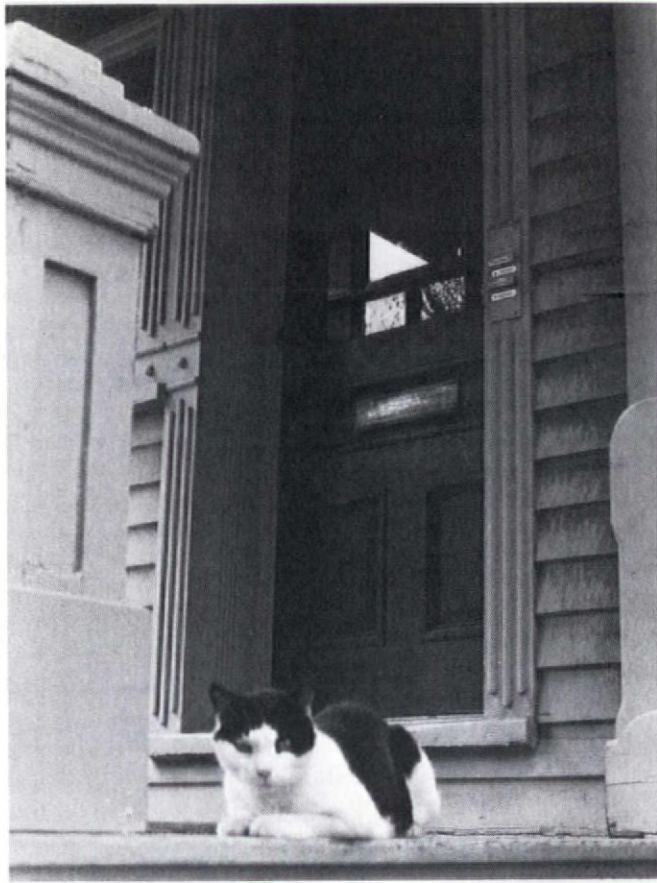
No one had lived on the third floor since 1945. To rent the apartment legally, I needed a Certificate of Occupancy. Certificates of Occupancy are not easy to come by.

"Our book specifies no combustible materials," said the code enforcement officer who inspected my house. He recommended that the natural-cherry staircase in the foyer be coated with fire-retardant paint. I explained that my house was built before his book was published; my house was historic.

"Then you'll have to get the historic zoning board to back you."

The historic zoning board was polite but firm. One block to the east, and the house would lie in the historic GE Plot. Half a block south and the house would stand on Historic Union Street. Ten blocks west and the house would be in the Historic Stockade. As it was, 1056 Gillespie Street was in a hole — smack in the middle of a historic doughnut. It did not qualify.

Determined not to lose my balusters to modern bureaucracy, I plagued the head of the code enforcement office with phone calls. Finally, he came personally to inspect my natural-cherry staircase and gave me his blessings to rent the apartment on one condition: that I build a room of type-X-firecode Sheetrock around the furnace. Within a month, the job was done and the apartment rented. My new tenant Kay was so eager to move in, I didn't even have time to paint the ceilings.



What a nice scene to come home to: a happy cat and my own front door.

The house has remained fully rented ever since. Today my accounts look something like this:

Monthly Expenses

- ✓ Mortgage & Taxes = \$480
- ✓ Home improvement loans = \$175
- ✓ Fuel oil = \$220
- ✓ Insurance = \$25
- ✓ Supplies, books, OHJ subscription, odds & ends = \$50 (give or take)

✓ Total = \$950

Monthly Rental Income

- ✓ Second floor = \$500
- ✓ Third floor = \$240
- ✓ Total = \$740

So, it seems I'm losing \$210 a month. But wait! If I didn't own my roomy first-floor flat, I'd be dishing out \$500 a month in rent. Therefore, I'm actually *making* \$290 a month. In fact, my accountant claims I'm doing better than that, thanks to tax deductions, equity, and so on.

Suddenly my house is not a money pit, but a gold mine. In fact, I was even able to quit my job. Now I spend my days doing things I love, teaching an occasional college class, writing, and working on my big old house. Sometimes I dream about how rich I'd be if I chopped the building into efficiency apartments and rented to fifteen students at \$150 a head. But hey! who needs to be rich? My tenants Bill and Abbie and Kay do not merely help me meet expenses. They listen to my woes, applaud my efforts, and babysit my cat.

THE GEORGIAN & FEDERAL STYLES

by James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell

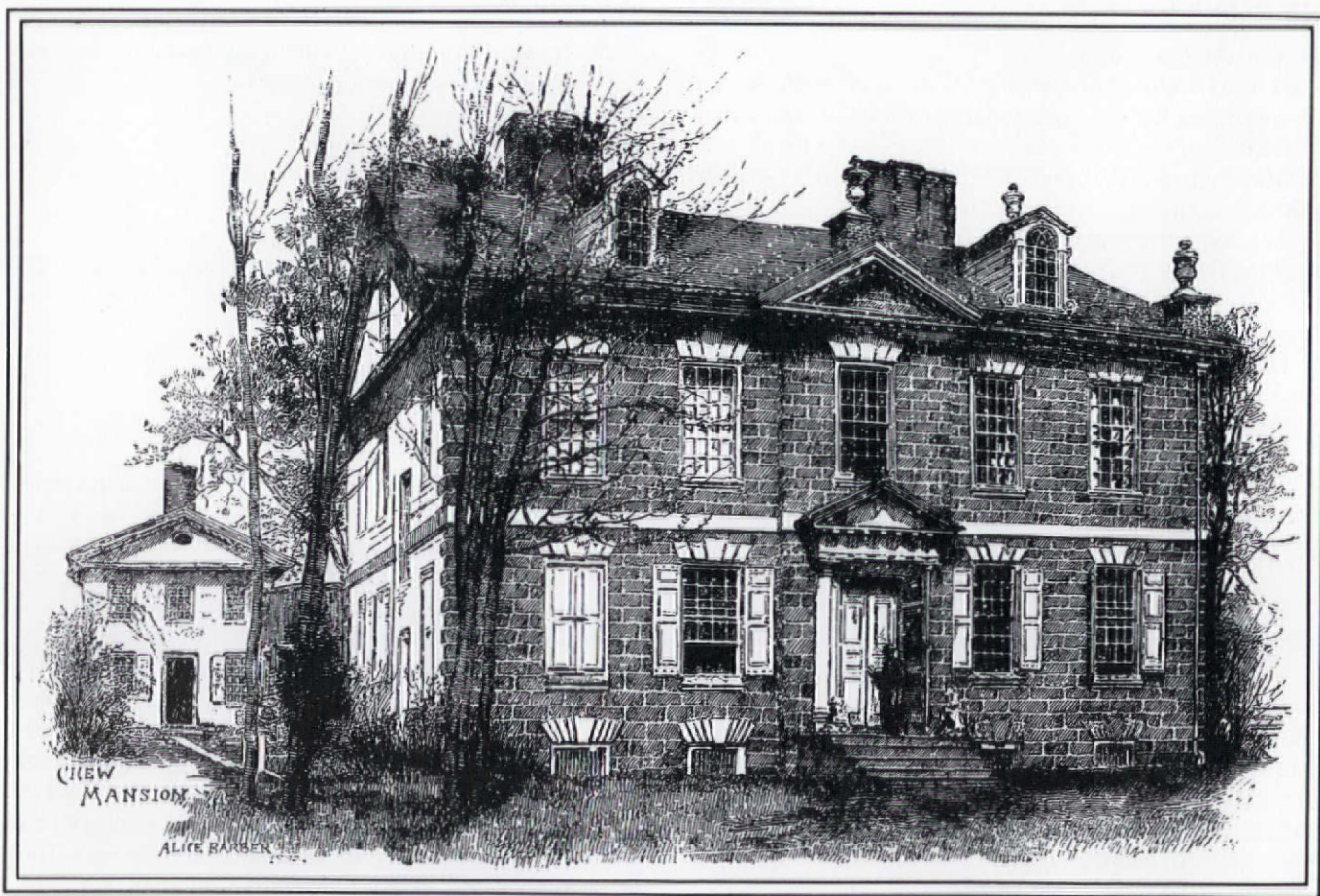
Colonial-era architecture was much indebted to vernacular European forms. With the Georgian and, subsequently, the Federal styles, Americans adopted a more formal approach to architecture. Of course, Colonial building features continued to be used in Georgian buildings. Typically Georgian features were added to buildings that were basically Colonial. While the builder's vocabulary changed slowly, change it did. Certain concepts are more typical of one period than another, and these are the ones we'll emphasize. Most of our examples are taken from the Middle Atlantic states (just authors' prerogative ...).

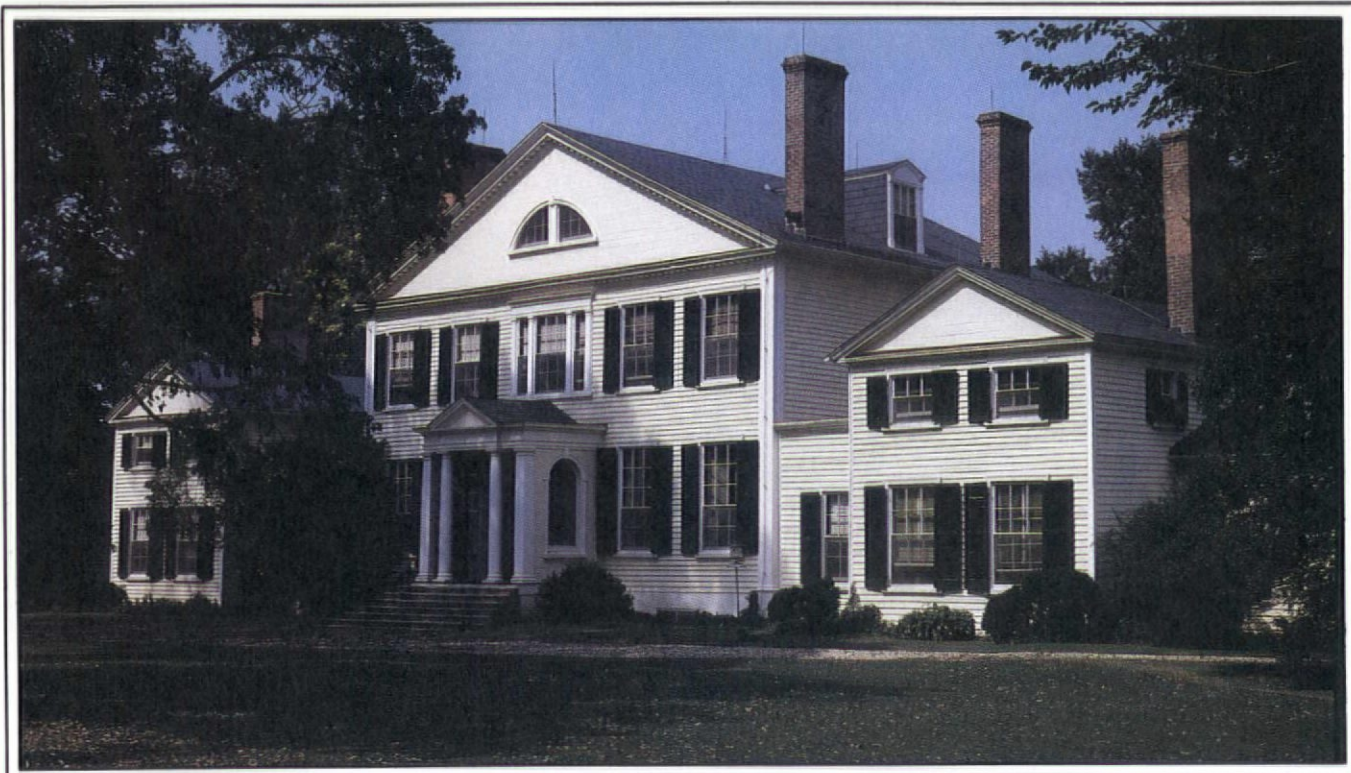
The Georgian style in art and architecture was named for the era in which it flourished: the reigns of the first three Georges of England, from 1714 to 1811. In the history of American architecture (and particularly in this discussion of styles), Georgian is best illustrated in buildings constructed from about 1740 until the American Revolution, when building in the Colonies came virtually to a standstill. After the war, Americans were eager to create an architecture of their own in the new republic. Although they turned to British sources for inspiration — particularly

to the work of Scottish architects Robert and James Adam — their ideas began to assume a distinctly American shape in the Federal style, popular from about 1790 to 1820. (American styles lagged about 25 years behind their European models.)

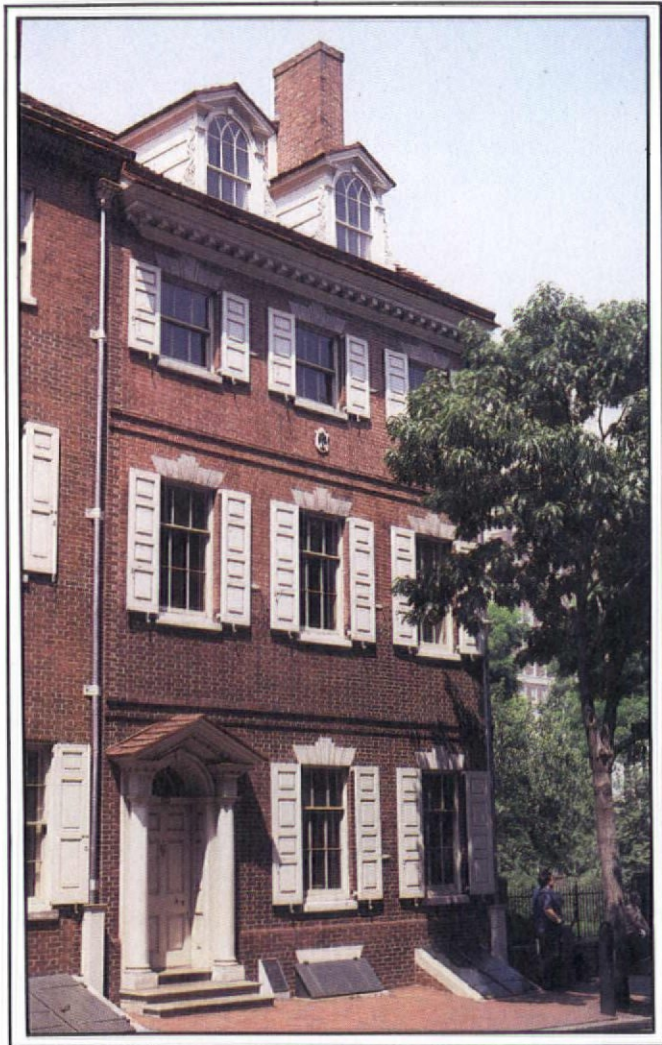
There were no professional, trained architects in the Colonies until the 19th century, and so Americans relied heavily on architectural pattern books compiled in England. In both countries, revivals of the works of the architects of the Italian Renaissance, particularly Andrea Palladio, stirred enormous interest. These were widely circulated among well educated and affluent Americans. Other British architectural volumes, some of them reprinted in America, were aimed at builders and carpenters. Not until 1806, when Asher Benjamin published *The American Builder's Companion: or A New System of Architecture Particularly Adapted to the Present Style of Building in the United States*, did a native volume become available — but despite its title, it was derivative of English sources.

Although Colonial, Georgian, and even Federal building styles were British imports, they had been modified for American use. Designs for even elaborate American build-





above: *Wye House (1781-84), near Easton, Maryland. This smaller, five-part Palladian model, built in wood frame with very small hyphens, exhibits both Georgian and Federal design elements.*

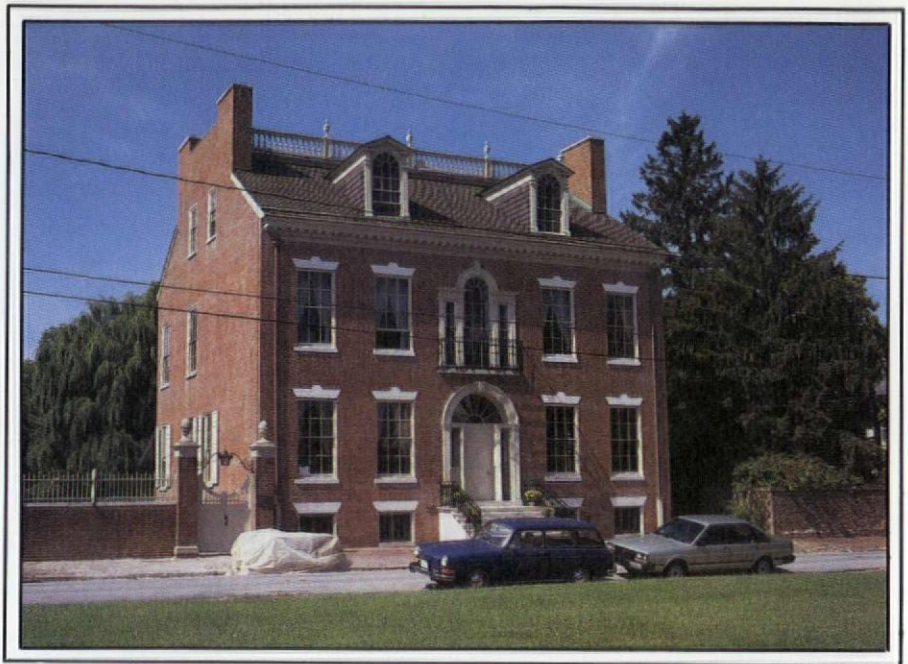


left: *Bishop White House (1786-87), Independence National Historic Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This excellent 3½-storey Georgian townhouse typifies what might have been built for a wealthy property owner.*

opposite page: *Chew House (now Cliveden), Germantown, Pennsylvania. This fine house in ashlar stone is transitional in design from Colonial to Georgian.*

right: Reed House (1804), Newcastle, Delaware. This transitional house bandily illustrates how Georgian and Federal features could coexist until well into the Federal period: The massing is Georgian; the details, Federal.

below: Amstel House (1730-50), Newcastle, Delaware. This doorway illustrates the blocky design typical of the Georgian style.



ings were simplified to suit owners less affluent and builders less skilled than their British counterparts. The most sophisticated buildings required the importation of craftsmen as well as designs.

With the reliance on widely circulated pattern books, regional variations in style began to fade in the Georgian-Federal period (although they certainly didn't disappear). Later, a small but growing number of architects practiced

nationwide, also blurring regional distinctions.

In contrast to Colonial buildings, which usually emphasized function over form, both Georgian and Federal buildings exhibit a rigid design symmetry. Indeed, most of the similarities between the two styles are based on this shared insistence on balance. Main entrances are centered (except in party-wall townhouses); window openings and other elements are evenly spaced on the facade. When such symmetry is missing — as it is in Mount Vernon, for instance — it may be because additions have thrown the arrangement off balance. Still, wings and dependencies were almost always added in symmetrical increments and were often placed so that they continued the line of the main facade of the house, although they might be dissimilar in height, roof slope, or building material.

Symmetry aside, however, the differences between Georgian and Federal houses are striking. The Georgian style is sometimes described as “masculine,” meaning that Georgian houses are likely to be blocky, robust, and assertive in design. The main entrance is frequently contained within a projecting central section (pavilion) that reaches up through the full height of the house, generally two-and-a-half or three-and-a-half storeys above a raised basement. The grandest houses have two-storey entrance porticoes, with large pediments supported by columns.

The ultimate expression of the Georgian style is the free-standing, five-part “Palladian” mansion: a sturdy main block flanked by hyphens (a wonderfully appropriate term for these low, connecting units!), leading to smaller flanking wings (flankers or pavilions). The hyphens may be fully enclosed or merely covered walkways. They may extend straight out on axis or curve, with the pavilions at right angles to the mansion (as at Mount Vernon).

The Federal House, if not exactly “feminine,” is more formal and restrained in both outline and detail. The style is largely a reaction to the boldness of its Georgian pred-





left: Woodford (1756; 1772), Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Originally only one storey high, this compact free-standing Georgian was raised to two storeys. Note the Palladian window.

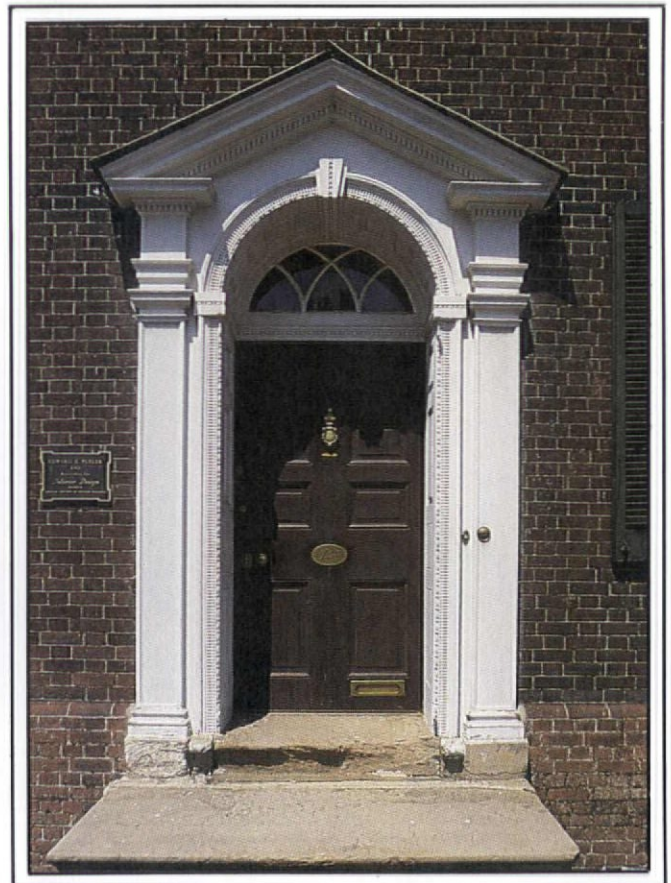
below: Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home (1795), Alexandria, Virginia. This is a more refined doorway treatment than the one pictured opposite, and would lead eventually to the Federal style.

ecessor. Federal lines are simpler, surfaces smoother, decoration more attenuated. Where the Georgian might have a bit of swagger, the Federal leans toward refined understatement, frequently expressing an even-more-sophisticated geometry. Federal houses often include curving or multi-sided bays, elliptical rooms, semi-circular or octagonal bays or porticoes, domed and arched ceilings. They are more likely than the Georgian to be three full storeys high — or conversely, much more likely to have only a large single storey above a raised basement. The five-part form was also used for Federal mansions, even for one-storey buildings such as Homewood, a Baltimore house constructed in 1801-03 (see p. 28).

roofs remained most common, lower slopes were much more fashionable, and hip or deck-on-hip roofs became *de rigueur* on the finest houses. (There were even some leaky attempts at truly flat roofs, but these experiments would not prove successful until the mid-19th century.) Metal as a roofing material began to come into its own during these years, and some very fine buildings were given copper roofs.

There was a trend throughout the late-18th and early-19th centuries toward more substantial masonry buildings and more carefully finished surfaces. Brick was favored in both periods. Georgian houses, particularly in the Middle Atlantic states, were somewhat more likely to be built of stone than were Federal houses. In either period, fine ashlar stonework (that is, laid with evenly cut blocks rather than irregular “rubble” chunks) is rarely found except on great public buildings. When frame construction was used, as it often was in New England Georgian houses, the wood cladding might imitate ashlar stonework, sometimes with simulated stone quoins (corner blocks). Similarly, the use of stucco on exterior walls, often scored to imitate ashlar stonework, is common in the Federal period, although it is occasionally found on earlier houses. Stucco was used with brick decorative work at Mount Pleasant (1761-62), a great Georgian mansion in Philadelphia (see p. 27). Whereas mortar joints in the Georgian house were thick and often decoratively tooled, those of the Federal period were thin, sometimes almost to the point of being invisible.

The steeply sloped Colonial roofline gradually flattened during the Georgian and Federal years. Although gable



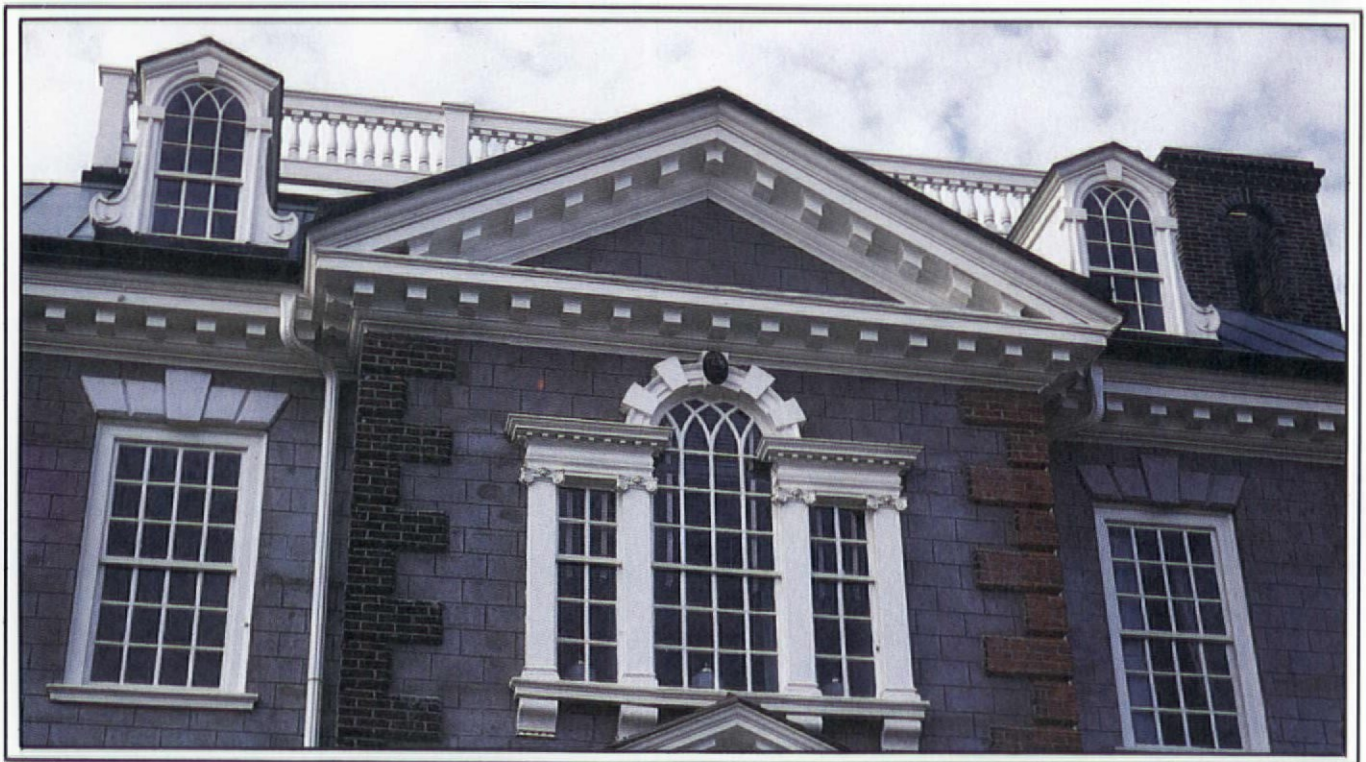
Entrways starred in both the Georgian and Federal years, but the effect was very different in the two periods. Georgian doorways were showy constructions, gorgeously trimmed, with lots of carved and moulded wood. They might be topped by formal pediments flanked by pilasters and supported by elaborate consoles, or brackets. Semi-circular fanlights with thick, straight, radiating muntins above the doors provided both decoration and natural illumination. Federal doorways, less given to self-advertisement, displayed far less wood; columns and pilasters were slim and light. They often had semi-circular fanlights, but elliptical fans with delicate tracery in wood or lead are a distinctive Federal feature. Muntins were thin, flat, and delicate, even when they were ornamental. Sidelights and, where there is no curved fanlight, transoms are also frequently seen in Federal buildings. In both periods, six- or eight-panel, single- or double-leaf doors were common, but the raised panels of the Georgian period gave way to a flatter look in the Federal.

The Palladian window, a three-part construction with a tall arched center section and shorter, narrower, rectangular sidelights, became almost commonplace among better American homes of the Georgian and Federal periods. Jib windows, which doubled as doors that opened from the floor up to head height, were a convenience of the Georgian dwelling. Federal houses often featured double- or triple-sash, floor-length windows. Windows and windowpanes are larger in Federal houses than in Georgian ones, but the overall ratio of window to wall actually decreases in the later Federal. A typical Georgian window may be twelve-over-twelve panes, separated by thick mun-

tins and set within a thick frame. Both frame and muntins grew thinner as the 18th century drew to a close, however, and six-over-six windows were common at the beginning of the new century. Pilaster trim, with circular mouldings in corner blocks, is first found as exterior trim on Federal windows and doors. Taken indoors, it became the most common interior trim in the 19th century.

As we have seen, Georgian ornament is large in scale, elaborate in execution. That of the Federal period is smaller and infinitely quieter. Much of the ornamental design of the Federal period was inspired by the work of Robert Adam, who had developed a refined interpretation of decorative motifs from classical antiquity. Under his influence, the noisy splendor of Georgian woodworking — the marvelous carved columns and pilasters and pediments, the bold cornices, dentils, and modillions — was gradually muted, replaced by the subtler rhythms of the new century. Where heavy masonry string courses wrapped around blunt Georgian facades, the plain surfaces of Federal buildings were likely to be broken only by shallow recessed or applied panels. Where virtuoso Georgian woodcarving might once have dominated a pediment, Federal swags and cartouches now discreetly insinuated themselves.

The rather sedate evolution from the Colonial and Georgian to the Federal styles marked the end of a long continuum in architectural development. The 19th century would shortly field a lively architectural battle, as architects revived, one after another, a rich panoply of styles from other times and other places.

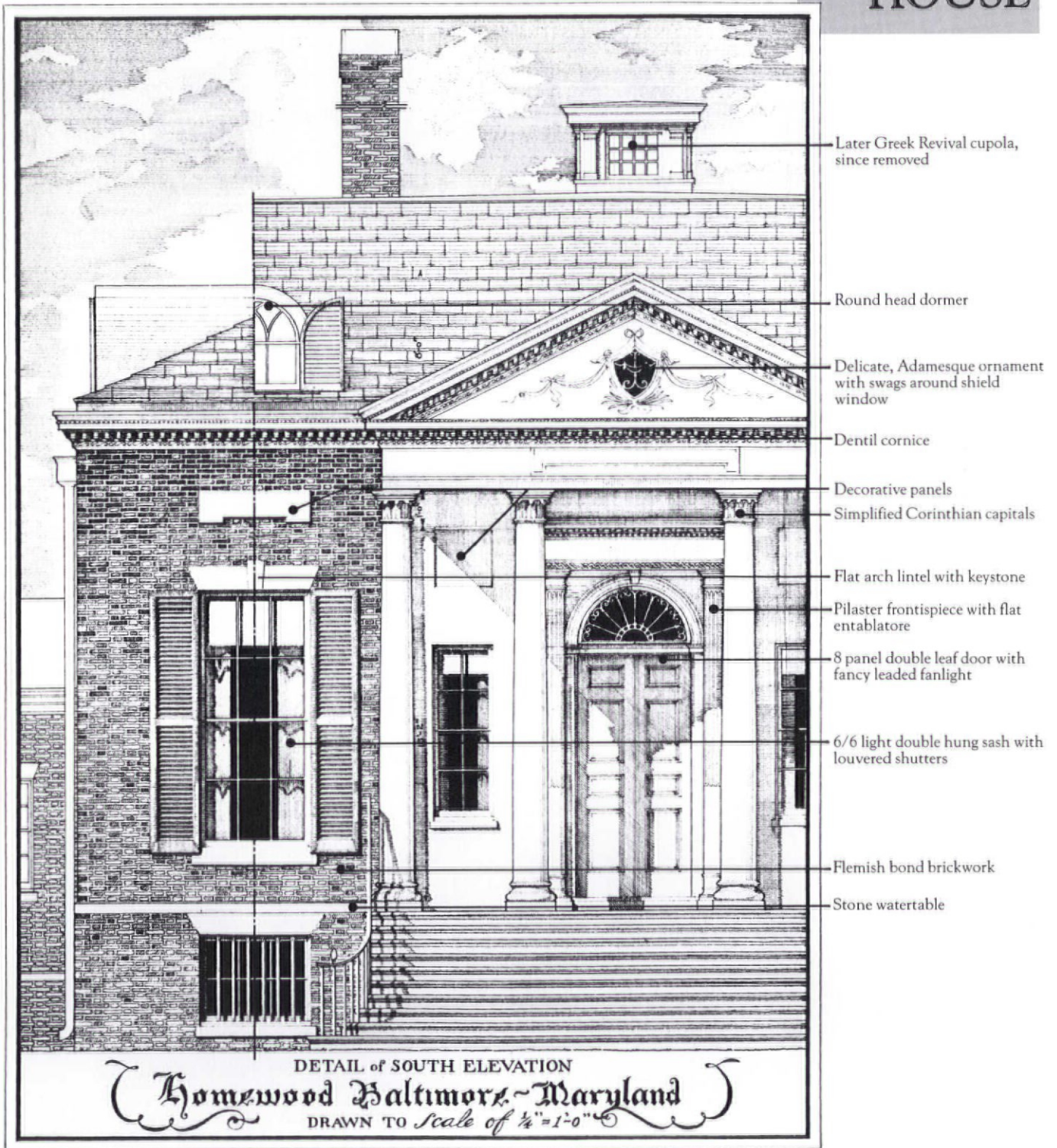


Mt. Pleasant, (1761-62), Fairmount Park, Philadelphia. "The most elegant seat in Pennsylvania" is what John Adams called this high-style Georgian mansion with exceptionally bold ornament.

THE FEDERAL STYLE

KEY: Graceful and Elegant Style, Refined Proportions,
Restrained, Small Scaled Ornament

READING THE OLD HOUSE



Mitchell Wooten, 1921

Projecting pedimented entrance bay
on raised basement

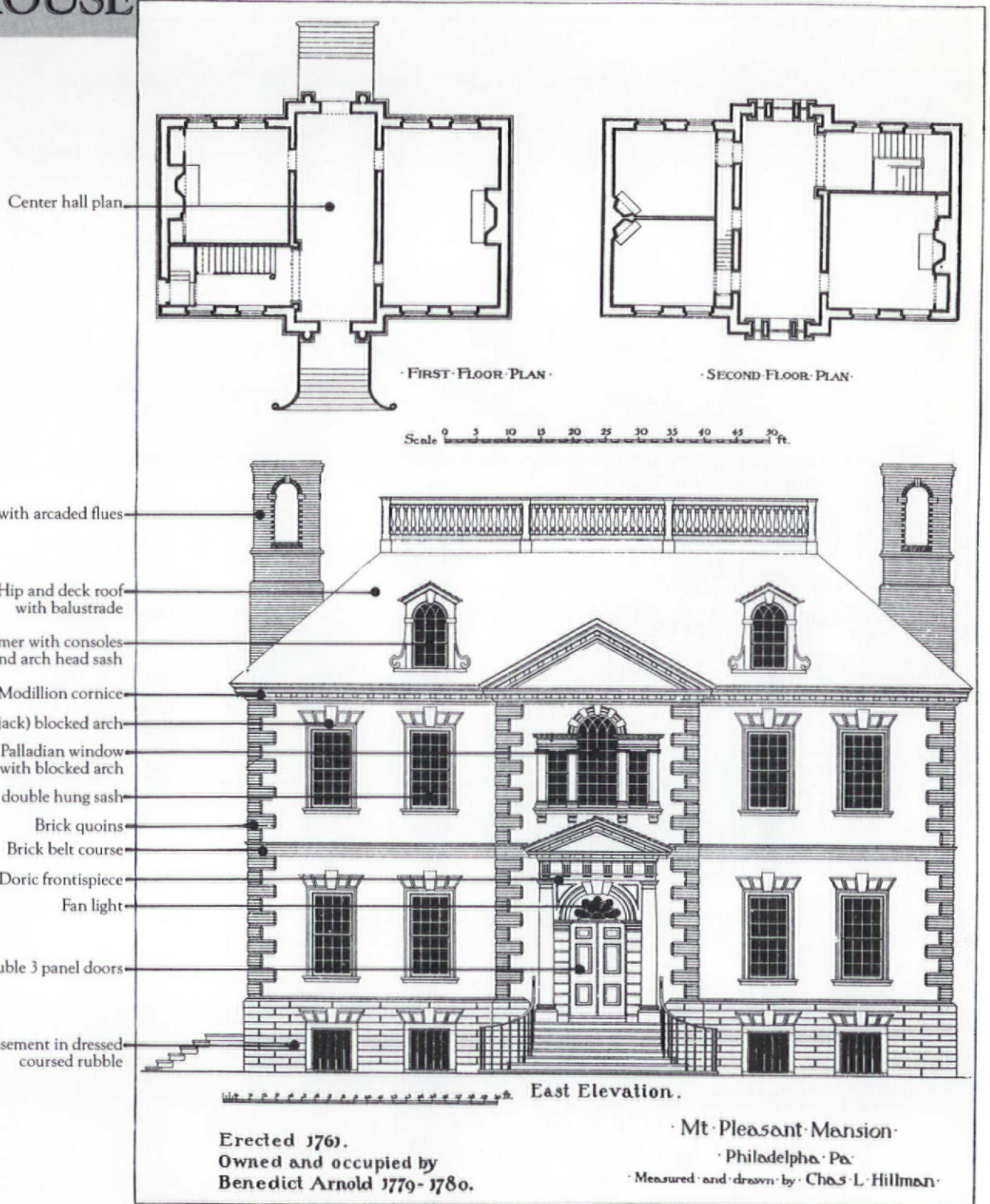
NOTE: Partial elevation of main block. Hyphens and flanking pavilions not shown.

SOURCE:
ARCHITECTS EMERGENCY COMMITTEE
GREAT GEORGIAN HOUSES OF AMERICA, 1933.
J.C. MASSEY, '87

READING THE OLD HOUSE

THE GEORGIAN STYLE

KEY: Highly Articulated Formal Features
With Robust Ornament, Adapted From England



COPYRIGHT, 1899 BY THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT AND BUILDING NEWS CO.

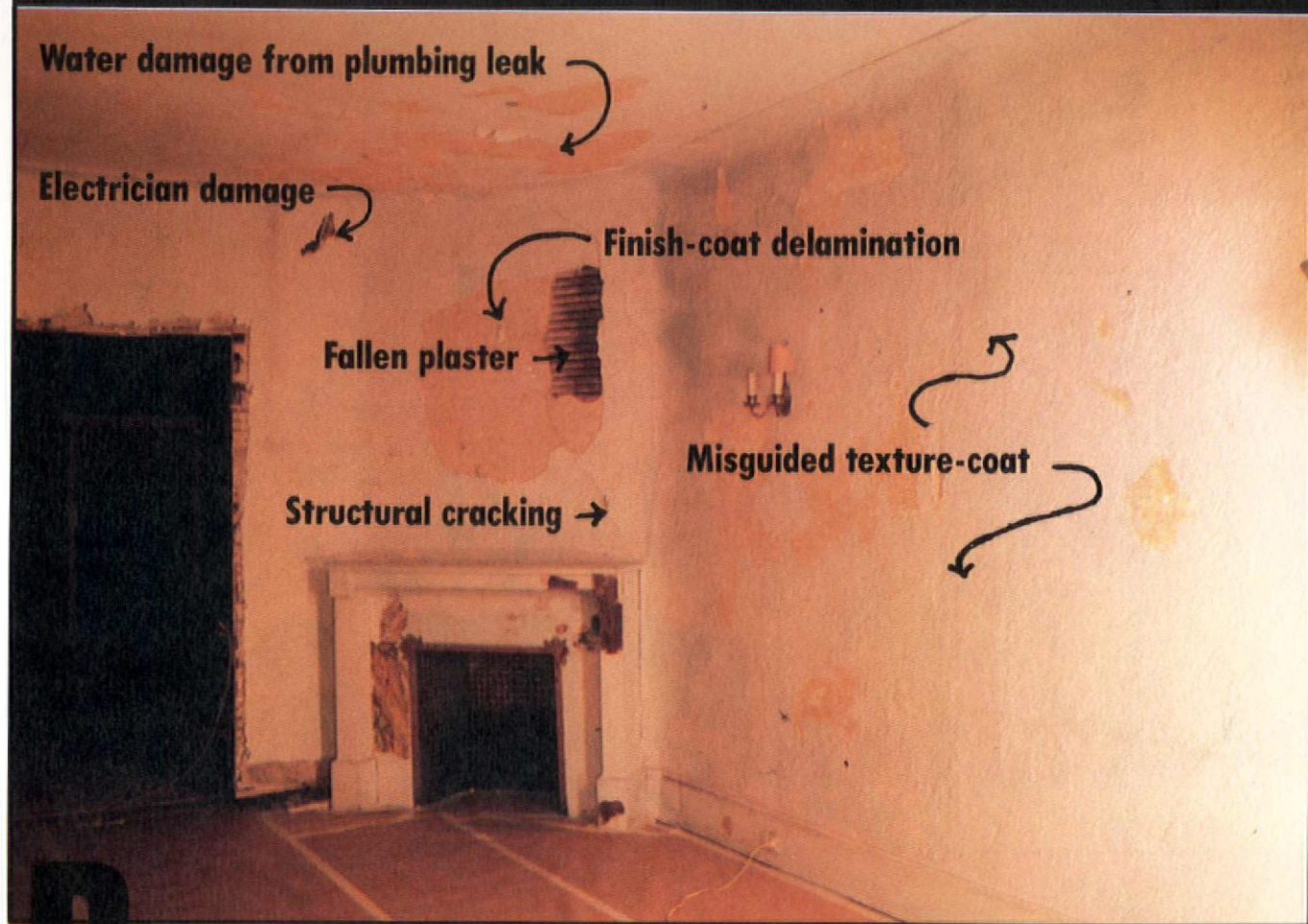
↑
↑
Projecting pedimented entrance bay

NOTE: Flanking pavilions ("flankers") not shown on drawing

SOURCE:
AMERICAN ARCHITECT, 1899.
J.C. MASSEY, '87

The Basics of PLASTER REPAIR

by Patricia Poore



Plaster technology and techniques would fill a big textbook. My purpose here is to explain what plaster is and why it fails, and to outline your options in dealing with problems. Throughout, I'll assume that 50% of your plaster is salvageable; in other words, we're talking about patching and repair, not demolition and replacement.

Reading this article won't make you a plasterer. Big jobs, especially, require a lot of practice working with the materials. But I think you'll be convinced that plaster is usually salvageable using simple, inexpensive techniques. Even if you're already an experienced taper or patch-plasterer, a few of the tricks or products described in this article may be news to you. And the Plastering Glossary that appears on page 34 clears up confused vocabulary for all of us.

WHAT IS PLASTER?

In old houses, plaster is most often a three-coat system of lime- or gypsum-based, trowellable mortar that was applied wet over wood lath strips. The first two coats contain sand (and perhaps animal hair); the finish coat is thinner and contains no aggregate or binder. The base coat of plaster has a mechanical and adhesive bond to the lath: *mechanical* through keys, or hardened slumps of plaster that went through the spaces between lathing strips; *adhesive* by virtue of suction created between the wood lath and wet plaster.

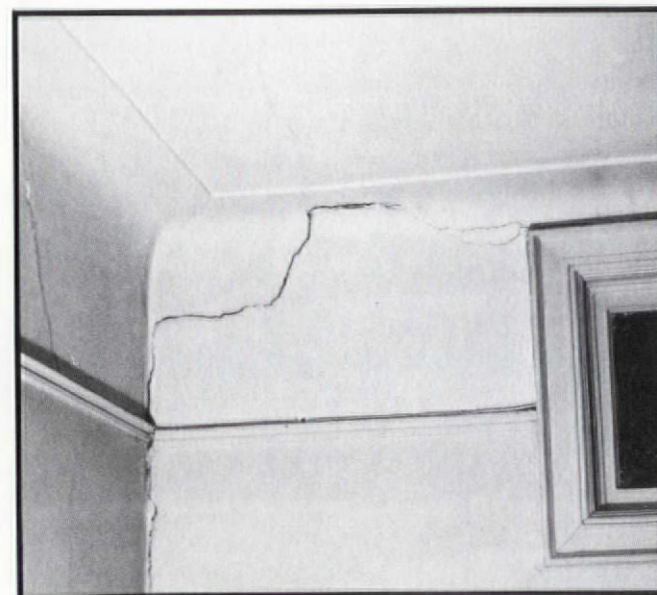
Obviously, plaster can fail because of imperfections in the material itself, or because of stresses in or failure of the structural system that supports it (house framing, studs, lath).



Patching cracks is time-consuming ...



... but if you tape them, they won't come back.



Settlement cracks to be patch-plastered and taped.

CRACKS

Hairline cracks are no threat to the integrity of the wall or ceiling, but you'll want to patch them before painting. Open the crack with the point of a can opener or a putty knife, and fill it with spackling compound. Cracks may be cyclical — opening and closing with seasonal variation in humidity which causes the lath to swell and shrink. In that case, it's best to not "spackle" them with rigid plaster. Instead, bed fiberglass tape in joint compound and feather over with more compound.

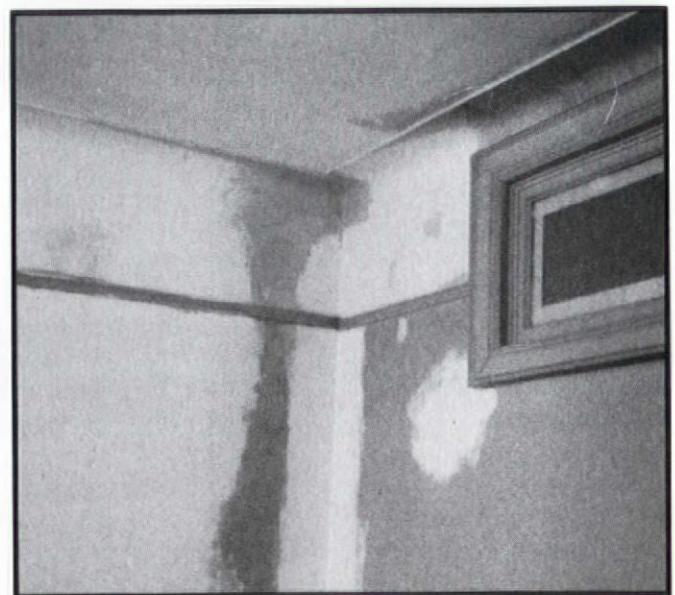
Structural cracks or large cracks usually happen early in the building's life. Dig them out, undercutting slightly to provide a key for the patch plaster. Vacuum out all debris. Patch with the appropriate patching plaster, finish with a layer of compound, sand or sponge, and prime.

canvassing

Wall canvas or modern substitutes are used to line plaster walls before they are painted or papered. (Order it through wallpaper stores.) Decorative painters in the past used to canvas walls before stencilling to protect the fancy painting from hairline cracks. You can use it over patched walls or ceilings, as long as the plaster is basically sound. It's a good way to resurface if you've got less-than-perfect patches, lots of hairline cracks, uneven paint layers, or other minor imperfections. Canvas can't bridge holes or disguise badly uneven patches, however, so do your stabilizing, taping, and patching first.

plaster washers

Plaster washers, also called repair discs or ceiling buttons, are an old-fashioned fix for pulling sound plaster back up to lath (when the keys have broken), or for pulling plaster and lath back to the studs or joists. They are used in conjunction with flat-head wood screws or drywall screws, and are subsequently covered with joint compound. They're



The same corner after patching.

useful for securing areas of sound plaster before you remove damaged plaster nearby.

Even bowed plaster can be saved by anchoring it with plaster washers. The plaster itself must have integrity — it can't be crumbly or soft due to water damage. If the plaster-and-lath assembly together has separated from the structure, long wood screws can be used to go through the lath and into studs or joists.

Plaster washers may be hard to find. We know of two companies that will ship them to you via mail-order: Charles St. Supply Co., 54 Charles St., Dept. OHJ, Boston, MA 02114; Fastenation, PO Box 1364, Dept. OHJ, Marblehead, MA 01945.

PATCHING HOLES

In the middle photo at right, an area of missing plaster was patched with traditional three-coat plaster (more on this later). Another method for patching holes larger than four inches square is to use drywall as a base material, as in the bottom photo. This method is usually easier for non-plasterers — you don't have to buy and mix and trowel traditional plastering materials. Areas of bad plaster are removed. Then the hole is squared up so that a neat patch can be cut from drywall to fit the hole. Cut the plaster back to studs or joists so you have something to screw the drywall to.

The drywall might have to be shimmed to bring it up to the surface of the surrounding plaster. The gap between patch and plaster is treated just like a Sheetrock seam: taped and finished with joint compound. You can skim the entire patch with compound, too, if necessary to level it or impart a trowelled finish texture. All patches, taped cracks, and skimmed areas *must* be primed before painting.

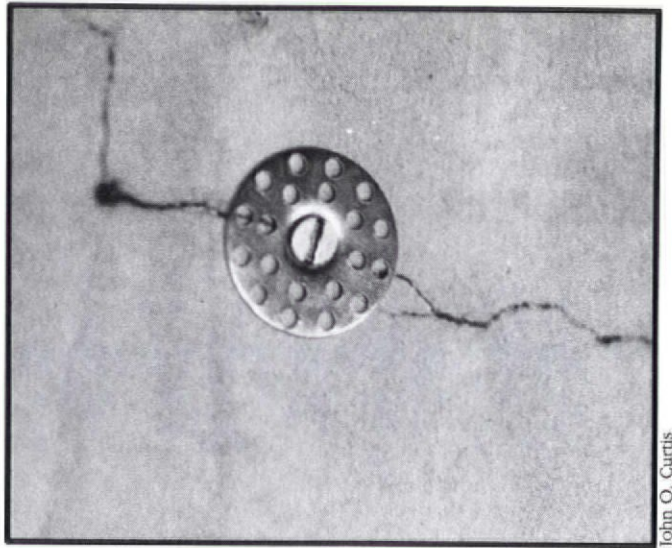
secret of the screw gun

A screw gun comes in handy for installing both plaster washers and drywall patches. By the time you bang nails into the drywall, the surrounding plaster will have cracked and crumbled further. And debris caught behind the patch will keep it from laying flat. A screw gun is an electric screwdriver with a retractable sleeve that controls the screw depth. It's fast, and the depth adjustment allows every screw to be countersunk just below the surface of the drywall without breaking the paper face. But its greatest advantage in patch plastering is that it avoids the hammer impact that would damage fragile plaster.

patch plastering

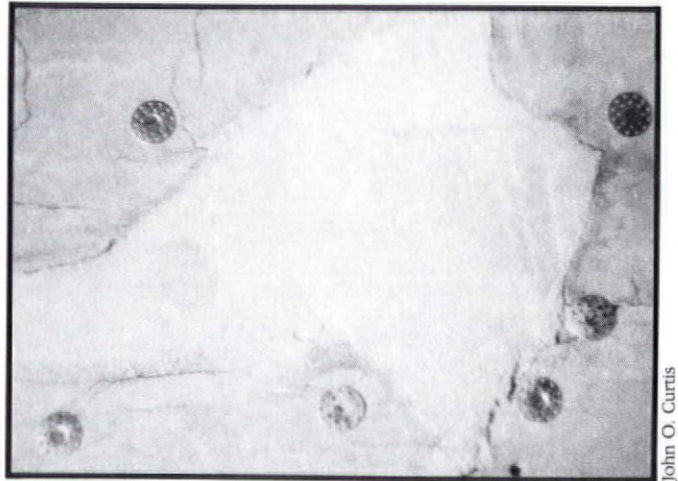
The alternative to the drywall patch is patch plastering. For holes less than four inches in diameter, fill to not-quite-level with Structo-lite or patching plaster, and finish (skim) with joint compound.

Larger holes down to the lath will probably require three coats. For the scratch and brown coats, use Structo-lite Regular (USG's perlited gypsum plaster) or the equivalent. The top or finish coat is finish lime mixed with gauging plaster. (Refer to a very detailed article on how to patch



John O. Curtis

A plaster washer draws cracked plaster to the lath.

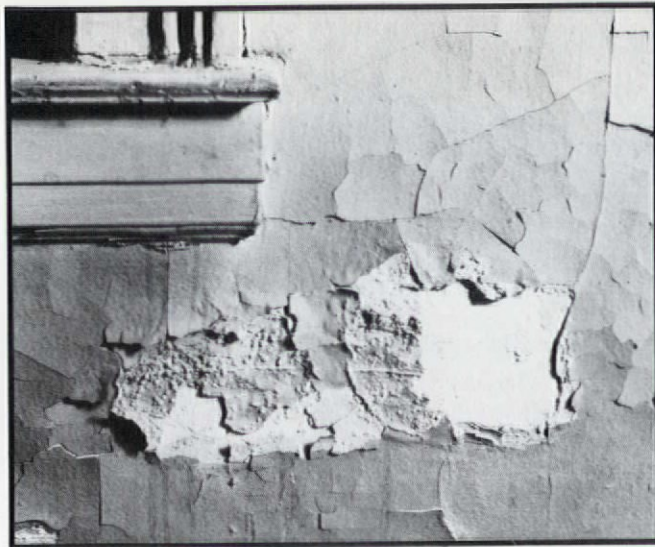


John O. Curtis

Washers secure the remaining old plaster around a hole that has been patched.



When large chunks of plaster are missing, drywall patches can be used as a base.



Paint and plaster failure from water penetration.



Walter Jowers

Raw materials and tools of the trade.



Walter Jowers

Metal lath has been tied over wood lath to provide reliable keying of the patch plaster.

plaster in the July-August 1986 issue of OHJ.)

Remove damaged plaster very carefully. You can't just bang it out unless you were intending to remove the whole wall and whatever is on the other side of it. Cut it with a chisel and pull it away with your hands, using a prybar gently. Anchor salvageable surrounding plaster with washers as described previously. Resecure loose lath to the studs or joists, predrilling to avoid splitting lath. Vacuum out all debris. We suggest installing metal lath over the wood lath before patching with plaster; this makes the patch less likely to fail.

FINISH-COAT FAILURE

Buckling or delamination of the finish coat of plaster is a common problem in old houses. It can occur because of a bad original bond between the brown coat and the finish coat. Problems in the manufacture of the raw materials, or with the on-site mixing, application, or humidity, may have interfered with the chemical reaction that causes the plaster to cure.

If failure is limited to small areas, joint compound (the restorer's best friend) can be used. Just be sure to remove all areas of loose finish coat, because it *will* fail. If delamination is extensive, it makes more sense to replaster the finish coat; call in a plasterer unless you're willing to invest some time in learning the skill yourself.

DAMP WALLS, WATER DAMAGE

Plaster that was merely stained by a short-term water leak in the past can be sealed with shellac or a shellac-based primer. But if the plaster lost its integrity (becoming bowed and crumbly), it probably is unsalvageable. Remove only the damaged section, of course. Anchor edges of remaining sound plaster, and patch.

Plaster badly damaged by water effloresces. The dry powdery bubbles are salts in the plaster brought to the surface by the water. If it's minor, the efflorescence can be brushed away and the plaster sealed with shellac before painting. More often, efflorescence is not a good sign. Water-damaged plaster will not hold paint and, worse, it will eventually fall.

TEXTURE-FINISH REMOVAL

Textured wall finishes were popular from about 1920 to the late '30s. They're often attractive, in good shape, and part of the character of the house. Then there's the overdone texture finish, sloppily applied and now failing in areas, which was part of a "modernization" of an older house. If you want to remove this stuff, you're in for a lot of work.

Simple scraping with a putty knife or old chisel may remove much of the finish. A rented wallpaper steamer further breaks the bond of texture to original plaster, making it easier to scrape. If you get most but not quite all of it off, skim the wall with joint compound. Two thin coats, applied at right angles, is best. Warning: A later texture


finish may have been a last-ditch attempt to "rescue" failing plaster, and when you scrape it off, the underlying plaster (finish coat or more) may come with it. Oh well . . . better you know now.

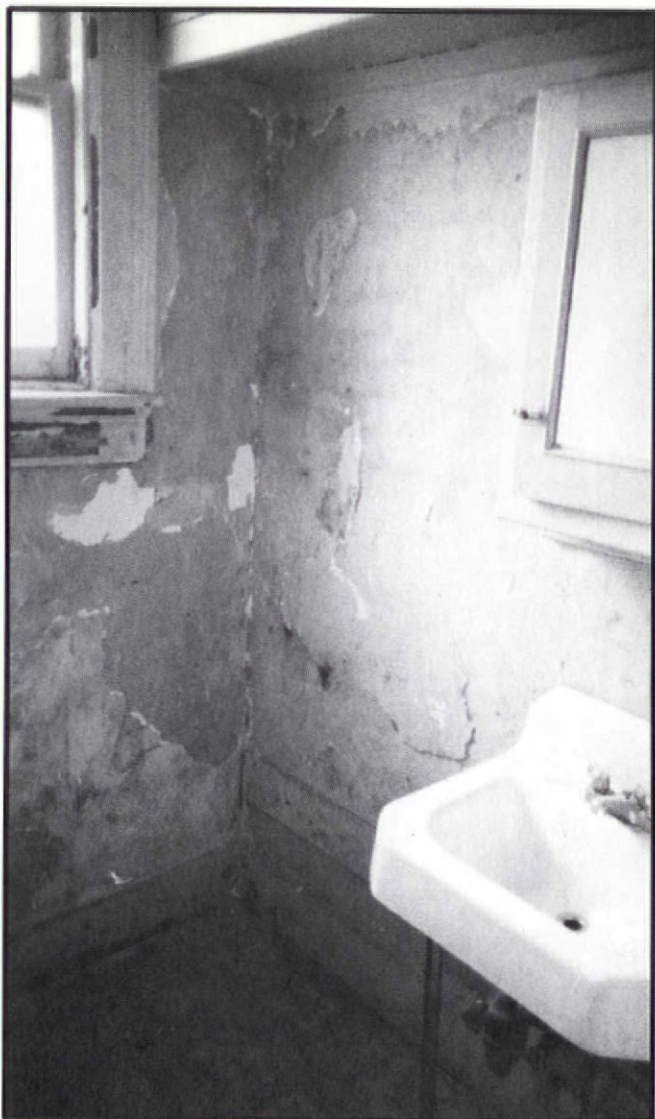
STARTING OVER

What if you find your plaster ceiling or walls are unsalvageable? You have three basic options for replacement: real three-coat plaster, drywall, or veneer plaster.

The advantages of real plaster are both aesthetic and practical. Nothing else looks like plaster; the older the building, the more important that look is. Drywall in an eighteenth-century house looks anachronistic. Real plaster has the best insulating and sound-deadening characteristics, too. Don't dismiss the concept of replacing plaster with plaster until you get prices. If you live in a place (usually urban) where you can find a plasterer, plaster may be quite competitive with drywall.

Drywall (Sheetrock) is the usual choice of both do-it-yourselfer and general contractor. The materials are modular; the sheets go up quickly with less mess and disruption than plastering. (Taping takes awhile, however.) Less skill is needed to do an adequate drywall job than plaster job. On the other hand, only really good tapers can make truly invisible seams. Drywall is perfectly flat and regular (characterless). What makes an old house old is a subtle thing. Let's put it this way: A Sheetrock ceiling in the kitchen or moisture-proof Sheetrock on bathroom walls isn't too much of a compromise. But a whole house with walls of new drywall is a very different animal from the same house with plaster walls. Craftsmanship exists only in the latter.

Veneer plaster is in-between. Here, a real trowelled finish coat of plaster is applied to a prefabricated gypsum-board base. (Sometimes a base coat and finish coat are applied over the gypsum base.) Get prices locally before you decide which way to go. 



Bathroom walls and exterior walls are two common sites for plaster failure due to water.



Failing texture finish that will have to be scraped and perhaps steamed.



If the underlying plaster is sound, a chisel can be used to scrape off unwanted texture finish.

A PLASTERING GLOSSARY

Note: The terms used in this craft vary regionally across the country, and have also been altered by changes in technology and the passage of time. The result is that some definitions have become as plastic as the materials themselves!

■ **Aggregate** — A mass of granulated particles, such as sand and crushed rock. In plastering, aggregates are important 1) to ensure that the applied plaster shrinks uniformly as it hardens, and without excesses that would cause cracking; 2) to form channels for the crystallization of calcium; 3) as fillers for economical purposes. Lightweight aggregates, such as **Vermiculite** and **Perlite**, are increasingly popular because of the improved resiliency, fire resistance, sound deadening, and weight reduction they offer over traditional materials such as sand.

■ **Autoclave Finish Lime** — Double-hydrated lime requiring NO soaking before use; it can be mixed on site and used immediately. Some plasterers feel that Type S (single-hydrated) lime has better workability. Plaster prepared with autoclave lime may be less resistant to environmental moisture (i.e., water leaks).

■ **Base** — Any continuous surface to which plaster can be applied and to which it will cling. A base might be a continuous masonry wall, or **Lath** over structural framing.

■ **Base Beads** (base screeds) — Metal strips, attached to the lath before plastering, that provide a division to work against when troweling plaster that will end at the top edges of base-boards.

■ **Brown Coat** — The rough base coat of plaster used with rock-lath systems. With metal- or wood-lath systems, it is the second application of wet, base-coat plaster.

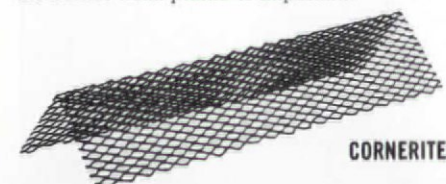
■ **Browning Brush** — Fine-bristled, water-carrying brush used to moisten base coat while working.

■ **Casing Bead** — Metal casing beads are sometimes used around door and window openings. Like a wood **Ground**, they indicate the proper thickness for the plaster.

■ **Cat Faces** — Finish-coat surface imperfections that show up as hollows after **Floating**.

■ **Ceiling Buttons** — See **Plaster Washers**.

■ **Corner Beads** — Wire mesh with a rigid metal spine used on outside corners. Installing the corner bead plumb is important.



CORNERITE

■ **Cornerite** — Wire mesh used on inside corners of adjoining walls and ceilings. It keeps corners from cracking.

■ **Darby** — A **Float** with two handles and an extra-long blade, used for further leveling and straightening any of the plaster coats.

■ **Devil's Float** — A wood **Float** with one or two nails protruding $\frac{1}{8}$ in. from the sole, used for surfacing the **Brown Coat** after it has dried 24 hours. Scratches left by the nails provide tooth for adhesion of the **Finish Coat**.

■ **Dots** — Small plaster spots placed as depth guides during work on walls and ceilings. They

are plumbed and leveled like **Screeds** to aid in **Rodding** the surface.

■ **Drywall** (wallboard, plasterboard, Sheetrock, gypboard, gyp-rock) — Rigid, insulating board of plasterlike material (usually gypsum), covered on both sides with heavy paper. Also, the system of wall surfacing using this material.

■ **Drywall Nail** — Short, heavy nail with large head designed for installing **Drywall**, often ribbed and/or coated for maximum grip into framing.

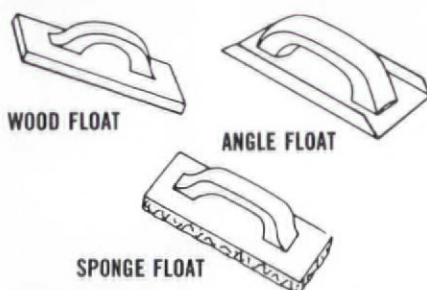
■ **Drywall Screw** — Phillips-type screw fastener designed for powertool installation of **Drywall**.

■ **Featheredge** — Leveling tool similar to **Rod** except that blade tapers to a sharp edge for cutting in corners and sharp, straight lines.

■ **Finish Coat** — Pure lime, mixed with a little **Gauging Material** (in ratios ranging from 5:1 to 2:1), used for the very thin finish surface of a plaster wall. Fine sand can be added for a sanded finish coat.

■ **Finish Plaster** — Fine, white plaster made from lime putty and gauging plaster.

■ **Finishing Board** — A 5-by-5-ft. **Mortarboard** on which finish-coat lime plaster is hand-mixed.



WOOD FLOAT

ANGLE FLOAT

SPONGE FLOAT

■ **Float** — Surfacing tool consisting of a flat, short board with a large handle, that is glided over the surface of plaster to fill voids and hollows or impart texture. Also, the plastering operation involving this tool.

■ **Gauging Material** (gauging) — A plaster additive intended to produce early strength and to counteract shrinkage tendencies. For interior work, common gauging materials are **Gypsum Gauging Plaster** and **Keene's Cement**; for outdoor work, **Portland Cement**.

■ **Ground** — Metal or wood strips around the edges of doors and windows and at the bottom of walls. These grounds help keep the plaster the same thickness and provide an edge for it to stop against.

■ **Gypsum** — A naturally occurring sedimentary rock, originally mined from large quarries near Paris. Gypsum, in its natural form, is calcium sulphate. When heated in the calcining process, water molecules are driven off, leaving a hemihydrate of calcium sulphate — the material commonly known as plaster of paris. When mixed with water again for use as plaster, the process reverses and the gypsum recrystallizes or "sets" into rocklike calcium sulphate. What this means is that plaster cures by a chemical process, not by drying, giving it strength and integrity. Until 1910, not enough was understood about the set of gypsum plaster. At around that time, plasterers found that a lime/gypsum combination gave them the best of both worlds: the workability of lime with the quicker cure of gypsum.

■ **Gypsum Bond Plaster** — Calcined gypsum mixed with 2 to 5 percent lime by weight, designed to bond to properly prepared concrete bases.

■ **Gypsum Gauging Plaster** — A special material made from gypsum carefully processed so that it sets in a definite time interval. On the job, it is added to slaked lime to provide initial surface hardness in mortars like finishing plaster.

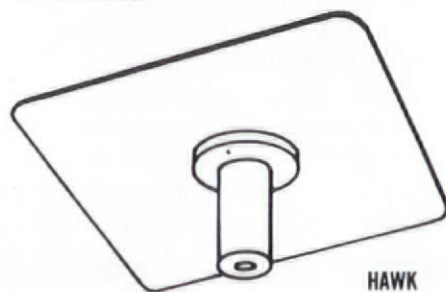
■ **Gypsum Neat Plaster** — Gypsum plaster without **Aggregate**, intended for mixing with **Aggregate** and water on the job.

■ **Gypsum Ready-Mixed Plaster** — Gypsum plaster and ordinary mineral **Aggregate**, requiring only the addition of water for use.

■ **Gypsum Wood-Fibered Plaster** — Plaster composed of calcined gypsum and finely shredded wood fibers, used to produce base coats of superior strength and hardness. Wood-fibered plaster has great fire resistance, insulating, and sound-deadening qualities. It is also able to withstand vibration due to its flexibility, and weighs about two-thirds as much as sanded cement plaster. Wood-fibered plaster is slightly more expensive than a sand mixture, but its other advantages make it the recommended **Scratch Coat** for all kinds of lath.

■ **Hair** — Animal hair (usually from cattle) once included in scratch-coat mixtures as a mechanical binder.

■ **Hardwall Plaster** — Gauging plaster mixed with **Perlite Aggregate** to form a lightweight base-coat plaster. Sold under trade names such as "Structolite."



HAWK

■ **Hawk** — A square, lightweight, sheet-metal platform with a vertical central handle, from which plaster or mortar is applied to the wall with a **Trowel**.

■ **Hydrated Lime** — Lime prepared at the factory by adding controlled amounts of water to **Quicklime**. Two basic grades are available: mason's hydrated (for construction) and finishing lime (for plastering). Finishing limes are used in the final plaster coats, and are the modern, quick-to-prepare versions of **Quicklime**. They can be categorized into three general types by the amount of **Slaking** they require:

■ **Autoclave** — Can be used immediately after mixing with water.

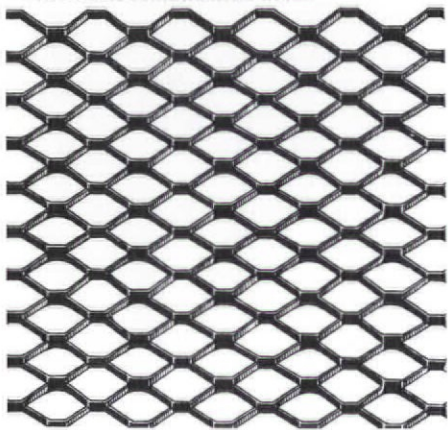
■ **Type S** — Requires less than sixteen hours **Slaking**.

■ **Type N** — Requires 16 to 24 hours **Slaking**.

■ **Joint Compound** (wallboard compound, drywall compound, "mud") — A ready-mixed preparation used for finishing joints and seams in **Drywall** construction. Because it is ready-mixed and easy to apply, trowel, and sand, it is widely used for patching and resurfacing plaster.

■ **Keene's Cement** — A fine, high-density plaster that produces a very hard, fine-textured finish coat. It is produced by heating crushed gypsum rock until nearly all the water of crystallization is driven off, and then adding alum as an accelerator. In decades past, Keene's Cement had many uses, especially in moulded and cast work. Today it is a specialty product (and somewhat altered in composition) that seldom plays a role in house plastering and patching.

■ **Key** — Plaster that has penetrated through the narrow openings in **Lath** hardens to form keys which create a mechanical bond.



EXPANDED METAL LATH

■ **Lath** — Any of several types of perforated **Bases** secured to structural framing. For years, thin wooden strips called Wooden Lath were used, but these have been superseded by gypsum and metal products. Gypsum Lath and Rock Lath are boards with gypsum cores sandwiched between two sheets of absorbent paper, and used mostly in new construction. Metal laths are popular for both new and repair work, and have been manufactured in many (generally interchangeable) forms, such as: rib lath (expanded metal screen with ribbing), sheet-metal lath (sheet metal with perforations), and wire lath.

■ **Lime** — Found in limestone formations or shell mounds, naturally occurring lime is calcium carbonate. When heated, it becomes calcium oxide (**Quicklime**), and after water is added it becomes calcium hydroxide. This calcium hydroxide reacts with carbon dioxide in the air to re-create calcium carbonate.

■ **Mortarboard** — Mixed plaster is initially transferred from the mixing box or mixing pan to the Mortarboard, often a large version of a **Hawk**. The mortarboard is usually a large, flat piece of smooth, clear plywood.

■ **Perlite** — Volcanic glass which, when flash-roasted, expands to produce frothy particles of irregular shape. Perlite is a lightweight **Aggregate** often used with calcined gypsum. Perlite is roughly three times as effective an insulator as sand, and is much lighter.

■ **Plaster** — Any pasty construction material of mortarlike consistency, which is applied in a plastic condition, and hardens in place after being applied. As a surfacing for the walls and ceilings of buildings, plaster denotes an interior covering, while **Stucco** denotes an exterior one.

■ **Plaster of Paris** — See **Gypsum**.

■ **Plaster Washers** (ceiling buttons) — Discs of stamped sheet metal perforated with a central screw hole, designed for repair work on plaster walls and ceilings. In use, plaster washers help stabilize areas where broken **Keys** have caused the surface to come away from the **Lath**.

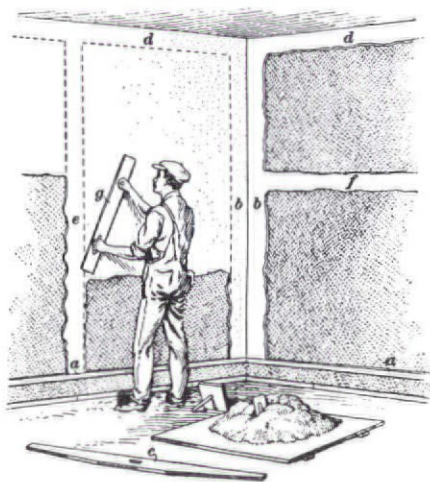
■ **Plasterboard** — See **Drywall**.

■ **Portland Cement** — An extremely strong hydraulic cement, produced by burning silica, lime, and alumina (an aluminum oxide) in a kiln in proper proportions. Portland Cement plaster is used where an extra hard or highly water-resistant surface is required, such as in walk-in refrigerators and cold storage spaces, toilets, showers, and basement spaces. It should, however, never be applied over gypsum products, such as gypsum lath. Portland Cement plaster is also widely used in exterior applications.

■ **Pumice** — A naturally formed volcanic glass **Aggregate**, similar to but heavier than **Perlite**. Pumice can double for **Perlite** in most applications, but is less popular because of its greater cost (which is the result of its greater weight).

■ **Putty** — Product resulting from mixing lime and water together. Technology has greatly reduced the time this operation takes. Traditional, "old-time" putty is **Quicklime** soaked in water for an extended period, often as much as 21 days. Modern hydrated limes have reduced this figure to 24 hours and less. See **Hydrated Lime**.

■ **Quicklime** — Limestone that is processed, but not hydrated. Chemically, it is calcium and magnesium oxides formed by firing limestone over 1700° F. To make plaster, quicklime must be slaked with water in an operation that sets off a violent, boiling reaction. This hazard was made avoidable by the introduction of **Hydrated Lime**. The principal use of slaked quicklime today is in masonry mortars.



RODDING BETWEEN SCREDS

■ **Rod** (Straightedge) — Wood or lightweight metal blade with slotted handle, often 6 in. wide by 4 to 8 ft. long. This is the first tool used in leveling and straightening applied plaster between grounds. See **Slicker**.

■ **Sand** — A traditionally used **Aggregate** in plasterwork. Sand improves the strength and workability of plasters. It must be of high quality — clean, sharp, without harmful chemicals or organic impurities, and screened to a uniform size — or it can cause defects.

■ **Scarifier** — A rake-like tool for adding furrows in scratch coats that will improve the bond between the **Scratch Coat** and the **Brown Coat**.

■ **Scratch Coat** — The first base coat put on metal or wood **Lath**. The wet plaster is "scratched" with a broom or the point of a **Trowel** to provide a rough surface so the next layer of base coat will stick to it.

■ **Screed** — Plaster screeds are ribbons of mortar, leveled, plumbed, or otherwise trued on walls or ceilings, which serve as guidelines for a straightedge to run on when **Rodding** the surface. They are usually the depth of two coats of plaster, and ensure that the new work is spread at a uniform thickness. Metal screeds, like **Grounds**, provide a guide for plasterwork.

■ **Sheetrock** — U.S. Gypsum's trade name for a **Drywall** product, now used generically like "Kleenex" and "Band-Aids."

■ **Slaking** — The process of adding water to lime to hydrate it in preparation for mixing it to form a **Putty**.

■ **Slicker** — A flexible straightedge used for leveling wet plaster.

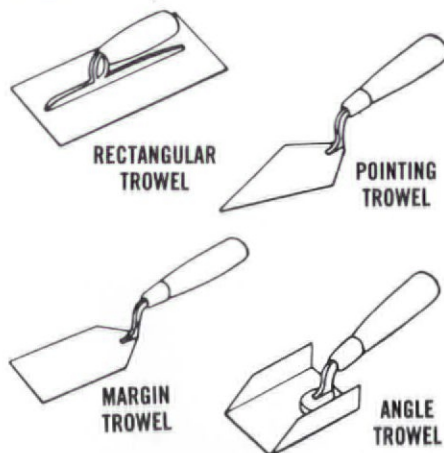
■ **Slip** — The richness, plasticity, and workability of mixed plaster. "Slip" is a hard-to-define characteristic, but is determined in large part by the quality of the plaster used. Plasters with "slip" mix easily, go on quickly, and spread far, resulting in maximum coverage with minimum effort. Slip is also the thinned plaster used as an adhesive between, say, a cast-plaster ornament and the ceiling.

■ **Spackle** — Muralo Co.'s trade name, often used generically, for a plasterlike preparation used in cosmetic repair work, or as a **Joint Compound** in new drywall work. Spackle is available as a dry powder or ready-mixed, moist compound.

■ **Structo-lite** — Trade name for a dry-mixed, under-finish-coat plaster preparation, often used for patch repairs. See **Hardwall Plaster**.

■ **Stucco** — The term applied to plaster whenever it is used as an exterior covering on walls and buildings. Stucco plaster is made with masonry cement (particularly **Portland**), sand, and water. Once cured, it is hard, strong, fire resistant, and weather resistant. See **Plaster**.

■ **Tape** — In drywall construction, paper or fiberglass strips applied, in conjunction with **Joint Compound**, to reinforce joints and seams. Tape is usually 2 in. wide, and can be purchased perforated or nonperforated.



■ **Trowel** — A hand-held, bladed tool used to apply, spread, and smooth plaster. Trowel sizes and shapes vary widely, and are determined by the purpose for which the tool is used.

■ **Vermiculite** — A soft, light mineral **Aggregate** made from the layered mineral mica, added to gypsum plaster as a substitute for sand. Vermiculite has gained popularity not only on the merit of its reduced weight, but because it imparts substantial insulating qualities to plasters that allow them to be used as fireproofing in steel construction.

The Bare Facts

by J. Randall Cotton

About Early Floors

Unfinished, untreated, bare wood floors, undecorated by carpets or rugs — they don't exactly exude an aura of warmth and cozy domesticity. Yet this is precisely what the floors in most American homes were like in pre-Victorian times. It's little wonder that few unaltered examples have survived. Only in a carefully restored house museum are you likely to see the real thing.

If they weren't simply replaced, most early floors were, over the years, painted, stained, or given some kind of protective finish like varnish, shellac, oil, wax, or polyurethane. This practice was and continues to be so universal that we largely have forgotten what pre-Victorian floors were really like.

Even the most ardent old-house purist usually opts for floors that are painstakingly "restored" by sanding and an application of some stain-and-varnish combination that brings out the warm richness of the wood's grain and imparts a mellow sheen. Perhaps a few Oriental rugs are plunked down for final effect. Well, this look clearly pleases most 20th-century tastes, but it was virtually nonexistent in houses that predate circa 1840.

To our forebears, floors were purely utilitarian. Generally, only the wealthy would have had floors with any kind of decorative treatment. Painted, stencilled, marbled, and carpeted floors were the exception, not the rule.



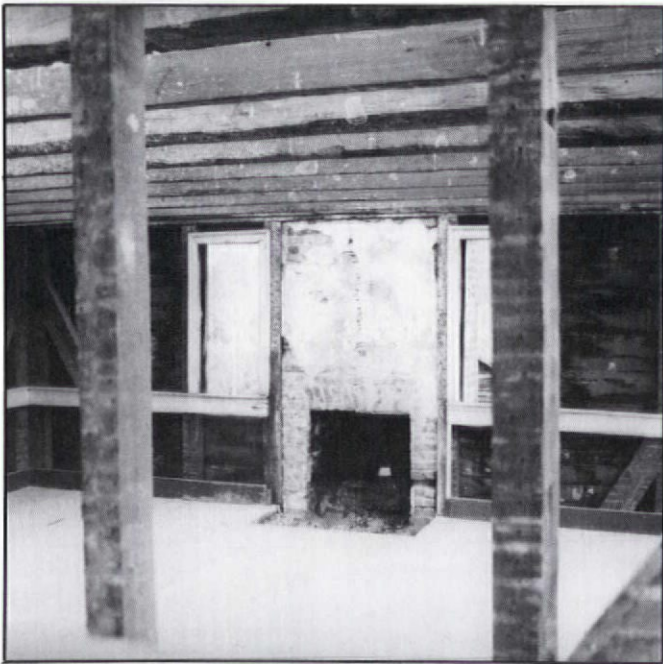
Unfinished floor in the Jan Martense Schenck House, Flatlands (Dutch Brooklyn), 1675.

Floorboards

The boards of early floors usually were sawn at a local mill. The up-and-down reciprocating action of these water-powered saws left distinctive parallel marks on the wood. Usually, such telling marks still can be seen on the unplaned undersides between the joists in places like the basement ceiling. (Hold a raking light from a flashlight across the face of the board. If you see *perpendicular, parallel* marks, chances are the boards are circa 1840 or earlier.)

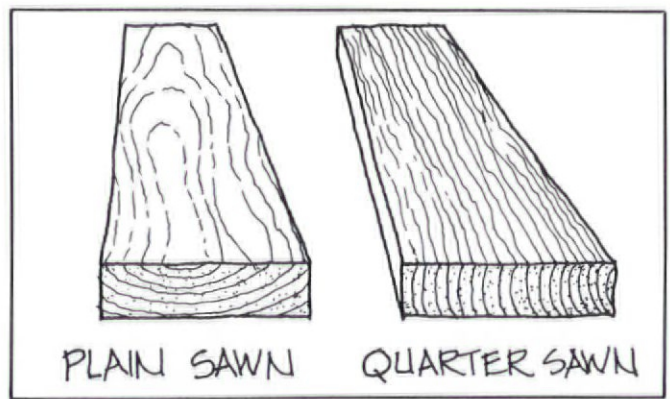
Much rarer are pit-sawn boards (they have *angled* parallel sawmarks) or handhewn boards smoothed with an adze or drawknife. Only vernacular buildings like loghouses, barns, and other outbuildings would have had hewn floorboards. Hewn boards whose undersides are left "in the round," sometimes with even the bark still attached, are called *puncheons*.

Pine was far and away the favorite wood species used for floorboards. It was plentiful up and down the East Coast and easy to work with. In the Northeast, white pine was predominant, although Northern yellow pine was used occasionally. From Virginia and Maryland, Southern yellow pine (sometimes known as longleaf pine or heart pine) was nearly ubiquitous. Because it is harder, denser, and more resinous than white pine, yellow pine was, and still is, a superior wood for floors.



Flooring typical of Southern houses in a 1787 North Carolina restoration.

Another important factor in a floor's durability was how it was sawn — "quarter-sawn" or "plain-sawn" (flat-sawn). Plain-sawn wood was cut across the entire width of the log, producing boards of varying widths, each containing a spectrum of wide and narrow growth rings (see illustration). Quarter-sawn wood was cut from logs that first were split into four quadrants, making each board narrower, with less variation in growth rings.

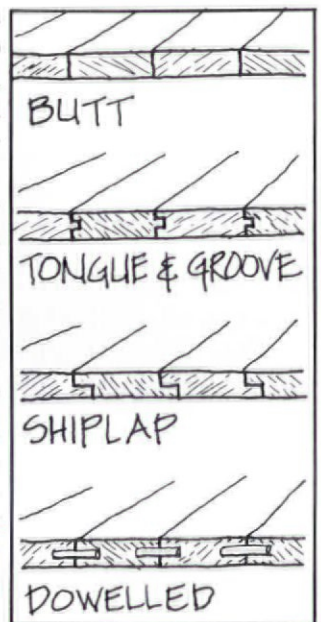


In the Northeast, white pine was commonly plain-sawn, resulting in distinctive random-width floorboards. Although today these exceptionally wide boards are much admired, they weren't the best for flooring. Changes in humidity and temperature tended to warp the boards, forcing open the joints. Wide, plain-sawn boards also wore unevenly. The softer middle sections of each board wore away faster, causing an undulating, "cupping" effect. Why carpenters in the Northeast chose this particular technique is unclear, although using wider boards meant that fewer of them were needed, and so floors could be laid down faster.

In the South, quarter-sawn yellow pine flooring was the norm. Less susceptible to the ravages of temperature and humidity, these reddish-hued floorboards wore more evenly and were more standardized in width. Unfortunately, only about 1% of the estimated 100 billion board-feet of yellow pine which once stood in this country remains.

Other woods were also used, especially in areas where an indigenous species was common. Hence, rot-resistant cypress was used in Gulf Coast floors; oak or hemlock was used in mid-Atlantic floors, as was white spruce (which gave off a pleasant aroma). There was scattered use of long-wearing but now extinct chestnut in New England, the mid-Atlantic states, and the upland South.

The type of joints used in floorboards doesn't seem to have been a matter of regional preference. Butt (also called straight or square) joints were by far the most common. Boards usually were face-nailed directly onto the joists; subflooring was not customary outside of New England. Wrought nails were used before circa 1800, cut nails thereafter (providing another way to determine the age of old floors). In elaborate homes, the boards were often blind-nailed. Tongue-and-groove and shiplap joints were tighter but required greater skill, and tended to be uncommon.



Scattered examples of floorboards that were dowelled together can be found in the mid-Atlantic. Blind, *horizontal* dowels connected the abutting edges of the boards, much like tabletop leaves. The "old-time" pegged oak floor so popular today apparently has no early historical precedent. It may have been popularized during the Colonial Revival period, when oak floorboards were screwed down and the countersunk heads of the screws were covered by wooden plugs.

In most cases, once an early floor was laid, it was considered finished. There was, of course, the periodic cleaning. Lye, from wood ash, was a popular cleaning agent that could remove spilled food or drippings from tallow candles. A weekly scrubbing with hot, soapy water would leave the floors with a "silvery whiteness," according to one observer.

Another technique, one that now seems particularly peculiar, was "sanding" the floors clean. Sand was sprinkled over the bare floors to collect dirt and grease, in the manner that dry-cleaning compounds are used in today's automobile repair shops. When the sand was swept up, the week's dirt went along with it. An occasional good scrubbing with sand and water kept floors looking relatively new. And in accordance with an early American naval tradition, floors also were "holy stoned" — that is, a porous, pumice-like stone (sometimes sandstone) was rubbed across a sanded floor to clean it.

A less common, but not rare, practice was to create a "sand carpet." Decorative patterns were created in sand spread across the floor. According to one account, the best parlors were "swept and garnished every morning with sand sifted through a 'sand sieve' and sometimes smoothed with a hair broom into quaint circles and fancy wreaths." Herringbone patterns were also documented.

Waxing floors was very rare, although one diary from the early 1800s recommends a formula of two parts boiled linseed oil, two parts turpentine, and one part lemon juice or vinegar as a sort of early "Scotchgard" treatment to resist stains. Don't you try this concoction, however, because it most likely would darken the wood and make for a rather sticky surface.

If you're one of the few restoration purists who decides to live with authentic bare-wood floors, you might take the suggestion of a fellow devotee who recommends a cleaning regimen of regular scrubbing with a tri-sodium-phosphate (TSP) solution. Over time, daily wear and TSP will turn the raw wood a mellow brown. But don't expect perfect floors. You'll have to live with the inevitable scratches and stains.

If you think your floors pre-date circa 1840 and you want to restore them, you can strip off later paint, varnish, and stain. If the original floor has been removed (check to make sure it's not hidden under a later floor), there are numerous companies that can supply either old, salvaged flooring of hard-to-find woods or new yellow- or white-pine floorboards cut in appropriate widths. (See the list of suppliers on page 56.) Most of these companies remill salvaged floorboards to make them attractive and easy to lay. Purists should be aware, though, that some restoration experts

and historians argue that the introduction of old, salvaged flooring into an antique house gives misleading architectural clues that may confuse future historians.

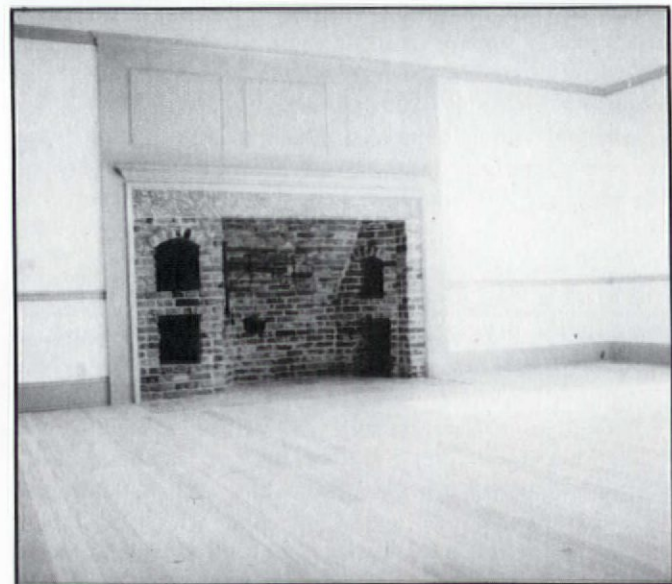
For authenticity's sake, use the wood species that historically was predominant in your area. For durability's sake, remember that quarter-sawn wood is more durable than plain-sawn wood. If you use face-nailing to put the boards down, the nail heads will be exposed, so consider using reproduction cut nails for early-to-mid-19th-century floors and reproduction wrought nails for 18th-century examples.

Painted Floors

Not *all* early floors were bare; painted floors were uncommon, but not rare. This tradition seems to have been widespread, if geographically spotty. The best-known examples are in New England, but painted floors have also shown up in Texas and the Midwest, for instance.

Painted floors had their advantages: Paint made the surface more resistant to stains. It also made for a more colorful floor and enabled homeowners to tie the floor into an overall decorative scheme. Solid colors applied to floors included "Indian" red, greys, browns, and greens. Yellow ochre was a favorite, since it was supposed to hide dirt and dust particularly well. Pale blue and even white were occasionally used in New England in the late 1700s.

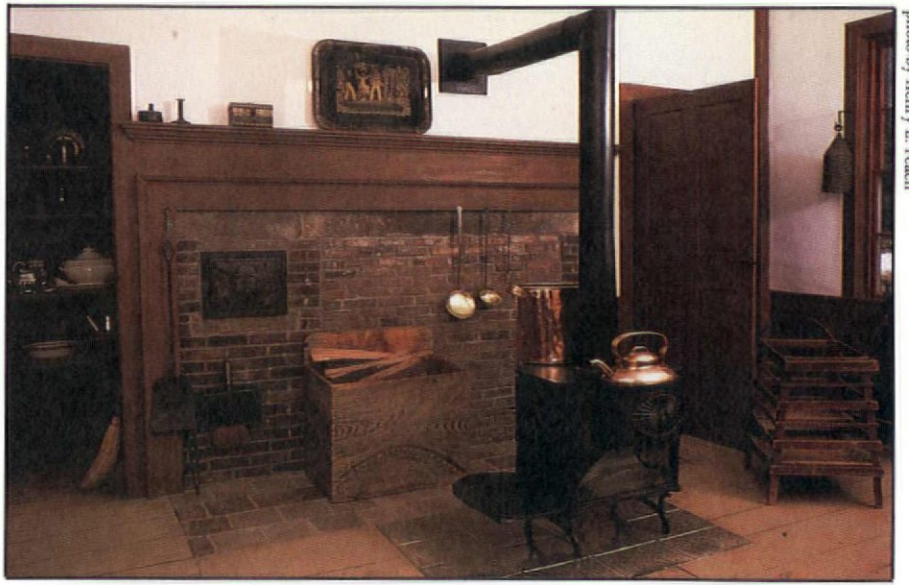
The painted floors most valued these days are the decorative ones. Examples dating from as early as the mid-1700s have been discovered, and the practice continued well into the mid-19th century. These floors were either done freehand or stencilled, sometimes by the homeowners themselves but more often by itinerant artists. Just as wall stencilling was a relatively inexpensive imitation of wallpaper, the decoratively painted floor was an imitation of the rugs and carpeting that were highly prized but out of the reach of the average homeowner.



New installation of salvaged floorboards.

Courtesy The Joinery

Extant examples show a wonderful variety of patterns. Although there were occasional striped floors, painted borders were more common. The middle of the floor was often embellished with geometric diamond patterns, floral motifs, zigzags, and checkerboard designs. Landscapes and animal motifs or flower-petal, heart, or oak-leaf designs were sometimes used. At the very center was often a large design. There was some correlation to the prevailing popular architectural and decorative styles of the day. During the Federal era, for instance, urns, swags, and garlands were all the rage. Stencilled floors naturally tended toward precise, repeated patterns, while freehand work was more whimsical and random.



Kitchen with a "sanded" floor in Old Sturbridge Village.

Throughout much of the 19th century, marbled floors, though still comparatively rare, were sometimes used. Painted geometric blocks in white, black, or greys were "veined" like marble. Marbled floors usually were found in entry halls or in the formal parlors of the finest houses. Unfortunately, very few have survived. There still may be evidence of painted floors, however, in hidden places: under built-in pieces of furniture, behind later partition walls and closet additions, under newer floors and carpets, or beneath baseboards subsequently added. Any surviving remnant can serve as a valuable model for a reproduction.

Floorcoverings

Philadelphia was one of early America's most affluent cities. Yet a study of 18th-century household inventories indicates that, even there, fewer than 3% of the households had any

kind of floorcovering at all. It stands to reason that floorcoverings were far more scarce in rural and less affluent parts of the country. Indeed, they were mainly the province of wealthy urbanites and rich Tidewater planters.

In short, floorcoverings, whether carpets, rugs, oilcloths, or mats, were luxury items, status symbols. Before the 1780s, almost all floorcoverings were imported, primarily from England, and therefore extremely expensive. Pre-Victorian floorcoverings can be divided into two categories: carpets and rugs, and their more modest counterparts, including painted floorcloths and grass matting.

Painted floorcloths were the precursors of linoleum. Like both linoleum and painted floors, they were stain-resistant, easy to clean, and decorative. Painted floorcloths were imported from England until after the Revolution, when Americans began making them. They remained popular until the 1850s, when carpeting became more affordable.

Painted floorcloths were made from canvas — cotton, linen, hemp, or wool — painted on both sides to make it impervious. With up to five, even seven, layers of paint on each side, they could be a year in the making; curing could take two years. The decorative patterns on floorcloths were applied freehand, stencilled, or "blocked" on, often using the same bright, intense colors and fanciful motifs as those applied on painted floors. Geometrics — checkerboards, hexagons, diamonds, triangles, and the like — were popular. So were *faux* tile and marbled designs, as well as imitations of carpets. One example was described as featuring a "poussy [sic] cat and little spaniel."

Painted floorcloths were not strictly the poor man's carpet; the wealthy also used them. They were most popular in



Stencilled floor in the Fitch House parlor, Old Sturbridge Village.

vestibules, hallways, parlors, and dining rooms (particularly under tables). Fortunately for restorers, there is a resurgence in the art of the painted floorcloth; sources are listed on page 56.

Another early floorcovering was matting. Imported from England, India, China, or Japan, it was made from grassy or marshy fibers like straw, hemp, jute, or rush; even corn husks were used. Matting was popular into the 1800s, even into the Victorian age. It often was used under dining room tables over valuable carpets. (Drugget, a coarse, plain wool floorcovering, was also used over carpets for protection. Today, a large piece of unfinished awning canvas can substitute for drugget.) Matting often replaced carpets during the summer months; according to some experts, it didn't become a year-round floorcovering until the 1830s.

Although matting was relatively inexpensive, it stained easily and didn't wear well. Few examples have survived. But straw matting seems to be making a comeback, and *tatami*, a modern matting from Japan, can be found at Pier One and other stores. It comes in strips about a yard wide, which must be seamed together to make a room-sized covering. It's also available in tiles with non-slip backs, which can be pieced together.

Carpets and Rugs

In pre-Victorian times, carpets and rugs were the Cadillacs of floorcoverings. (Carpets generally denoted wall-to-wall coverings tacked down in place; rugs were portable pieces used to cover smaller areas.) Until America's own carpet-mill industry was firmly established in the mid-1800s, carpets were seen only in wealthy households, though by about the 1830s they could be found in some middle-class homes. All carpet owners went to great lengths to protect their investments, reserving them for the best rooms, taking them up during the summer months, and partially covering them with protective drugget or matting.

Most early carpets were imported from England or Scotland; some came from the Near or Far East. For centuries, carpets were made on hand looms, but there was a gradual mechanization of the process from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s. The Jacquard loom attachment, perfected in 1804, made carpet-making semi-automatic. With the development of the steam-powered loom (invented by Erastus Bigelow in 1837), carpets were manufactured in steam-powered mills.

Carpet Types

Pre-Victorian rugs and carpets were of two basic types: flatwoven and pile. Past OHJ articles have described in de-

tail the variations. (See the August/September 1983 issue.) Another source of information on this subject is a recently published work by Gail Caskey Winkler and Helene von Rosenstiel entitled *Floor Coverings for Historic Buildings* (Preservation Press, 1988). Here's a brief synopsis of both types of carpets:

FLATWOVEN CARPETS

As the term implies, these had a flat weave, without tufts or piles. They were woven on two-harness looms, much like a piece of linen cloth. The width of the loom limited the width of the carpet, so strips had to be seamed together to make wall-to-wall coverings.

There were several major types of flatwoven carpets:

Ingrains were easily the most popular carpets throughout the 1800s, accounting for up to 50% of all woven floorcoverings at the time. Ingrains were reversible; that is, both sides had the same pattern but with the colors reversed. Because they were routinely turned over, the life of ingrains could be extended — a good thing, since they were not very durable. Ingrains could be colorful and highly patterned.

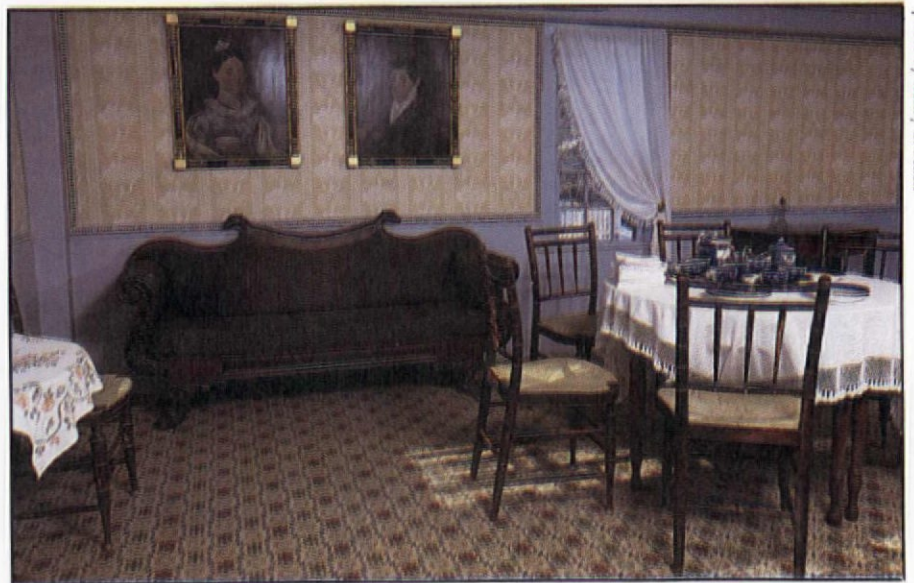
Venetian carpets were warp-faced carpets, cheaper than ingrains and usually woven into colorful stripes that made them popular in hallways and on stairs.

Rag rugs have been homemade for centuries. Woven from strips of cotton rags or fabric, they had a distinctive coarse, informal look. In pre-Victorian days they were used primarily in more private spaces like bedrooms or upstairs halls.

PILE CARPETS

These have always been considered the cream of the crop in carpeting. Durable, plush, and colorful, pile carpets had superseded flatwovens as the carpets of choice by the late 1800s, when they were being mass-produced.

The face of the pile carpet was formed by cut or uncut upright loops of yarn. The carpets often featured designs that picked up on the popular styles of the period: Classical and Adam motifs were common during the Federal era,



Reproduction ingrain carpet in the Fitch House at Old Sturbridge Village.

photo by Henry E. Peach

Grecian ones during the American Empire period from the 1820s to the 1840s, and florid rococo designs during the early Victorian era.

There were three principal types of pile carpet:

Brussels were woven carpets with an uncut loop pile. They featured bold, dark colors, elaborate designs, and, often, borders.

Wiltons were similar to Brussels but had a cut pile.

Axminsters historically were the top-of-the-line carpets, with hand-knotted cut piles. Axminsters were English imitations of the Turkish carpet (then, as today, known generically as "Orientals"). Although they were a sought-after luxury during the 16th century, Axminsters waned in popularity toward the end of the 1700s. They enjoyed a revival in the late 19th century, when a mechanized production process was invented.

Many of the rugs and carpets described above still are available through specialty carpet manufacturers or the ever-increasing number of custom weavers.

By the 1840s, American floors began to look dramatically different. Mass-produced floorboards were narrower and standardized in size (from 2" to 5"). Tongue-and-groove joints became common. Stains and varnishes could mask imperfections, and as they came into use, the quality of the wood became less important. Hardwood floors




photo by Henry E. Peach

Surprising color in this Old Sturbridge Village documentary reproduction carpet.



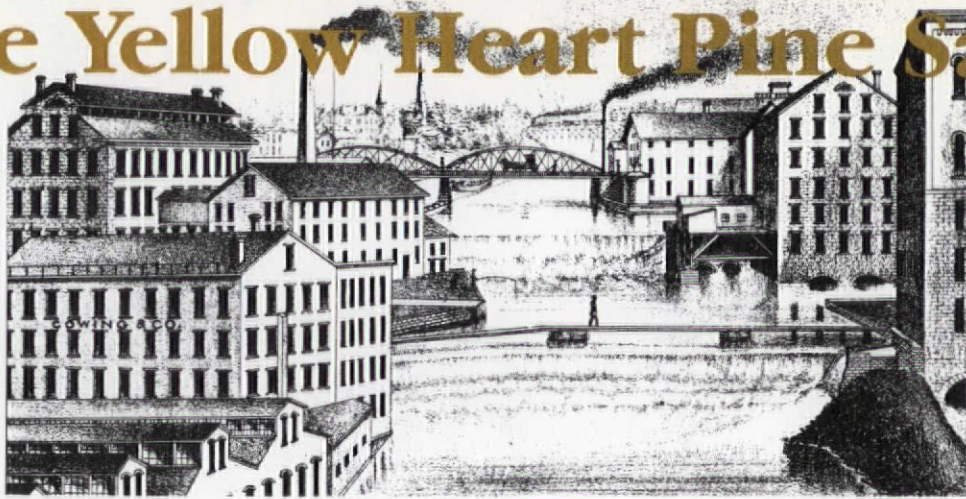
Venetian carpet in the Fenno House at Old Sturbridge Village.

were "in." So were parquet floors. The tastemakers of the day, like Charles Eastlake, promoted the area rug, a trend that continued into Colonial Revival times (which partly explains why the oak-floor-with-Oriental-rug look is sometimes misidentified as "Colonial" today). Gone was the era of the bare wood floor. Fancy floors became the fashion. 

Thanks to John Obed Curtis of Old Sturbridge Village, and Gail Winkler, Dewey Hudson, and Nancy Webster for providing information for this article.

See the list of sources for pre-1850 flooring and floor coverings in Restoration Products, page 56.

The Yellow Heart Pine Saga



Old mill buildings provide a not-quite-virgin forest of heart-pine timbers to be remilled.

When European explorers of the 1500s first started thinking seriously about the "New World" that had complicated their shortcut to Asia, lumber was in the backs of their minds. The Spanish had set their hearts on finding mountains of gold in South America, but other nations saw a richer treasure in the virgin timberlands of the northern continent. Shipbuilding was a big, essential industry in places like England and Germany. The hitch was, both had been shaved clean of real trees back in the Middle Ages. When the newcomers caught sight of the tall, straight pines miles deep on the Atlantic Coast, though, they saw ship masts and profits.

Masts could be made from a variety of trees, but the best was the yellow heart pine, a longleaf species that towered over other pines found in what is now the American South. Heart pines could grow to over 120' high, but they took 150 to 450 years to do it. In that time, their inner cores — the heartwood — had been compressed into a dense mass of terrific strength and durability. Other pines had heartwood, as do all trees, but none could match the "heart pine." Its resinous wood went from yellow to a pleasant rose as it aged, it was bug- and rot-resistant, and in big timbers it was more fire-resistant than steel.

Europe and the rest of the world were still the big consumers of heart pine until the 1870s, when America woke up to this ideal building material in her own backyard. Instead of ship masts, the wood now was in demand for tough, weather-prone objects such as railroad cars, wagons, and window casings. The best trees, however, wound up as massive floor beams in the new mills and factories of the industrial revolution. By the 1930s, America had devoured all her virgin heart pine, and with at least two centuries needed to produce a tree worth sawing, no new stock was on the way.

The original heart-pine trees are all gone, but the demand for their wood is as strong as ever. Cabinet and paneling manufacturers still use all that they can get hold of, and its denseness and beauty makes it ideal for flooring. To fulfill this demand, an industry has turned in on itself, so to speak, recycling heart pine (and other top-quality but

increasingly scarce woods) in a thriving industry. As buildings of all sizes are slated for the wrecker's ball, salvage companies buy up their valuable timber. Some house floors and other small-sized stock do get recycled as is, but not much. The bulk of the business is resawing and milling the structural timbers of factories and mill buildings from the last century — just as if they were newly felled trees!

Companies that manufacture recycled heart pine dot the East Coast, but most are located in the South where the trees originally grew. Demand for the lumber is strong. Mountain Lumber Co. in Ruckersville, Virginia, a major mill, requires at least a 30-day lead on orders, and says most jobs need half again that time.

Besides being scarce, today's heart pine is also expensive. Recycling lumber is very labor-intensive, and this runs up costs. Every timber is searched with metal detectors for saw-damaging nails, and then these have to be pulled by hand. Better grades easily run \$4 to \$5 per board-foot, which puts them on a par with exotic imported hardwoods like teak and ebony.

The quality of the lumber, though, is excellent. Once the recycled timbers are sawn into rough lumber, it is re-seasoned by kiln-drying to remove any moisture picked up during years in mill buildings. Then, it is re-graded into at least five special grades. The result is stock with an average width of 10 in., available in random lengths, and ready to be used either as-is or further milled into products like moulding and flooring.

The finale to the heart-pine story is that the lumber industry is now running out of the same wood for the second time! In the words of one sawmill owner, "we can see the end" of the supply of used timber. The search for old mill buildings to recycle is world-wide, but they are a finite source and eventually will be exhausted. Of course, adaptive reuse of mill buildings for malls and office complexes only increases the scarcity of marketable timbers.



— Kathy Fulton and Gordon Bock

Repairing Antique Floors

by Kathy Fulton and Gordon Bock

drawings by Jonathan Poore

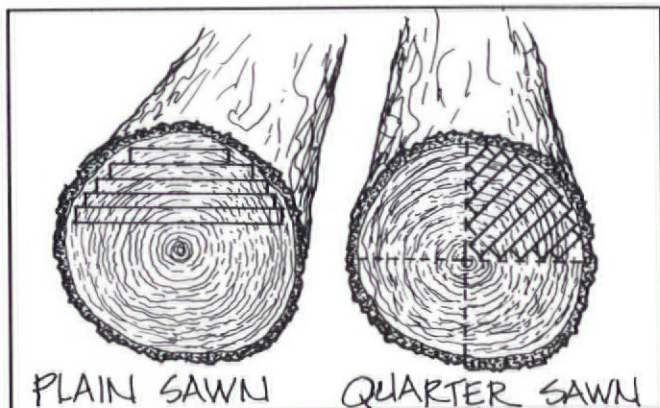
Repair of wooden floors is a branch of carpentry unto itself, and working with pre-1850 floors is really a specialized area within this branch. One reason for the breakdown is that floors over 150 years old are built differently from those that came after. Almost without exception, old floors are nailed directly to the supporting floor joists, and not to a subfloor that was laid down first (as in modern homes). Also, old floors were built before there was machinery to make true tongue-and-groove joints, so most consist of large boards with square edges, butted tightly together. (Or at least the boards were tight when the floor was laid.) These differences in construction, as well as the task of matching worn and often scarce lumber, can make repairing and restoring a pre-1850 floor an intimidating project, even for woodworkers.

An expert on repairing old floors is Mr. B.M. Jackson of Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Jackson, who is now in his 70s, has worked with wood floors for more than 45 years, and continues to restore flooring for Flint Hill Construction Company and ByGone Era of Atlanta. He has seen many floors and all kinds of damage in his time, and says the most frequent problems are rotting wood, stains from dog or cat urine, and severe scarring from objects being dragged across the floor. According to Mr. Jackson, repairing a floor involves three basic steps: 1) locating replacement boards, 2) removing the damaged portions without marring the surrounding floor, and 3) installing the new boards in the original floor so the patch is not obvious.

Finding Replacement Lumber

"The most difficult part of the project is getting floorboards to match," says Mr. Jackson, "something most people don't consider until they've ripped out the damaged boards." In fact, the quality of the match between old flooring and repair lumber occasionally decides whether a floor with large areas of damage is repaired in sections, or replaced altogether because additions would stand out. Finding wood of the same species is the first step, but other matching characteristics are just as important:

CUT: A log can be cut into lumber in two ways. *Flat-sawing* (also called plain-sawing) is a style in which the tree is cut tangent to the annual rings (see drawing). It is the simplest, most efficient method of sawing timber, but flat-sawn lumber has advantages and disadvantages as flooring. It does not shrink much in thickness when drying and has a pleasant pattern on the board face, but flat-sawn flooring can warp, and it is prone to raising splinters. The majority of flooring is cut in a manner called *quarter-*



sawing, which leaves each board with a vertical grain. In this process, the mill saws timber radially to the annual rings of the tree (with some resulting waste). Quarter-sawn lumber shrinks and swells minimally in width, and is less prone to defects like cupping, twists, checks, and raised grain. It also wears evenly and tends to resist penetration by liquids. All this makes it well adapted to the requirements of flooring. In addition, a vertical grain cut leaves the wood fiber itself less compressible than flat-sawing, and this gives it great strength to resist marring forces like high heels and dropped objects. Because it is a more sophisticated cut, quarter-sawn lumber is more expensive than widely available flat-sawn lumber. Before buying flooring, determine the cut on your old flooring and make sure the new stock is sawn the same way.

GRADING: Floor repairs always benefit from the best possible match in grade between old and new flooring. Criteria like the size and frequency of knots and other defects play a big part in the look of a floor. Make an educated guess about the grade of your old floor, and keep this in mind when evaluating new lumber. By modern standards, quarter-sawn flooring has two grades: Clear and Select. Flat-sawn flooring has four grades: Clear, Select, No. 1 Common, and No. 2 Common. The Clear grade for both types has almost no surface imperfections, while Select has a few, such as small, tight knots. No. 1 Common has more defects, but must contain material that will make a sound floor without cutting. No. 2 Common has even more imperfections, but still provides a serviceable floor. The percentage of sapwood in the lumber also influences grade and floor appearance, particularly in softwoods like heart pine. Since standards vary widely, the best advice here is to look for as much heartwood as possible when shopping for softwood flooring.

MOISTURE CONTENT: As seasons change, or the humidity within a room varies, wood products in a house absorb and release moisture. This change in moisture content makes them swell and contract along each dimension, and

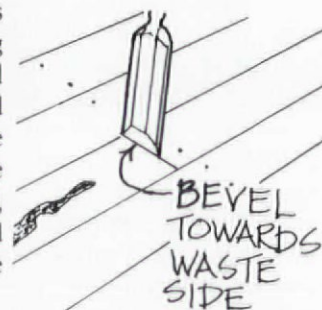
at different rates. In flooring these changes are critical, and affect whether it will develop big gaps in dry weather, or buckle when it's damp. To make sure the repair is "in sync" with the moisture cycle of the room, new flooring stock MUST be stored there for a period before being installed. A minimum duration is five weeks, but the longer, the better. In the same way, when stock is newly cut from a mill (and has a very high moisture content), the minimum *seasoning* period, where the flooring dries out at the mill, should be six months.

Lumber to repair a pre-1850 floor will in almost all cases come from some sort of sawmill, not from a retail lumberyard or hardwoods supplier. Some tips will help you deal with the mill. First, bring or mail in a sample of the floor you're trying to match to avoid speculation about interpretation and matching it. The sample need not be big, but it should be an average representation of what the floor looks like, neither the best nor worst area. Second, deal with a mill that is used to small orders, or one that was recommended from a previous job. You are likely to get more attention here (and thus better lumber), than at a mill that avoids such jobs, or does them only as a courtesy. Third, order enough to do the repair, and *then* some to cover unforeseen problems (30% over is a good figure). Also, think about the future if your floor is difficult to match, and buy a surplus to keep on hand for the next repair.

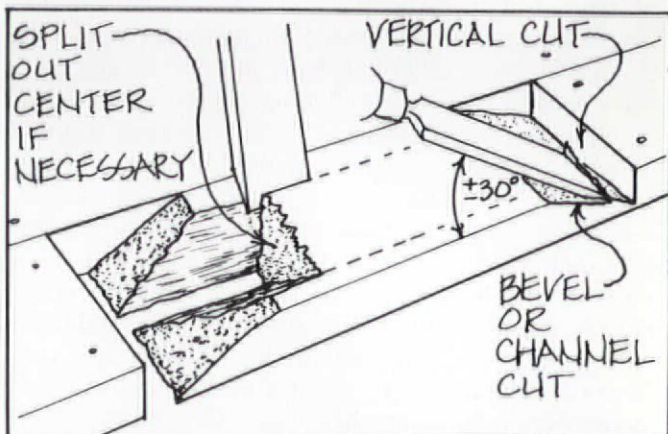
Removing Damaged Sections

Before pulling out the damaged boards in a floor, it's good practice to lightly chalk or pencil a cutting line around the area you need to remove. This kind of planning is particularly important in pre-1850 floors because, without a sub-floor, all boards must end on a joist for support. For instance, if a portion of a board can be saved, the damaged part must be cut off at a point over a joist so both new and old ends are held up. Pay close attention to the staggering of joints. Side-by-side boards with joints that are in line look awkward and will squeak. In the same way, floors that have a specific stagger pattern, say, every three joists, have to be repaired with the same pattern for a pleasing job. In practice, this usually means replacing whole boards rather than cutting out bad sections.

If it's unnecessary to remove the entire length of a floor board, the bad section can be isolated by parting the board along the cutting line. Mr. Jackson's time-honored technique is to use a hammer and chisel, the latter 18 in. long and "about three fingers wide." Place the chisel along the cutting line, with the bevel side towards the damage, and strike a sharp blow with the hammer. It should start a nice clean cut through the wood, which will have to be repeated across the width of wide boards.



Once the board has been cut, and often in the process of cutting, the waste piece will need to be "channelled." Move the chisel about an inch onto the damaged section (with beveled side down) and angle it at close to 30 degrees. Striking the chisel at this angle will peel off pieces from the end of the damaged section, like sharpening a pencil, and help free the board for removal. Work across the full width of the board. Board ends that are nailed can be freed either by channelling clear of the nails, or driving the nails through the board with a set.



After both ends of the damaged section have been channelled, it might be loose enough to remove with a little delicate prying. If not, you'll have to split the center out for removal. Make cuts with the chisel down the face of the board, so that a middle strip is split out and the board is divided into two pieces. Prying with the chisel after hammer blows helps speed the splitting. Once the center is gone, the other pieces will come out easily. In the same way, once the first board in a damaged area is removed, neighboring boards are much simpler to work on.

Installing the Replacements

Before installing the replacement flooring, it's important to ascertain how the existing floor was nailed down. A quick inspection will tell you whether the boards were *face-nailed* with heads exposed, or *blind-nailed* with the heads hidden between boards (see illustration). Use the same method for repairs. Looking at the nails will also tell you which way the floor was laid; that is, which side of the room the floor was started on when it was first installed. The angle of the nails will be the key here, with the heads pointing away from the direction of the first board. Occasional hammer prints where a nail was struck too hard will also be a clue, indicating which way the carpenter faced as he worked, laying the new boards in front of him. The lay of the floor is important because the new work will have to be installed in the same direction — both for looks and integrity. If the lay is still not clear from looking at the nails, check for a fitted, partial-width board on one side of the room. This will be the final piece of flooring put down in the original job (the last board always has to be "fudged" into an odd-sized space) and will mean the

lay starts on the opposite wall.

After you understand how the old floor went down, start the new work. Each board in a repair will probably have to be cut, trimmed, and fitted individually into the space it will occupy. Each board may also have to be planed on the top face to blend as closely as possible with the level of the old floor. To match the look of some 18th-century floors, it helps to grind the plane blade in a gentle arc so the repair simulates colonial workmanship.

Attention to the spacing of the boards also helps produce a quality job. Old floors draw up over the years, and the gaps that develop between the boards will be wider than in any new floor. When repairing, a trick is to use spacers like washers or small wooden wedges to set up gaps between the new boards that mimic the old. Keep in mind, too, that while quarter-sawn lumber has no top or bottom, flat-sawn flooring should be placed with its grain rings (viewed from the end of the board) pointing down. This will keep the boards from "cupping" as they age.

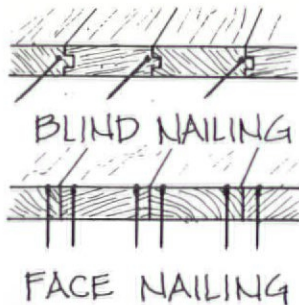
Mr. Jackson says there are fine points to nailing, too. First, choosing the right nails is important. If the floor is blind-nailed or the look of the nail heads isn't critical, he prefers eight-penny "casing" cut nails (available from Tremont Nail Co. as the N-3 Floor Nail). He works with common cut nails too, but finds these tend to split the wood. Both types, though, are preferable to smooth, wire nails for grabbing a joist and holding the floor tight. If reproduction nails are purchased (to blend with a floor full of hand-wrought originals), a little more "distressing" to each head adds individuality. For any type, pre-drill holes through the flooring if the wood is too hard or thick to nail easily. Also, use a nailset when making the last couple of blows, and ugly hammer prints will be avoided.

When a repair job gets down to putting in the last board, his advice is "get it in any way you can!" This usually means coaxing in with a prybar and tapping down with a hammer, in both cases protecting the board with pieces of scrap wood. The last board is special also because it can only be face-nailed even if the rest of the floor is not. To hide the nail heads, drive them deep with a set, then cover them with color-matched wood filler. In a repair of only two side-by-side boards, it is usually easiest to face-nail both these boards as well.

"Everybody does flooring a little different," was Mr. Jackson's closing comment, "but the old way is what I've described. Also, the best time to work, in Atlanta anyway, is August when there's the least amount of moisture 'round."



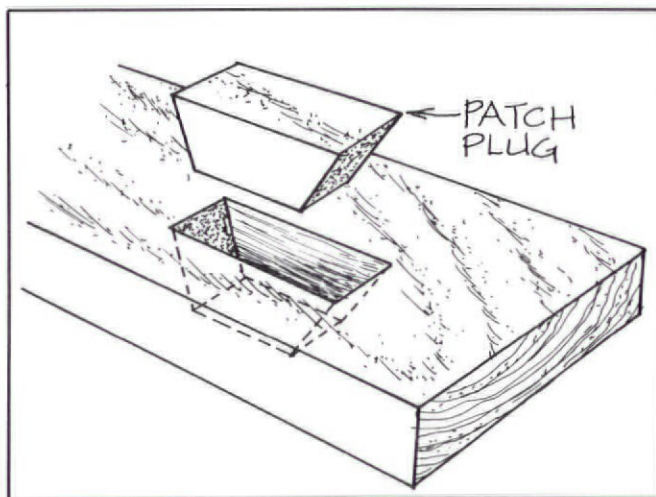
Kathy Fulton used to write the "Home of the Week" column for Georgia's Griffin Daily News, and is currently associated with Renovator's Source Group.



A Dutchman for Small Repairs

Not every injury requires a full-scale repair — replacing the flooring across two or more joists. Often the damage is localized to only a few square inches, as in a cosmetic blemish like a deep gouge, and does not affect the structural value of the flooring. In these situations, a patch that disturbs as little of the surrounding floor as possible works best.

This is just the kind of repair architectural conservator Tom Taylor employs at Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. "A typical problem is the high heel that has punched through a soft spot in a floor, usually one weakened by wood-eating insects." At Williamsburg, the priority is to retain as much original flooring as possible, so only the defective area is cut out of the board. Working with a hammer and chisel, a geometric cavity with beveled sides is carved into the floor, excavating all the damaged wood. The top profile is usually an easy-to-reproduce rectangle. Then, a plug is cut from lumber closely matched for looks and grain, and this plug is fitted and glued into the cavity. Once the glue has cured, the top surface can be finish-planed or sanded if necessary. The result is a patch much like a veneer repair that stands up well, even under heavy museum traffic.



Another tip: Andy Ladygo of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) says, "Don't overlook marine epoxy products as an alternative to wood replacement." He has used wood stabilizers (such as those available from Abatron, Inc., and Allied Resin Corp.) with success in arresting problems like rot. Fillers are also available in a variety of wood tones for patching small defects — often as invisibly as a wood repair.



Those Hardware Store WHATCHAMACALLITS

by Tom Philbin with Gordon Bock

These days our friend Steve Ettlinger is busy probing the mysteries of cat's paws, crow's feet, hawks, and snakes.

It probably sounds like Steve is a naturalist or zoologist. In reality, he's a book producer/editor/writer, and these terms are all used to describe hardware items. Steve's hard at work preparing a book for Macmillan, to be published this fall, which will round up all kinds of do-it-yourself hardware, tools, and materials, and include the names by which such items are commonly (and uncommonly) known.

Steve learned the hard way that it's very useful to have a good tool vocabulary. Indeed, an incident that occurred a couple of years ago was the turbulent genesis for the book.

"I had been instructed by a carpenter friend of mine to get a specific tool we needed to rip up a

floor," he told us, "so I went to my friendly hardware store and asked for a *cat's paw*. The salesman quickly caught on that I didn't really know what one was, and decided instead that what I should have was a *Wonder Bar*."

Cowed and corrected, Steve bought the Wonder Bar and did a week's worth of backbreaking labor before his contractor friend told him he was using the wrong tool. A cat's paw was for nail pulling, but a Wonder Bar was for prying. Steve said he sublimated his anger at his own ignorance and the salesman's indifference, and started to think about a book on hardware instead.

To make sure that people will get the most use from each entry, Steve and his team are not only looking for tool and hardware names that are accurate and widespread, but they are also seeking regional and colloquial variations. "For all I knew, a cat's paw here,"

he says, "could be a dog's tail there." For the time being, it looks like a cat's paw is a small hex bar with one end curved and formed with a slot that cinches nails just under the head — at least in the Northeast, where he's from.

Listed below are some abbreviated examples from the work in progress. We'd love to hear from OHJ readers across the country who know of other names for these and similar items. Have you ever asked for something you felt sure you knew, only to be told by a slow-to-comprehend clerk "Oh, what YOU want is a _____," using a name you've never heard? Some names may be archaic, trade-related, regional, or just plain incorrect. Still, they get used. For openers, what's a P.O. plug wrench?

And if there are so many types of spud wrenches, what's a spud?

And Lord, what's a spanner???

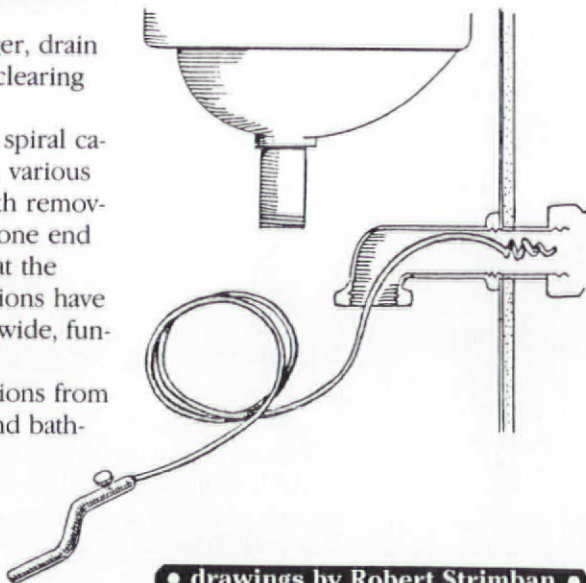
Snake

ITEM: snake.

ALSO KNOWN AS: auger, drain auger, trap auger, drain-clearing tool, plumber's snake.

DESCRIPTION: Coiled spiral cable, about 1/4 in. thick, in various lengths up to 25 feet, with removable or fixed handle on one end and a slightly open coil at the business end. Some versions have a crank mechanism in a wide, funnel-shaped container.

USE: Clearing obstructions from drain lines in kitchens and bathrooms.



• drawings by Robert Strimban •

Wrecking Bar

ITEM: wrecking bar.

ALSO KNOWN AS: ripping bar, pig's foot, gooseneck bar, crow bar.

DESCRIPTION: High-carbon steel bar, from one to several feet in length, with ends adapted for prying and nail-pulling. Typically,



one end is bent back in a hook, and has a forked, nail-grabbing tip. The opposite end has a solid chisel shape and is angled slightly. Cloven appearance of nail puller is source of the nickname "pig's foot."

USE: Heavy prying and wrecking, particularly where some damage is acceptable. Also popular for lifting heavy objects, such as flagstones or crates, the few inches necessary to place wedges and other items under them.

USE TIPS: The longer the model, the more leverage you'll have (and the more weight to maneuver).

Tongue-and-groove Joint Pliers

ITEM: tongue-and-groove joint pliers.

ALSO KNOWN AS: Channellocks (brand name), Channel-type pliers (referring to brand name), curved jaw pliers, groove-joint or jointed pliers, mechanic's pliers, pump-house pliers, slip-groove pliers, waterpump pliers, utility pliers.

DESCRIPTION: Plierlike tool with changeable pivot that allows jaws to be set at a variety of widths. Choice of models is immense, ranging in size from miniature to jaw widths of nearly a foot.

USES: For gripping items of any shape, often those too large for standard pliers. They're frequently used to hold pipes, rods, hose and cable connections, and so on.



Nail Claw

ITEM: nail claw.

ALSO KNOWN AS: cat's paw, nail puller, tack claw (smaller models).

DESCRIPTION: Hand-sized, hexagonal, or round steel bar forged with nail-grabbing tips at one or both ends. Typically, each tip is cup- or spoon-shaped, and slotted

to grab nail heads once it's been driven below the wood surface with a hammer.

USE: Pulls nails from just below the surface of a board so that they can be completely pulled out with the claw of a hammer, prybar, or ripping bar.



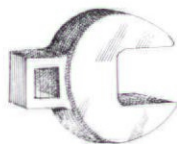
Crowfoot Wrench

ITEM: crowfoot wrench.

ALSO KNOWN AS: gimmick wrench.

DESCRIPTION: An abbreviated, open-end wrench incorporating a square hole into which a socket wrench or extension can be inserted for driving.

USE: Tightening and loosening nuts in places difficult to reach with conventional wrenches.

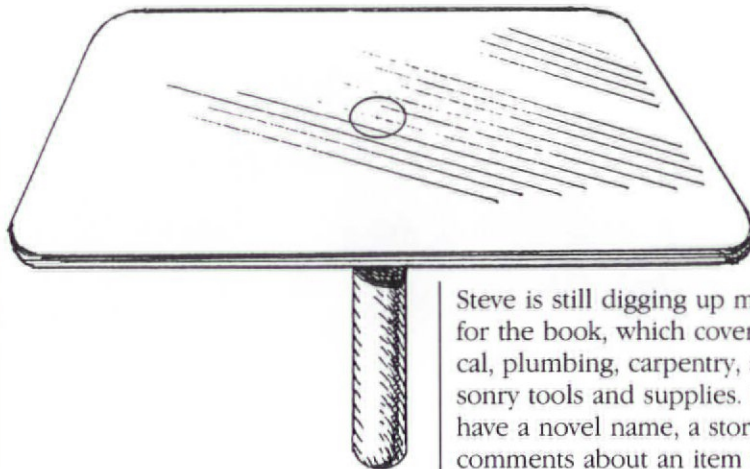


Hawk

ITEM: hawk.

ALSO KNOWN AS: mudboard.

DESCRIPTION: Palette of flat, thin metal with a perpendicular handle in the middle of one side.



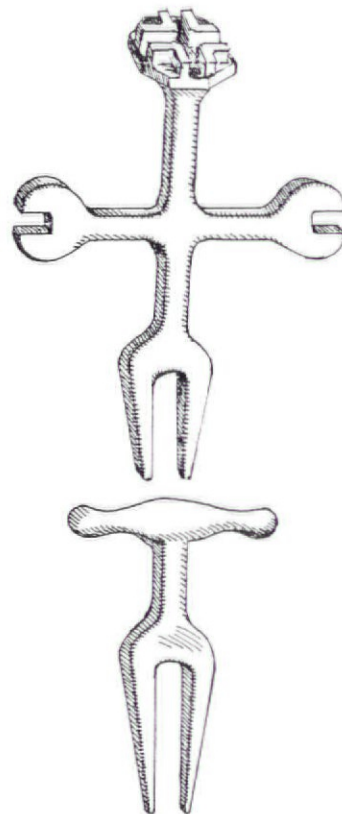
USE: For holding "working" amounts of plaster or drywall compound in one hand.

P.O. Plug Wrench

ITEM: P.O. plug wrench.

ALSO KNOWN AS:

DESCRIPTION: Cast-metal wrench with a forklike end and, in the case of the 4-way model, two arms.



USE: Removing P.O. ("pop up" or "pop out") plug from basin drain opening. Holds plug stationary in basin while nut is backed off from underside.

Steve is still digging up material for the book, which covers electrical, plumbing, carpentry, and masonry tools and supplies. If you have a novel name, a story, or comments about an item you think should be included, write to Steve Ettlinger c/o OHJ, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217.



Japanese Influence

BY BEKKA LINDSTROM

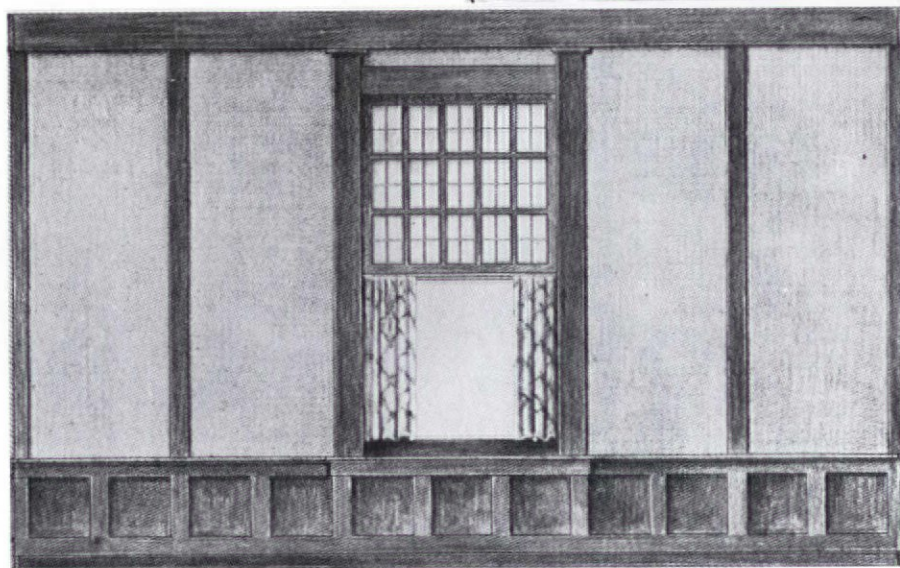


Western fascination with the East has taken on many forms in the history of the decorative arts. The late Victorian years saw Japanese motifs literally applied to furniture, wallpaper, woodwork, and bric-a-brac. Rooms were littered with objects associated with the East — fans, peacock feathers, cranes, butterflies; there was a fad for “Japanese” materials such as ebony, bamboo, lacquer, and straw matting. Such all-out embrace of Japanese motifs did necessitate a certain imitation of style: Decorative forms were simplified, flattened, and stylized (by High Victorian standards). But there was little attempt to integrate Japanese design principles into American architecture.

The high-style Aesthetic room at the right illustrates the Victorian attitude, with its sheer number of objects and quantity of ornamentation. Below is an example from *The Craftsman* magazine, showing less fascination with Eastern motifs, but a significant sympathy to Japanese design.



Original pen-and-ink drawing by Steve Bauer, 1984



Above: Idealized Aesthetic Movement interior of the 1880s, showing the use of elaborate Japanesque motifs.

Left: In contrast to the Victorian Japanesque, Eastern influence in the post-Victorian period was subtler, more integrated into the architecture (from *The Craftsman*, October 1907).

Opposite: “The Autumn Mountain” by Kogyo Terasaki, Modern Japanese Painter (*The Craftsman*, February 1910).

The Japanese influence on post-Victorian interiors was more profound. Rather than simply decorating existing furniture, fabrics, and woodwork with oriental figures and forms, designers experimented with the approach to form itself.

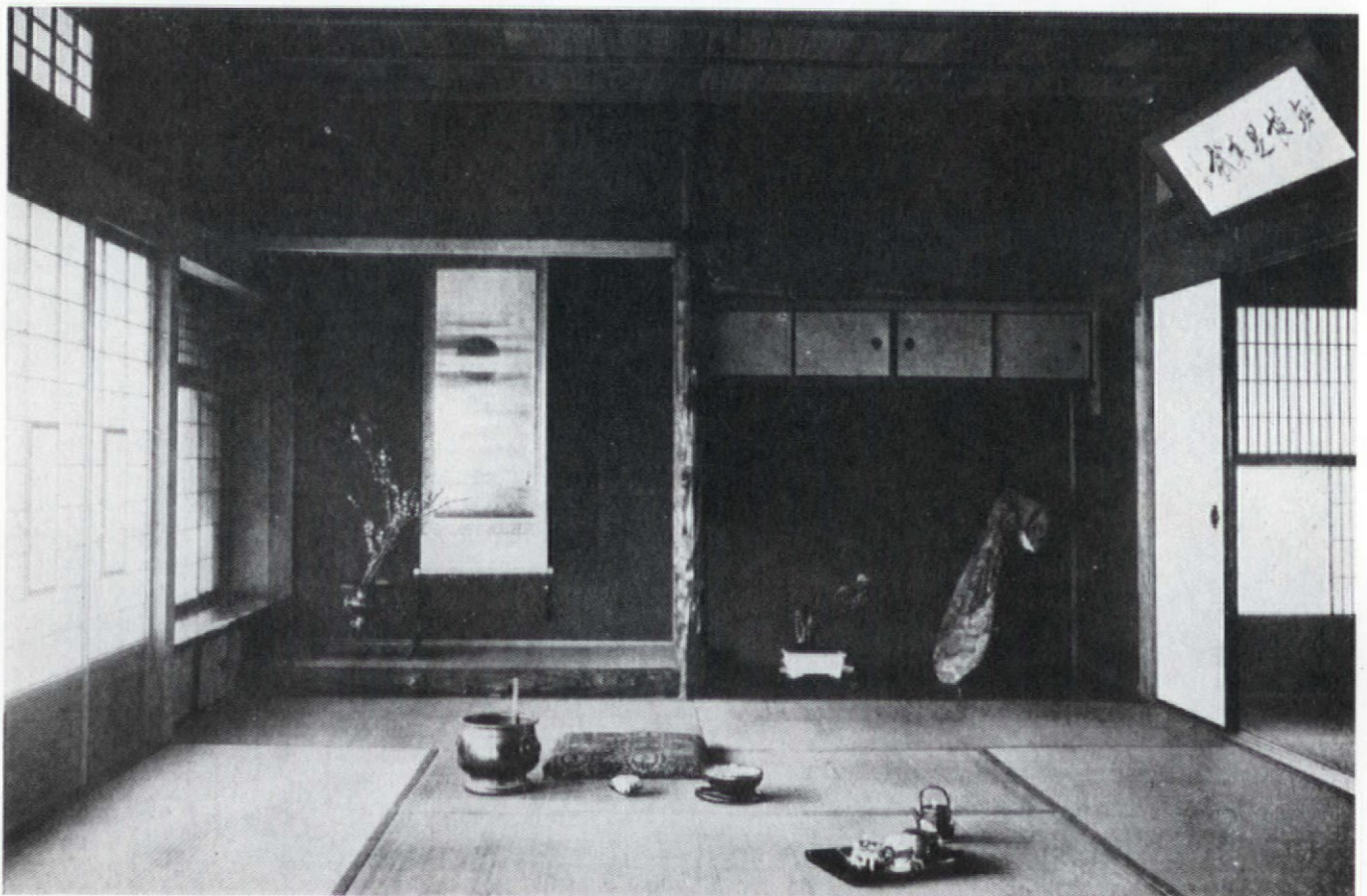
Post-Victorian Japanesque is marked by the preponderance of low-lying horizontal elements, flowing open spaces, logical control of space, and a careful asymmetry seldom seen in European design.

The importance of *integration* of Eastern principles is illustrated in titles of contemporary magazine articles: for example, "How Beauty and Labor are Interwoven in the Daily Life of Japan." There was also an open-minded awareness that cross-cultural influence could work both ways, as in *The Craftsman* article entitled "The Influence of the West on Modern Japanese Art" (1910). By 1916, reverence was expressed in an article entitled "The Japanese Print as a Reformer: Its Power to Influence Home Decoration." Mr. Stickley's advice was to hang a Japanese print in a room in order to "have some one perfect thing to which the rest of the room may be tuned, some one thing that corresponds to a tuning fork or the piano



"Japanese Designer" by Hokusai

Japanese interior, c. 1915.



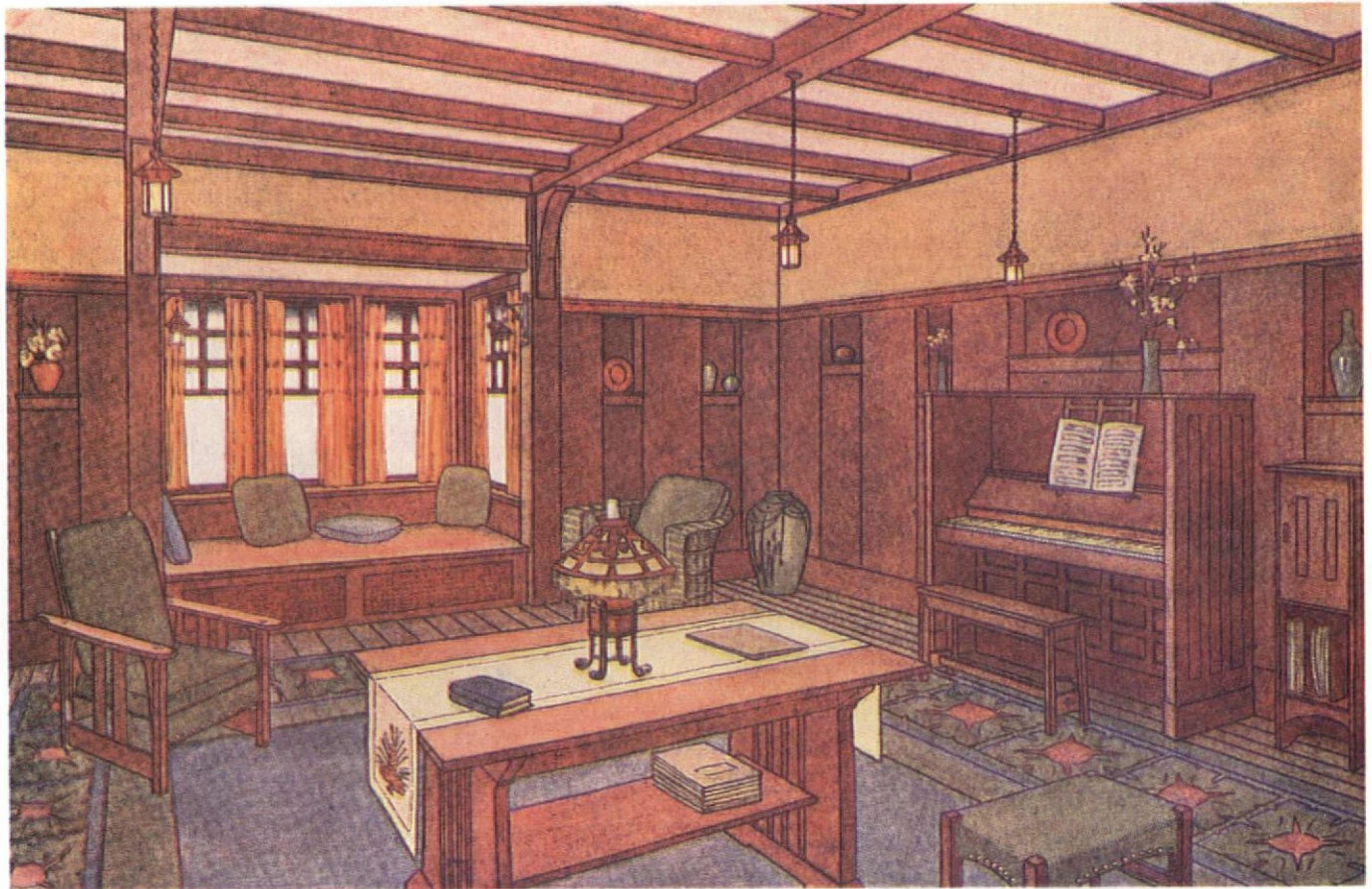
keyed to correct pitch that all other instruments in an orchestra must be harmonized with." By taking a cue from "the marvelous genius of the bold color combinations and the fine, subtle modulations," a harmonious palette could be created. An overly crowded room could be reduced to its most beautiful essentials. As *The Craftsman* commented on the Japanese interior reproduced here, "They find pleasure in the illusion of spaciousness obtained in a simply furnished room, in the dignity and importance that surrounds each object when but a few instead of many are shown at once. They come to see a beauty of color, a charm in neatness, an impressiveness in reserve."

The use of strong and low (or very high) horizontals expresses Japanese architectural influence. How different from the Victorian attitude toward Japanese, where a decorating "theme" came from the accumulation and application of oriental objects and patterns! Post-Victorian wall treatments are uncluttered, the architectural aspects of the room simplified though apparent, being structurally integrated with the room's decor. Large expanses of open space are defined by the extension of partition walls and such subtle touches as the placement



"When the Twilight Bats Are Flitting" by Hokusai

Craftsman interior, 1909



of rugs or mats. Rooms took on an airiness and ease that was also evidenced in the open placement of furniture — a much different approach from the Victorians' lining their walls with heavily ornamented furniture.

In the 1912 Craftsman room on the previous page, the furniture no longer juts into the room; abundant built-ins allow storage and display. Open rafters suspend lantern lighting that has clear Japanese feeling. There is continued fascination with objects that suggest the East, as in the cherry blossoms placed on top of the piano — but it is a singular and asymmetrical display. Rather than boasting a collection of Japanese souvenirs, the room expresses an empathetic attitude toward living space.

The Japanese gong at right was featured in the "Shopping Services" department of a 1920 issue of *House Beautiful*. It appears to have made its way into the "unusual interior" of the "picturesque plaster house" published in *Distinctive Homes of Moderate Cost* (1921). Notice how the walls function like Japanese partitions with



Gong, *House Beautiful*, 1920

from *Distinctive Homes of Moderate Cost*, 1921



their screenlike grille. Changing floor levels and the flattening of the wall plane allude to Japanese design. Also in common with Japanese interiors is the emphasis on natural materials, in this case unvarnished, unoiled, strongly grained cypress.

Because Japanese design influence in the post-Victorian period was more integrated, its effects were apparent not only in interiors but also in architecture in general. The 1912 exterior pictured at right resembles the low horizontal character of Japanese structures in its "unique window and roof treatment." This carries through, of course, to the house's interior, an integration and extension of the exterior. There is even some resemblance in the furniture; compare the Japanese interior below with the Craftsman sideboard.

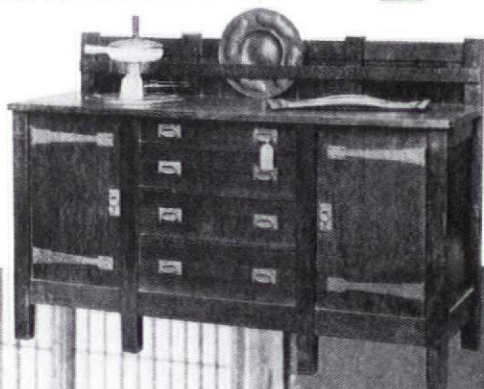
1912

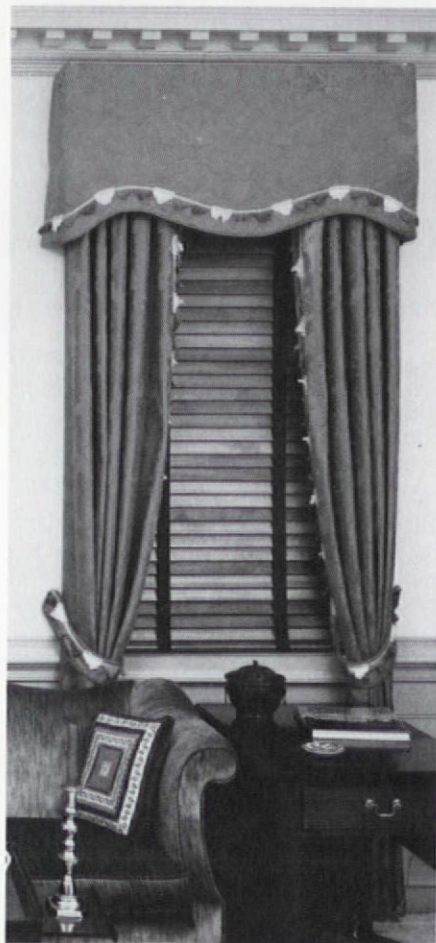


1912



Japanese interior, c. 1915



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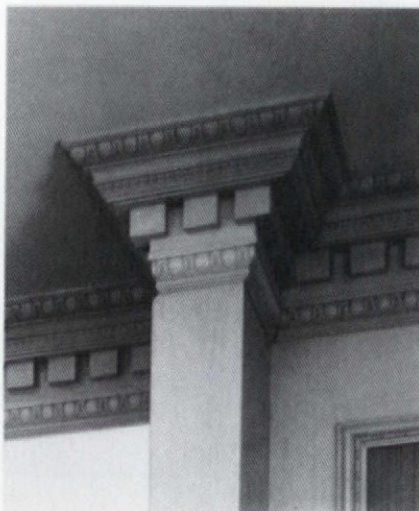
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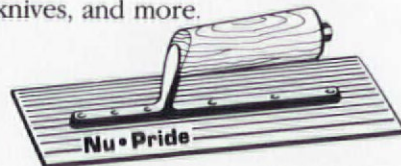
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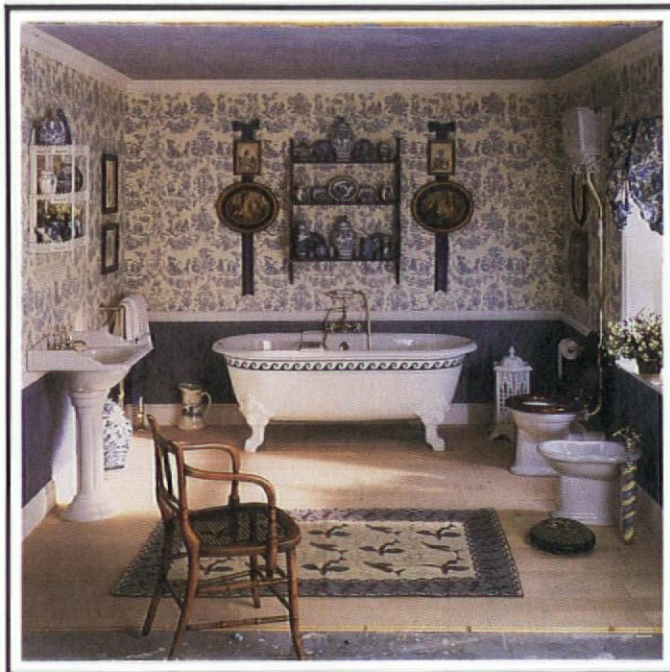
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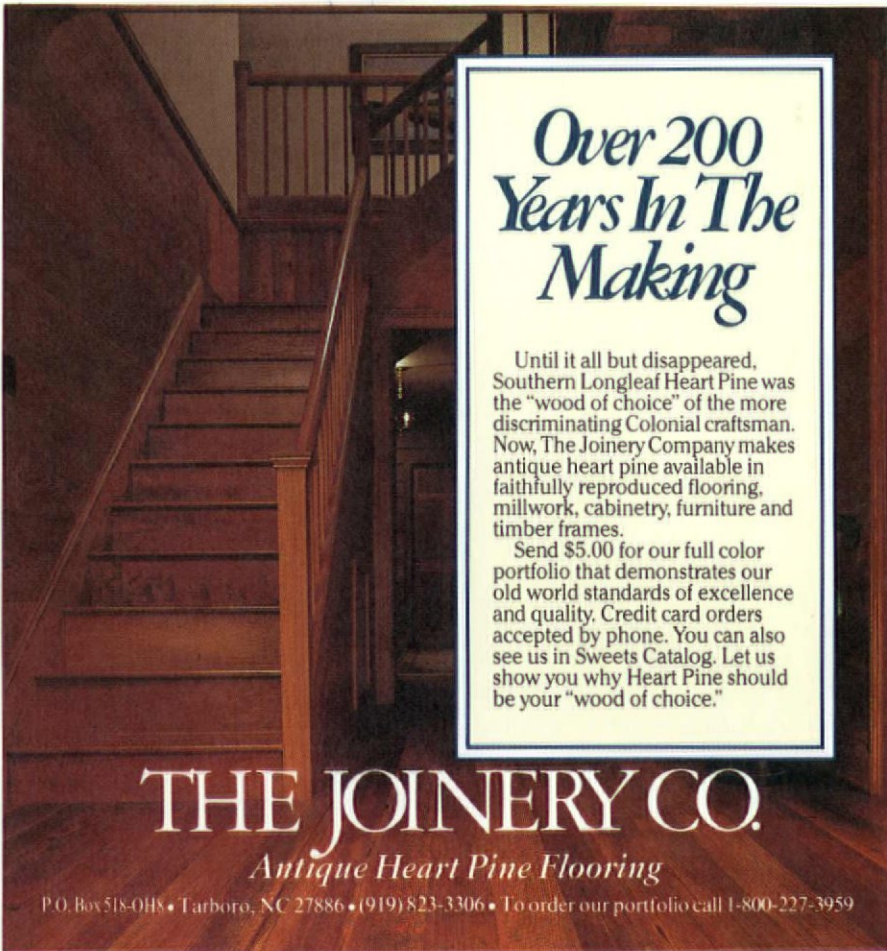
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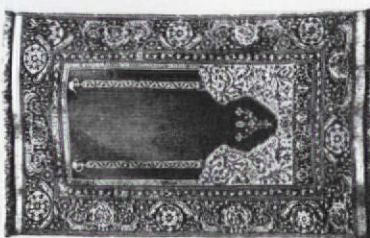
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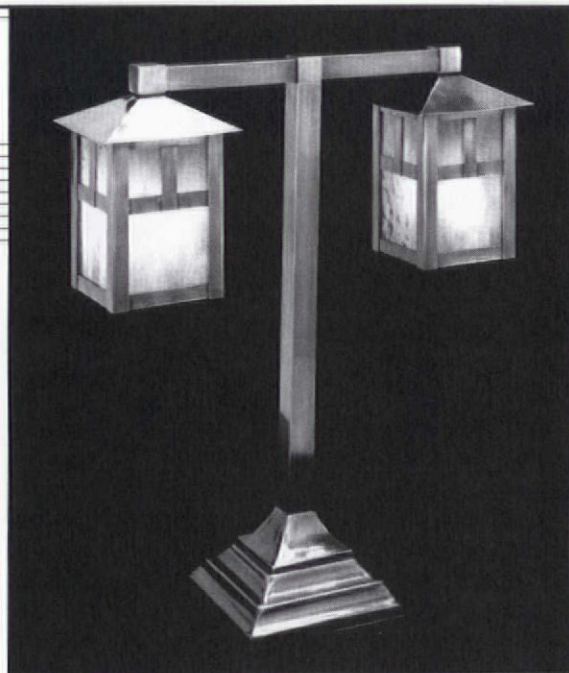
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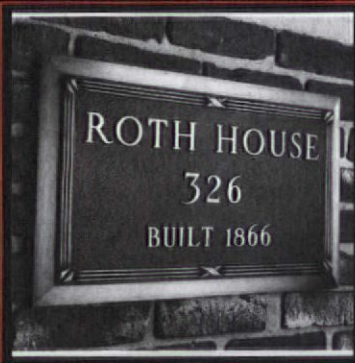


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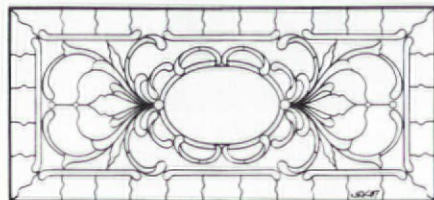


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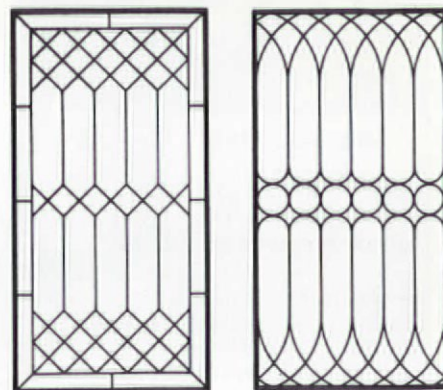
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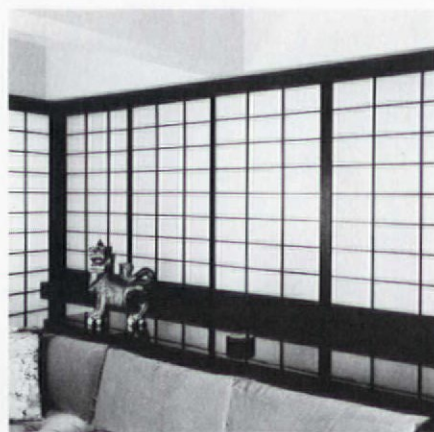
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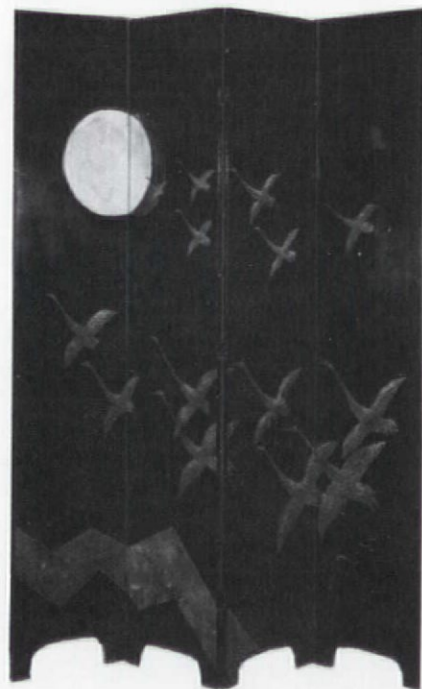
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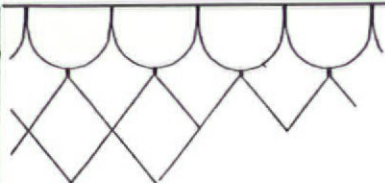
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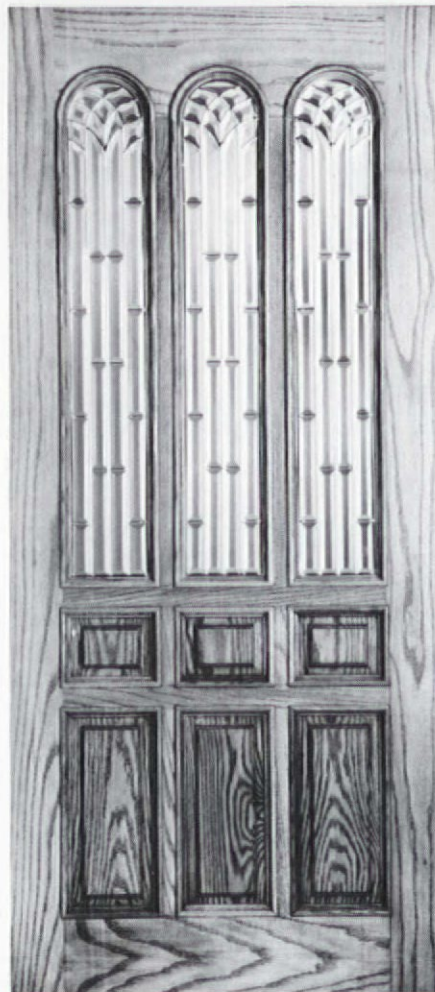
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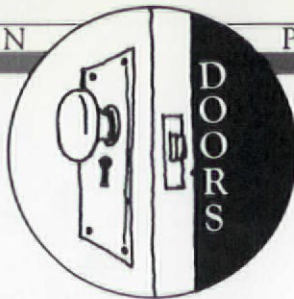
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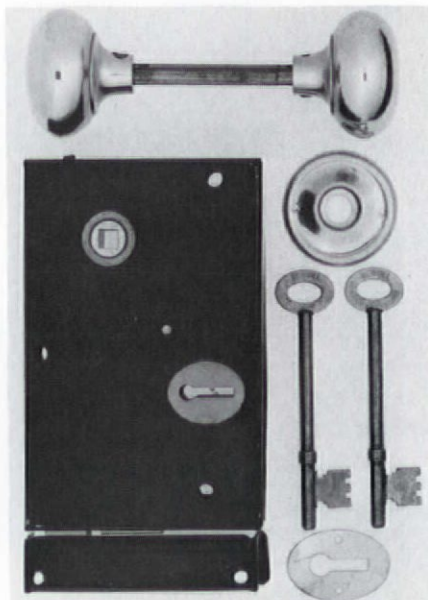


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Stands for Antique Doorknob Collectors of America. Published six times a year, the newsletter features articles, classifieds, and more. Write to Raymond Nemece, ADCA, Dept. OHJ, P.O. Box 126, Eola, IL 60519.

Hardware



The Antique Hardware Store carries all sorts of paraphernalia to adorn your entry door. The wide selection of doorknobs and lock sets includes this whimsical one; knobs and plates are sold separately. The Old Man Wind Knob sells for \$17.95. Door plates are \$11.95 each. All are of cast brass.

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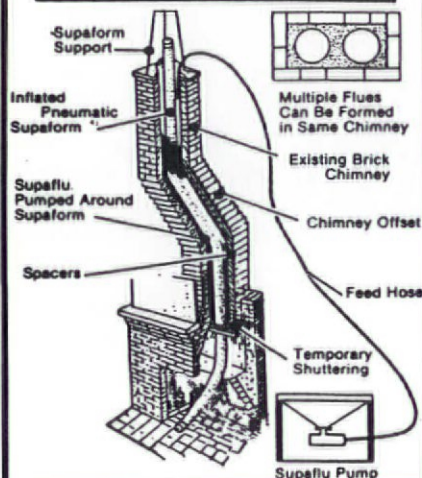
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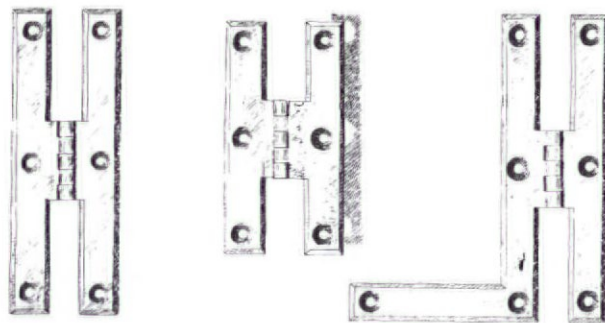
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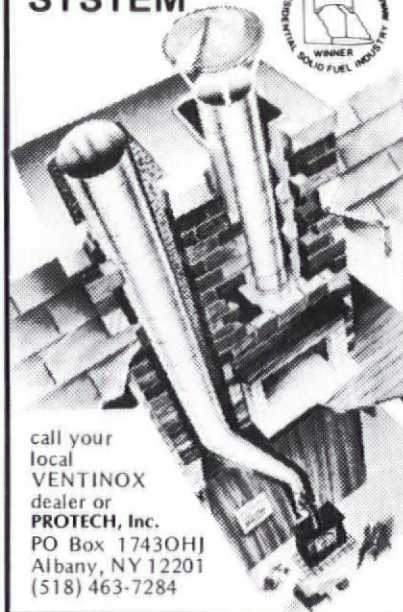
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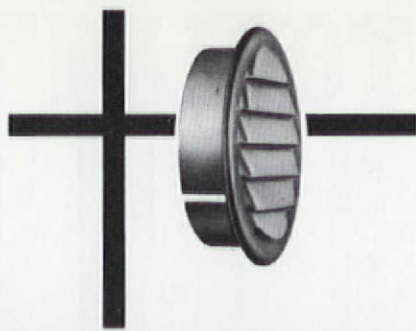
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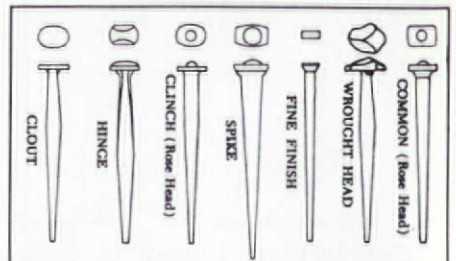
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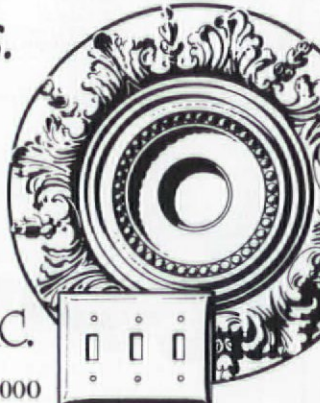
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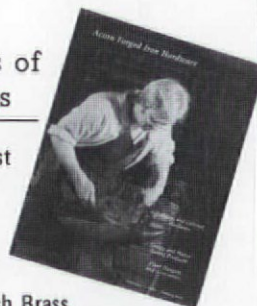
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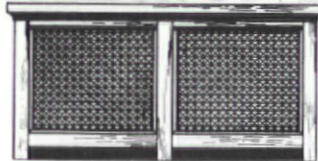
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The four books described on this page don't have a whole lot in common — except inspiration. All are terrific source-books.

Japanese Style

by Suzanne Slesin, Stafford Cliff & Daniel Rozensztroch, photographs by Gilles de Chabaneix. Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., distributed by Crown Publishers, 34 Englehard Ave., Avenel, NJ 07001. (201) 382-7600. 287pp, almost 800 color photographs. \$37.00 ppd, NY & NJ residents add sales tax. This beautiful book is a good place to start acquainting yourself with Japanese interiors. Hundreds of pages of photographs show how the essence of Japan is expressed in traditional as well as modern architecture, and how this spirit pervades all aspects of Japanese life. Simple decorative elements — one perfect piece of pottery, a flower artfully arranged on a plate, an antique kimono displayed against a bare white wall — are a few of the images presented.

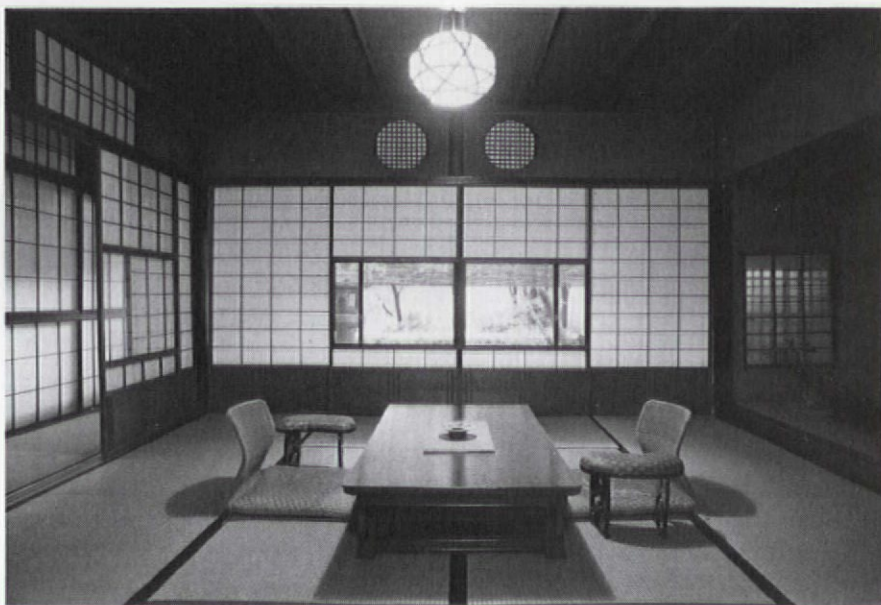
Of special interest is the way in which the influences of East and West have been combined to create rooms with the harmony and delicacy of Japan and the convenience and familiarity of the West.

At the end of the book is a helpful catalog of sources for antiques, plants, accessories, arts and crafts, and furniture, as well as museums with Japanese collections.

Architectural Ornamentation, Detailing in the Craft Tradition

by Jim Kemp, photographs by Robert Perron. Whitney Library of Design, Watson-Guption Publications Distribution Center, 1695 Oak St., Lakewood, NJ 08701. (201) 363-4511. 175pp with over 200 color photographs. \$34.50.

The first chapter of this book depicts two really wonderful homes full of detail work by craftspeople in all different media. The book continues with chapters on detailing with



wood, glass, metal, fiber, and masonry and ceramics.

This is a great "idea book." Each chapter presents a range of possible uses for the materials. The chapter on fiber has examples of stencilled canvas floorcloths, hand-woven rag rugs, custom quilts, and hand-made gauze bed linens, used in a variety of settings.

The book also includes a short source list, and a brief discussion of how to find and work with a crafts-person.

Architectural Details from Old New England Homes

by Stanley Schuler. Schiffer Publishing, Ltd, 1469 Morstein Rd., West Chester, PA 19380. (215) 696-1001. 176pp with hundreds of black-and-white and color photographs, paperback, \$21.95 ppd.

If you need information on Jacobean, Colonial, Georgian, or Federal design, this book, loaded with photographs (over 40 pages of doors alone!) will help.

Use it to identify details in your home, or copy from it to add authentic detail when remodelling, renovating, or building a new house. A number of precise architectural

drawings by Asher Benjamin, a leading builder and designer of the late-18th and early-19th century, are reproduced. The intricate plans for interior panelling and moulding will open your eyes to the complexity of creating these details.

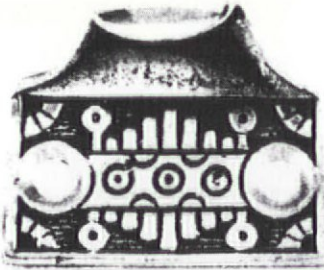
American Vernacular Interior Architecture

by Jan Jennings and Herbert Gottfried. Van Nostrand Reinhold, Mail Order Service, 7625 Empire Drive, Florence, KY 41042. 448pp with 306 line drawings, paperback, \$39.95 ppd.

This book will prove to be a handy guide — it covers, in exhaustive detail, the aesthetics of American vernacular architecture built between 1870 and 1940.

The book is divided into four sections: Elements — Windows, Doors, Trim, Hardware, etc.; Support Systems — Heating, Plumbing, Kitchens, Lighting; Design Systems — Ornamental, Classical, Artistic, Colonial; and Building Types — Gable, Row-house, Bungalow, and other.

This terrific resource book is also fun to just browse through. It's got everything from toilets of all shapes and sizes, to floor plans of bungalows.



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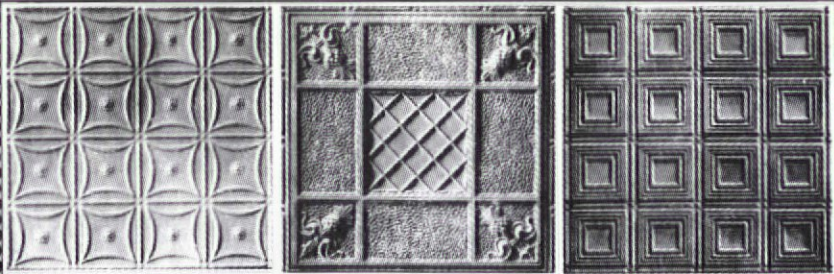
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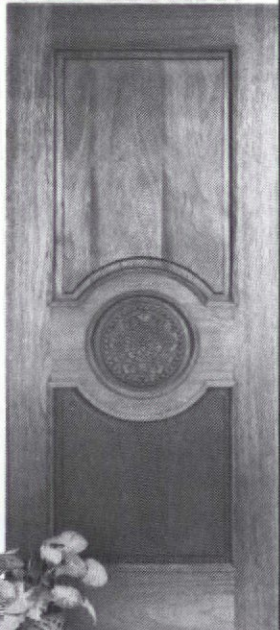
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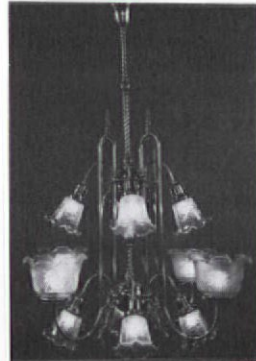


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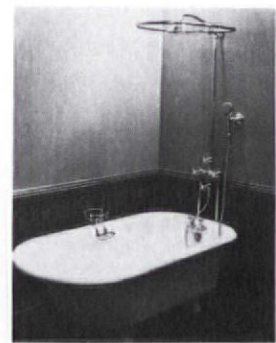
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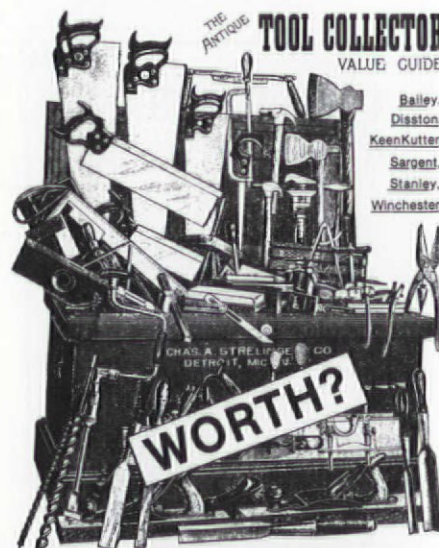
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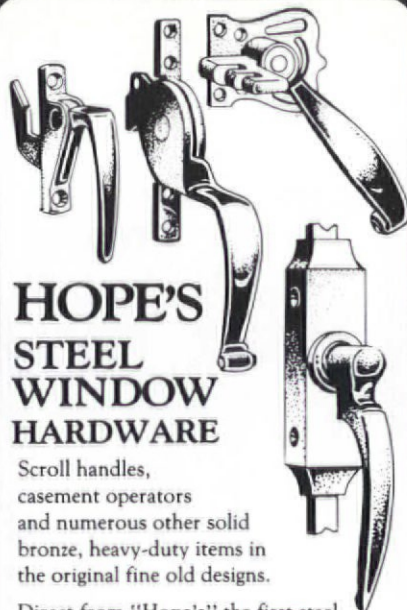
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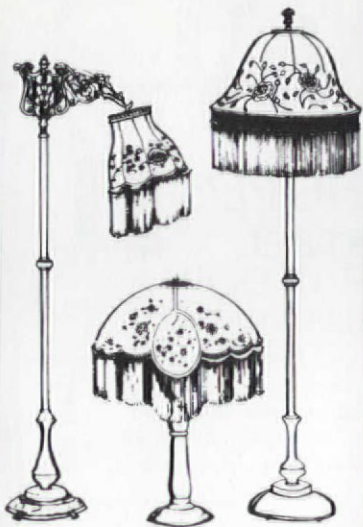


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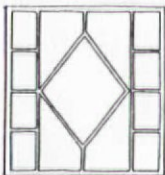
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BOOKS & PUBLICATIONS



YESTERDAY'S NEWS — Step back in time with "The Shirley Star." It offers actual 90-year-old stories and illustrations plus news of the day from Shirley, West Virginia. Send two postage stamps for a sample issue to The Shirley Star, Box 33A, Shirley, WV 26434.

SAUTTER HOUSE FIVE: Wallpapers of a German-American Farmstead. Text, color/B&W photos of wall coverings, 1860s-1916, Nebraska's pioneer period. Historically documented. 1983, 33 pp., pbk., 8½ x 11, \$8.50 plus \$1.50 shipping. Bulk rate available. Douglas County Historical Society, PO Box 11398, Omaha, NE 68111. (402) 455-9990.

HOPE & GLORY, an annual devoted to the eclectic world of Queen Victoria. Published each May. Second issue devoted to articles on "Recreation & Entertainment in the 19th Century." Subscriptions, \$7 per year, payable to the Iowa Chapter, VSA, 2940 Cottage Grove, Des Moines, IA 50311.

MEETINGS & EVENTS

23RD EUFAULA PILGRIMAGE & ANTIQUE SHOW in Eufaula, AL, April 8-10. Daily tours, 9 AM to 5 PM; candlelight tours, 7 to 9 PM; Sunday tours, 1 to 5 PM. For more information, contact Eufaula Heritage Association, PO Box 486, Eufaula, AL 36027. (205) 687-3793, Monday through Saturday, 10 AM to 4 PM.

53RD ANNUAL TOUR of Savannah homes & gardens, March 20-24. A variety of day & evening events, including candlelight tours, alfresco luncheons, & 19th-century evening dinner in one of Savannah's loveliest mansions. For more information & ticket requests, contact Savannah Tour of Homes & Gardens, 18 Abercorn Street, Savannah, GA 31401, or call Historic Savannah Foundation, (912) 233-7787.

BRANDYWINE VALLEY GARDENS CONFERENCE, May 4-6. The first-ever symposium, expected to attract landscape historians & garden enthusiasts from across the country, will address the past, present, & future of the unique enclave of gardens, museums, & estates clustered along a 10-mile stretch of the Brandywine River from Wilmington, DE, north into PA. For registration information, contact Philip Correll, Landscape Curator, Hagley Museum & Library, PO Box 3630, Wilmington, DE 19807. (302) 658-2400.

WORKSHOP SERIES: "Your Old House: What Ails It & What To Do About It," March 12 & 19 in Bennington, VT; "Building Diagnostics: Evaluating Problems In Historic Structures," March 28 & 29 in Windsor, VT. For further information, contact Preservation Institute for the Building Crafts, PO Box 1777, Windsor, VT 05089. (802) 674-6752.

INNKEEPING SEMINARS — Comprehensive 2-day seminar offered bi-monthly for prospective B&B owners. Topics include inn acquisition, financial analysis, marketing operating strategies & more. Tuition: \$195/ person; \$295/ couple (VISA/MC accepted). For free brochure, contact Innkeeping Consultants, c/o The Park House, 888 Holland Street, Saugatuck, MI 49453. (616) 857-4535.

LANDSCAPE PRESERVATION SEMINAR, March 25-26, University of Massachusetts at Amherst. A forum to inform professionals from various fields about the special skills and methodologies needed for the restoration, development, and management of historic landscapes of all types and scales. For registration information, contact Alice Szlosek, Division of Continuing Education, 608 Goodell Building, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003. (413) 545-2484.

SACRED TRUSTS:The National Trust, National Park Service, & Philadelphia Hist. Pres. Corp. are sponsoring a gathering of historic-preservation professionals, clergy, laypeople, & craftspeople to discuss the problems & opportunities of the repair, maintenance, protection, & management of historic churches & synagogues. Workshops, issue forums, tours, cultural events, photo exhibit. April 20-23 at several historic churches in Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square area. Registration, \$87. For more information, contact J. Randall Cotton, Philadelphia Hist. Pres. Corp., 1 East Penn Square, 22nd Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19107. (215) 568-4210.

42ND WILLIAMSBURG GARDEN SYMPOSIUM, April 10-13. "The Lure & Lore of the Garden" will be explored by nationally recognized horticultural authorities at daily lectures, tours, clinics, & demonstrations. Write Registrar, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, PO Box C, Williamsburg, VA 23187.

"BELLOWS, BOBBINS, & BUTTER CHURNS: Keeping House in 19th-Century America," March 16 through October 2. An in-depth look at what domestic life was like 150 years ago in rural working-class America. Kitchen utensils, textiles, advertisements, & household objects will illustrate the home life of that era. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 10-5; Sundays, 1-5. NY Historical Society, 170 Central Park West, New York, NY 10024. (212) 873-3400.

FRAUNCES TAVERN MUSEUM will celebrate its 80th anniversary with a special exhibition on the history of the most well-known of its five historic structures. Prints, photographs, artifacts, and memorabilia will be on display through August 31, 1988. Fraunces Tavern Museum, 54 Pearl Street, New York, NY 10004. (212) 425-1778.

OLD-HOUSE FAIR, April 23 & 24, sponsored by the Greater Hartford Architecture Conservancy. Come to New England's only show devoted to restoration & sensitive rehabilitation. Lectures, demonstrations, plus over 70 exhibits of products & services. For details, call Ruth B. Matteson at (203) 525-0279.

HISTORIC HOMES & GARDEN TOUR in New Bern, NC, April 8 & 9. Twelve historic homes, numerous churches and other landmarks, and the gardens of Tryon Palace will be open to visitors. Tour hours are from 10 to 5. Advance tickets are \$10; tour day tickets, \$12. New Bern Historic Homes & Garden Tour, PO Box 207, New Bern, NC 28560.

TV Heat Guns Aren't So Hot

OHJ's editors have been conducting extensive tests on all the new plastic heat guns that have been advertised on TV. And we've come to the conclusion that the red, all-metal Master HG-501 takes off the most paint in the least time.

Family Handyman magazine found the same thing. In test results reported in the March 1985 issue, the *Family Handyman* reviewer said of the Master HG-501: "It did the best job for me."

Although *The Old-House Journal* has been selling the Master HG-501 for several years, we have no ties to Master. (We are free to sell *any* heat gun — or no heat gun at all.) We offer the Master HG-501 because it is an industrial

tool that is not generally available to homeowners. For our readers who want the best, we'll continue to make available the all-metal HG-501 by mail.

The Master HG-501 vs. TV Heat Guns

In our tests, we found three major differences between the Master HG-501 and the mass-market TV heat guns: (1) the phrase "high-impact corrosion-resistant material" means "plastic." The HG-501, on the other hand, has an industrial-quality, cast-aluminum body that will stand a lot of rugged use. (2) With cheaper heat guns, heat output drops off after a while —

which means slower paint stripping. The HG-501 runs at a steady, efficient temperature, hour after hour. (3) When a cheaper heat gun is dead, it's dead. By contrast, the long-lasting ceramic heating element in the HG-501 is *replaceable*. When it eventually burns out, you can put a new one in yourself for \$8. (OHJ maintains a stock of replacement elements.)

Also, with the HG-501 you get two helpful flyers prepared by our editors: One gives hints and tips for stripping with heat; the other explains lead poisoning and fire hazards. OHJ is the *only* heat-gun supplier to give full details on the dangers posed by lead-based paint.

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The OHJ Guarantee: If a gun malfunctions within 60 days of purchase, return it to us and we'll replace it free. Price: \$77.95 — including UPS shipping. Use Order Form in this issue.

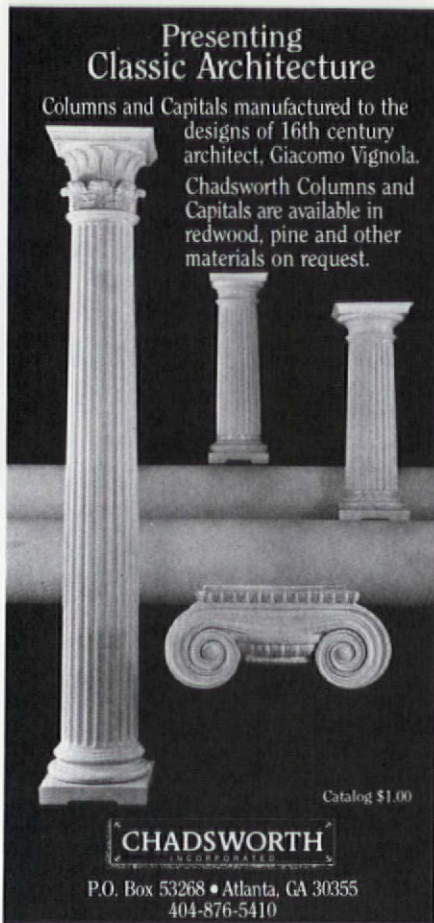
HOW WE CAME TO SELL THE HG-501

OHJ created the market for paint-stripping heat guns. In 1976, Patricia & Wilkie Talbert of Oakland told us about a remarkable way they'd discovered to strip paint in their home: with an industrial tool, the HG-501 heat gun. We printed their letter and were deluged with phone calls and letters from people who couldn't find this wonder tool.

We learned that the HG-501 was meant for shrink-wrapping plastic packaging. It was made by a Wisconsin manufacturer who wasn't interested in the retail market. So, as a reader service, we became a mail-order distributor. Since then, more than 12,000 OHJ subscribers have bought the Master HG-501.

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SOUTH CAROLINA — Southwest section. Historic homes, wide range in style and price. Lovely area. Easy drive to mountains, beach, metro areas. Derrick Realty, PO Box 486, Johnston, SC 29832. (803) 275-3234.

MENDHAM, NJ — well-maintained, 1888, 3-storey, turreted Queen Anne. 4000 sqft. LR & DR each 25' x 14'. 4 BR, 2B, laundry & den on second floor. 5 fireplaces, stained glass, mahogany trim, 3 porches, porte cochere. 4.2 parklike acres. Carriage barn w/ horse stall. \$715,000. (201) 543-2637.

HARRISONBURG, VA — Unremodelled, 10-room, 2-storey residence c. 1870s w/ many original features: hand-painted wood graining, original unfinished pine floors, original shutters. 1½ baths. Awaiting restoration. Excellent location near city. \$83,500. Hess & Miller Inc., (703) 434-7383, or AnnYoder, evenings, 433-8236.

CUSHING, ME — The Olson House, immortalized in Andrew Wyeth's painting "Christina's World," is being offered for sale. Virtually unchanged since it was built in 1741, the house has 15 rooms, including 9 bedrooms. Of hand-hewn wood frame with clapboard siding, the house is situated on approx. 9 acres of property with coastline frontage. Contact Sotheby's International Realty in Boston, (617) 536-6632.

CENTRAL VALLEY, NY — 1889 Carpenter Gothic built by owner of lumberyard on 1.3 acres, 1 hour from NYC. Pocket doors, ornate woodwork, 12 rooms, 2200 sf, outbuildings. Renovated 1963, new wiring, heating, plumbing. Livable as is but needs attention. \$185,000. A. Simmel, 801 W. 181 St., New York, NY 10033. (212) 568-5021, home; (718) 935-3783, work.

FLUVANNA COUNTY, VA — "Wilton," located between Charlottesville & Richmond on 167.4 acres, dates from late 1840s. Structurally sound, basic electricity to house, new drilled well. Four large high-ceilinged rooms downstairs; 3 bedrooms plus potential bathroom upstairs. 4 fireplaces. \$129,000. Deborah Murdock, McLean Faulconer, 503 Faulconer Drive, Charlottesville, VA 22901. (804) 295-1131 or 589-3083.

NEWARK, NY — 1837 cobblestone on acre lot, restored 1958-63. A spot for gracious living & elegant entertaining. Foyer, spiral staircase, formal living & dining rooms. Large stone fireplace dominates beamed, locust-paneled family room. 2 baths. Master suite w/ separate dressing room. 40 miles east of Rochester. \$165,000. (315) 331-4562.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: The US Forest Service is seeking proposals for the restoration, adaptive reuse, & occupation of the Russell Farmstead, a 19th/20th-century farm located in Oconee County, SC, on the Sumter Nat'l Forest. Management alternatives for long-term lease under special-use permit may include individual use; commercial use; non-profit use. Applicant will be responsible for cost of restoration and maintenance. For additional information, contact Robert Morgan, US Forest, PO Box 788, McClellanville, SC 29458. (803) 887-3311.



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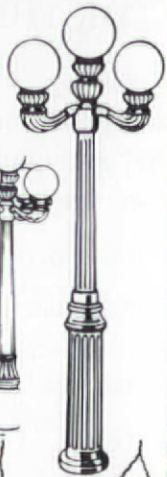
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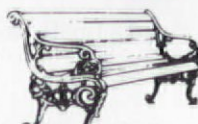
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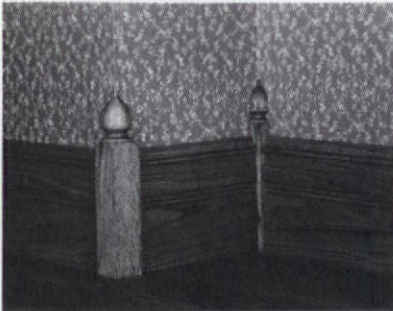
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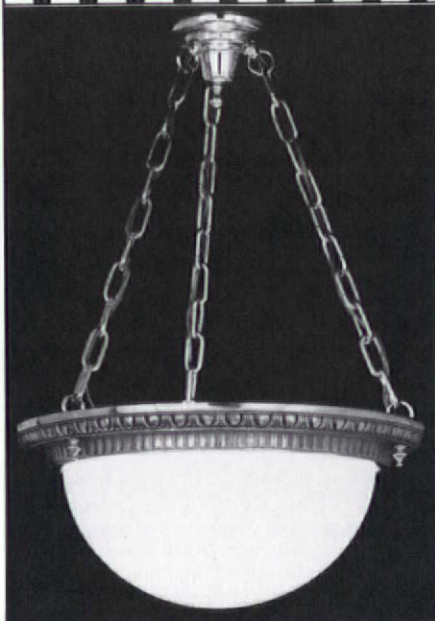
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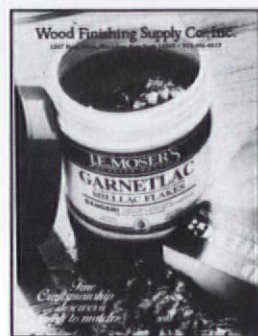
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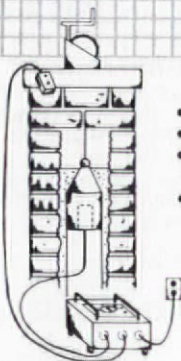
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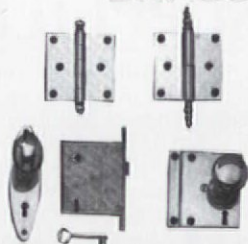
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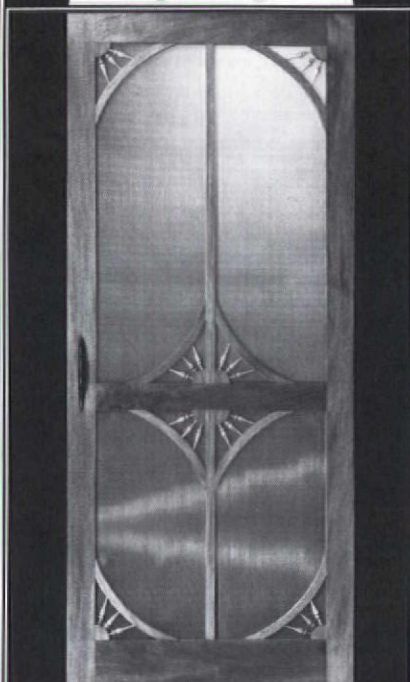


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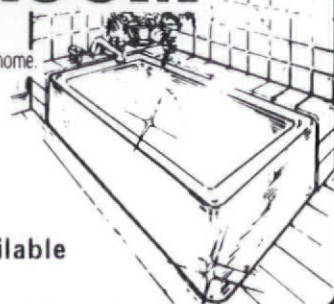
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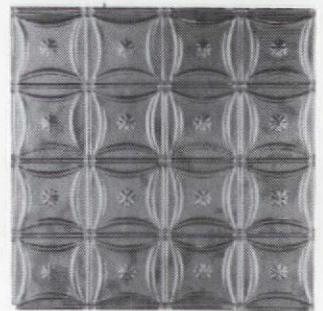
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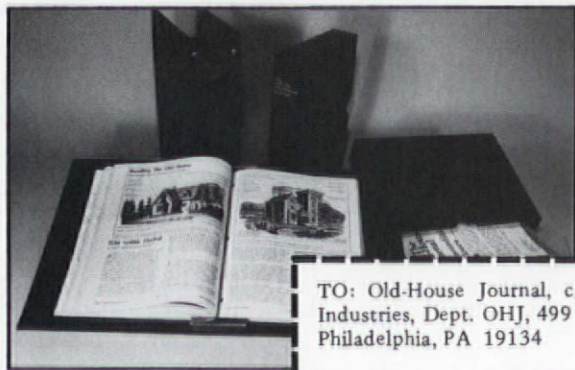
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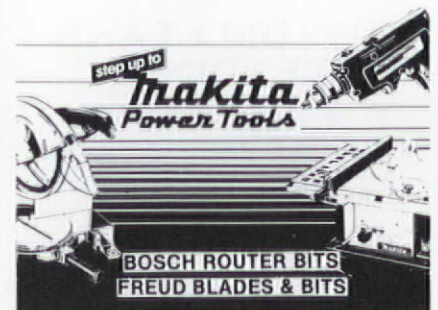
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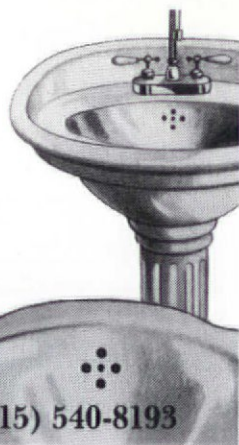
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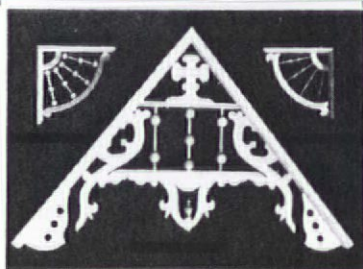
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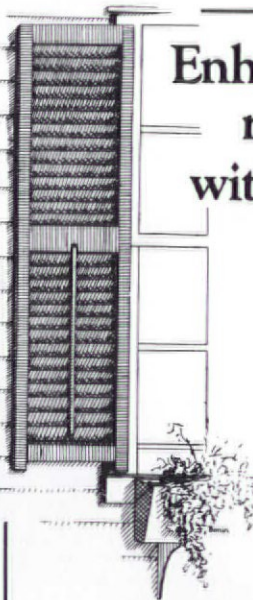
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ADVERTISER'S INDEX

Product Network No.	Page No.	Product Network No.	Page No.	Product Network No.	Page No.
130	A-Ball Plumbing.....	59	301	Devenco Products.....	11
20	AA Abbingdon Affiliates.....	65	52	DeWeese Woodworking.....	73
31	Abatron.....	7	166	The Doormen.....	73
82	Acorn Manufacturing.....	62		Easy Time Wood Refinishing.....	5
154	Advanced Materials, Inc.....	72		Edson Corporation.....	63
23	Ahren's Chimney Technique.....	72	263	Elegant Entries.....	65
260	American Heritage Shutters.....	66	170	Enviro-Chem, Inc.....	55
141	Amsterdam Corp.....	5	55	Erie Landmark Co.....	9
19	Anthony Wood Products.....	75	221	The Fan Man.....	9
17	Antiquaria.....	62	177	Fastenation.....	68
49	Antique Hardware Store.....	Inside Back Cover	104	Flue Works.....	71
219	Art Directions.....	71	178	Gougeon Brothers.....	63
18	Ball & Ball.....	61	179	Hamilton Enterprises.....	10
265	Ballard Designs.....	9	267	Hope's Architectural Products.....	67
155	Beaver Tool & Supply.....	74		Horton Brasses.....	74
185	Beech River Mill.....	75	137	Janovic Plaza.....	11
29	Besco Plumbing.....	55	2	The Joinery.....	55
27	Bradbury & Bradbury.....	9	181	La Haye Bronze.....	57
261	Burdoch Silk Lampshade Co.....	68	111	MRA Associates, Inc.....	55
22	J. R. Burrows & Co.....	74		Mac The Antique Plumber.....	61
59	Campbellsville Industries.....	74	173	Mad River Woodworks.....	59
192	Carter Canopies.....	71	183	Margate Cabinets.....	63
242	Chadsworth, Inc.....	70	9	Marvin Windows.....	15
47	Chelsea Decorative Metal Co.....	74	264	Mel-Nor Marketing.....	70
46	Cirecast.....	65	274	Merit Metal Sales.....	72
26	Classic Accents.....	62	215	Midget Louver Co.....	62
204	Connecticut Cane & Reed.....	63	16	Midwest Wood Products.....	68
42	Country Curtains.....	63	6	Monarch Radiator Enclosures.....	72
51	Crawford's Old House Store.....	63	57	E. T. Moore, Jr. Co.....	75
262	Creative Openings.....	73	113	National Supaflu Systems.....	61
98	Cross Industries.....	8	5	Nixalite.....	75
266	Croy-Marietta.....	67	128	W. F. Norman Corp.....	7, 9
44	Cumberland Woodcraft.....	7	56	Oak Crest Manufacturing.....	57
160	Decorum Hardware.....	70	32	Old Wagon Factory.....	59
			227	Olde Virginea Restoration.....	73
			61	Pasternak's Emporium.....	11
			114	Perma Ceram.....	73
			38	Protech.....	61
			117	Putnam Rolling Ladder Co.....	67
			270	Raleigh, Inc.....	10
			24	Reggio Register.....	72
			10	Rejuvenation Lamp & Fixture Co.....	57
			65	Renovator's Supply.....	67
			66	Restoration Works.....	62
			118	Robinson Iron.....	71
			11	Roy Electric Co.....	65
			1	Schwerd Manufacturing.....	3
			224	Shaker Workshops.....	73
			7	Shuttercraft.....	62
			239	Silver Tree Of Cedar Guild.....	59
			271	Silver Wallcovering.....	61
			15	Silverton Victorian Millworks.....	71
			240	Sink Factory.....	75
				Skil Corporation.....	16, 17
			30	Smith-Cornell.....	15
			209	Southampton Antiques.....	62
			14	Steptoe & Wife.....	63
			269	Sunrise Specialty.....	15
			138	Testfabrics, Inc.....	67
			67	Tremont Nail Co.....	62
			273	United House Wrecking.....	5
			125	Vande Hey Raleigh.....	Inside Front Cover
			50	Victorian Warehouse.....	73
			36	Vintage Valances.....	67
			13	Vintage Wood Works.....	70
			268	Wood Finishing Supply Co.....	71
			194	Woodstone Co.....	75
			272	The Woodworker's Store.....	59
			71	Worthington Group.....	7

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opinion... Remuddling



Frederic Zanetti, an architectural historian/consultant in Middletown, N.Y., sent us these photographs with the following comments: "I feared the worst when the owner of this fine, intact, Italianate-style house (in one of Middletown's older, 'upper-crust' neighborhoods) cut down the tree in front of his house. As the later shot proves, my worst nightmare was confirmed. Not only was the tree gone, but also the finely detailed porch and cupola were removed, the windows replaced, and the whole structure clad in vinyl. Score another one for the siding industry — and chalk up another loss for historic vernacular architecture."

WIN FAME AND \$50: If you spot a classic example of remuddling, send us a clear black & white photo. We'll award \$50 if your photos are selected. The message is more dramatic if you send along a picture of a similar unremuddled building. Remuddling Editor, The Old-House Journal, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

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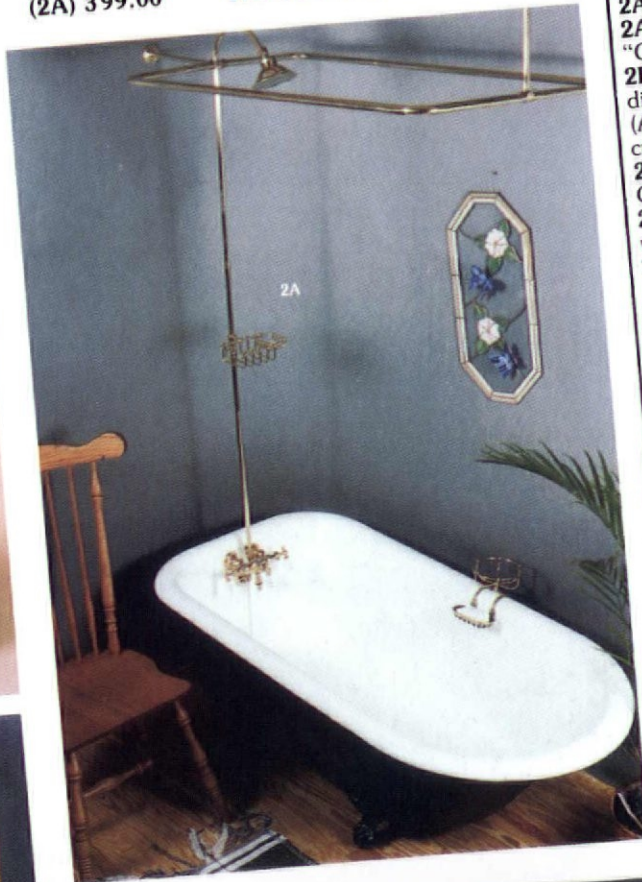
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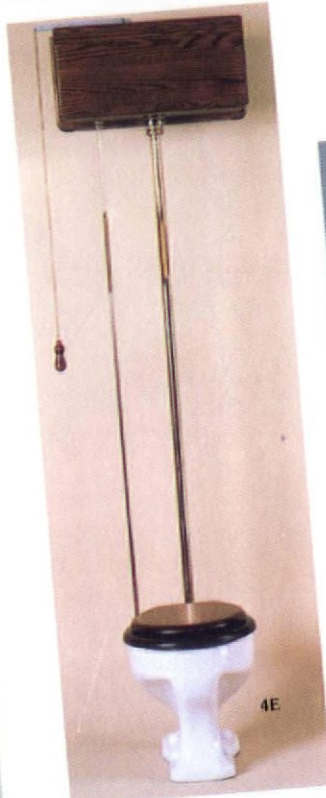
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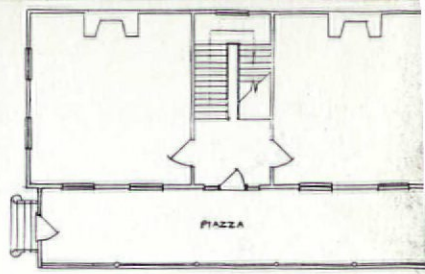


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The Charleston Single House



A traditional Charleston design, the single house evolved during the second half of the 18th century and continued to be built into the 20th century. The name refers to the house's one-room width. In plan, the houses were two rooms deep on each level, separated by a stair hall. The street entrance is at the end of the porch (called piazza in Charleston), from which one walks down the piazza to the hall entrance.

The number of storeys varies, as do construction materials, which include brick, stuccoed brick, and wood frame. This house style transcended all economic levels, varying tremendously in size and grandeur of detailing.

By the time of the Revolution, piazzas became a prominent feature. Piazzas ran the full length of the houses, and were oriented to funnel breezes into the building. Front rooms were occasionally used for commercial purposes, with separate entrances in the street facades. The elevation opposite the piazzas had few or no windows — an asset for privacy, as this side was often set along the property line to maximize use of city lots.

Kitchens invariably were separate from the main structure to reduce the risk of fire and keep the main house cooler. In recent years, kitchens and other surviving dependencies such as carriage houses have often been incorporated with the houses, or have been renovated as separate dwellings.

The single house was well adapted to Charleston's deep, often narrow lots and subtropical climate. The house style is such a prominent feature in the city's streetscapes that recent construction — public and private housing as well as commercial structures — has reproduced the single house in scale and massing if not in detail.

— Daniel A. Lewis
Middleton Place Foundation
Charleston, S.C.



Charleston's famous "single houses" — brick and frame, fancy and plain, the same basic plan wore every suit of clothes from Federal to High Victorian.