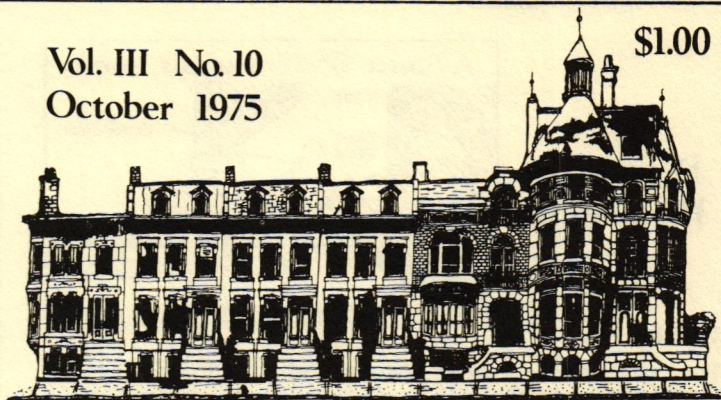


THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

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Renovation And Maintenance Ideas For The Antique House

Re-Creating Victorian Gingerbread

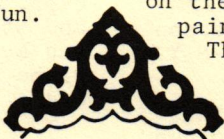
Many Victorian houses have been stripped of their exterior details by previous owners who wanted to "modernize" them. Yet it's not as difficult as it might seem to re-create much of the original Victorian character and richness. Here's how one homeowner did it.

By Jerry M. Lesandro

I HAVE HAD A LOVE OF OLD HOUSES since I was a small boy, and hoped someday to own a bit of Victorian elegance for myself. But most of the old houses I ran across were more than I could afford. When I finally found my current house, although there was little remaining of its original appearance I had faith that beneath the asbestos shingles was a thing of beauty waiting to be revealed.

THE WOMAN I BOUGHT THE HOUSE FROM told me that the house had been covered with asbestos shingles in 1950 at the cost of \$1,000. The reason given was maintenance freedom. But as far as I was concerned, this was destroying a thing of beauty just to get out of a little work. Besides, painting one's house is sort of an American tradition and it can be fun.

IN COVERING THE HOUSE WITH ASBESTOS, all the exterior trim and architectural detail was removed, including the decorative frame around doors and windows.



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Coming Next Month

The Old-House Journal Buyer's Guide

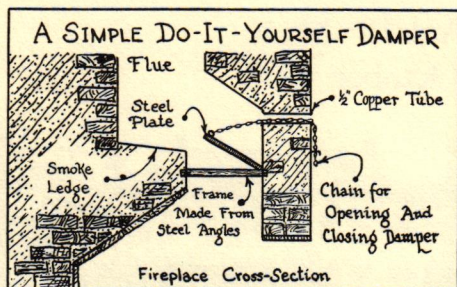
The only thing they didn't remove was the fish-scale moulding that encircles the whole house beneath the eaves. I was very lucky in this instance, for I'm sure that this bit of re-creation would have been very difficult and time-consuming. Fortunately, the shingles had been applied directly over this moulding.

MY FIRST PROBLEM IN REMOVING the shingles was getting the proper equipment. A ladder I didn't consider safe; it wouldn't allow enough working space considering the tallness of the house. Luckily, I have a friend in the construction business and was able to borrow some scaffolding. I would advise anyone working on a tall Victorian house to do the same.

THE NEXT PROBLEM was what to do with the shingles after they were pulled off. I just let them fall to the ground and later collected them in boxes and hauled them away. The smart thing to do would have been to rent a dumpster; the disposal of all the trash would have been much easier. One other lesson I learned the hard way: Under the shingles was a layer of tar paper that created havoc with future paint jobs. The tar paper left marks on the house that later bled through the new paint...requiring a repainting of the house. The wood should have been prepared more thoroughly, probably using mineral spirits or washing soda to get rid of

(Continued on page 6)

Details On Home-Built Damper



To The Editor:

The home-made damper described in Chris Hunter's article (July 1975) is exactly what we need for our fireplace. I'd like a few more details so that I can give proper instructions to a metal worker to make such a damper for us. Thank you.

Warder H. Cadbury
Albany, N.Y.

Chris Hunter has sent along the following answers to Mr. Cadbury's questions.--Ed.

- Q: What kind of clearance between the metal, angle-iron rectangle and masonry should be allowed when taking measurements?
- A: I set the angle into the masonry as I was building the firebox, so its measurement wasn't critical. As for the plate, it has about 1/8 in. clearance all around.
- Q: How did you fasten the angle-iron rectangle to the masonry? What kind of mortar is used to seal the edges?
- A: I didn't use any fasteners; it just sits in the masonry. Conventional mortar was used throughout.
- Q: What size angle-iron did you use?
- A: Each side is about 3/4-in. wide and 1/8-in. thick.
- Q: How did you hinge the damper plate to the angle-iron frame?
- A: There's no hinge. The plate just sits in the frame and bears against one side of the frame when opening. Its weight keeps it in place when closed.

Beware Asbestos In Taping Compounds

To The Editor:

After using wallboard joint compounds for several years, I have just become aware that at least some brands contain asbestos fibers. Sanding these materials creates a dust that can be very hazardous if you're not wearing proper eye protection and respirator. Since a number of the taping and spackling compounds that contain asbestos carry no warning, persons wishing to minimize risk should only use pre-mixed materials (the process of mixing dry powder with water creates dust) and "wet sand" dried areas using a sponge or a moist heavy-nap cloth wrapped around a backing block.

John Casson
Brooklyn, N.Y.

To The Editor:

In an article entitled "Exposure to Asbestos in the Use of Consumer Spackling, Patching and

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"Taping Compounds" by A. N. Rohl et al (*Science*, Aug. 15, 1975) the authors point out that such compounds often contain asbestos and other biologically active substances. The authors state: "...home repair work involving use of such materials may result in exposure to dust at concentrations sufficient to produce disease."

I thought of this when reading Jack R. Cunningham's article "Re-Creating the Effect of Colonial Plaster Walls" (Sept. 1975). He mentions mixing dry compounds and sanding rough spots—both of which produce a lot of dust. According to Rohl et al high-quality dust masks should be used during all such dusty operations, as well as during cleanup.

Bruce J. Bourque, Research Associate
Maine State Museum, Augusta, Maine

Another Approach To Pigeons

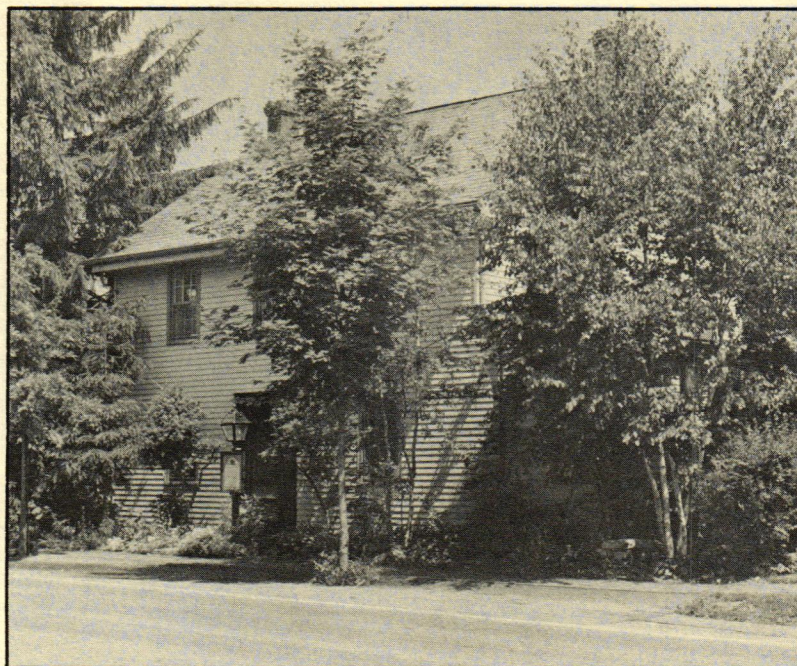
To The Editor:

We tried some of the pigeon repellents like Tanglefoot and found that dirt entrapment required them to be renewed every year. More determined pigeons would even land on a thin layer of it after a while. So when painting the cornice of our 19th-century brick rowhouse, I nailed a row of 3½-in. finishing nails every 2 or 3 inches along places where birds might land. Nails were painted with Valoil primer before being painted with the cornice oil paint color. These nails are nearly invisible from the sidewalk below—and create a palisade on which pigeons can't land. If they start perching on top of the flat brownstone window caps, I'll cut sheets of copper or aluminum and stud them with nails pointing up. Nails can be held with epoxy; such plates would have to be wired to anchors in the masonry so winds won't blow them off.

Charles Porter
Troy, N.Y.

An Early American Saltbox...

The Do-It-Yourself Way



By Clem Labine

IT'S NOT UNUSUAL for an energetic and enthusiastic young couple to have an enormous impact on the well-being of some fine old house. It is a little more unusual when the house, in turn, has an enormous impact on the lifestyle of its young owners.

SUCH IS THE SYNERGY between the Cunninghams of Rohrerstown, Pa., (near Lancaster) and The Saltbox. Of course, The Saltbox wasn't The Saltbox when they bought it. And therein lies our tale...

TWELVE YEARS AGO Shirley and Jack Cunningham seemed to be a very ordinary young married couple. He was a salesman for a business forms company, she a housewife. In their early 20's, they were looking for a house to buy—their first. Like many young marrieds, they didn't have much money. So when they finally found the old house on Marietta Pike—all covered with white asbestos shingles—they knew it was just what they were looking for: The price was low, and the house had an apartment in it that produced a rent sufficient to cover most of the mortgage carrying costs.

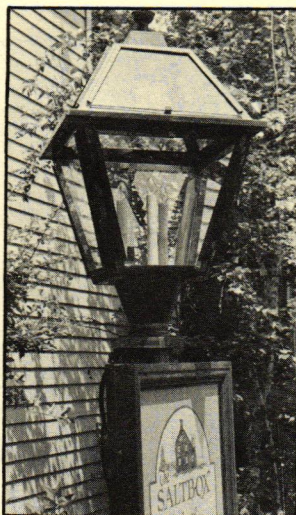
THE HOUSE WAS BUILT around 1825. But when the Cunninghams moved in, there was no way to tell its age. Besides the asbestos shingles that covered the original clapboards, the interior had been totally "remuddled" during the years, so that it was best described as "semi-Victorian, semi-contemporary." The house suited their needs, however, and things flowed along in a very uneventful way until the fateful day when Shirley lifted the flowered linoleum...

TEN YEARS LATER, Jack still recalls the day vividly: "I came home from work, and Shirley couldn't wait to show me the dirty gray boards she had found under the linoleum. My first reaction was to lay the linoleum back down and leave well enough alone." But Shirley persisted, and finally got Jack interested in helping her sand and refinish the random-width pine boards she had uncovered. The floor, cleaned and varnished, looked quite handsome...and Jack and Shirley were very pleased with themselves.

"I WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO QUIT while we were ahead," admits Jack. "But I came home a few days later and found Shirley peeling the 1930's flowered wallpaper off the walls to see what was underneath." At that point they both were hooked...although they wouldn't realize to what extent until years later.

AS THEY CAME TO REALIZE MORE and more the rich tradition that the 150-year-old structure represented, they set out on a re-creation on a "what-might-have-been" basis. The house had been so totally re-worked over the years that a true restoration was impossible. So they have re-made their house in a style they call "rural American country dwelling."

BECAUSE MONEY WAS LIMITED, they used the resource they had the most of: Their own time. Jack developed an eagle-eye for good salvage material. Example: He was able to rescue the 1820's mantel that now graces their living room from an old tavern that was being demolished. And the boards for the wall that divides the living room from the keeping room came from an 18th-century



The post light in front of The Saltbox is from Jack's workshop.