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MARCH/APRIL 1994

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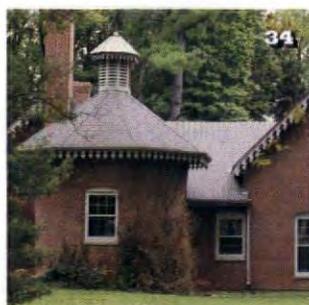
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OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

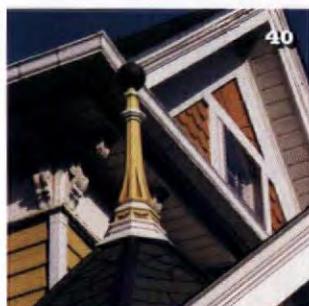
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BY JAMES C. MASSEY AND SHIRLEY MAXWELL

A tour of octagons and round houses—two geometrical buildings whose popularity peaked in the mid-19th century, but still persists today.



THE FINIAL TOUCH40

BY GERARD MACLACHLAN COLE, JR.

Making a finial for the author's Queen Anne posed two problems: finding a design and constructing a durable round ornament out of wood. Here's his step-by-step solution.



COMPASS WORK.....45

BY GORDON BOCK, JOHN LEEKE, AND ROBERT POOLE

Curved carpentry is common in old houses, but the methods behind it are often forgotten. This article offers three techniques for moulding and siding on circles.



CURING AILING SILLS50

BY JOHN LEEKE

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BY STEVE JORDAN

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BY JEAN HANFF KORELITZ

A touching story about an 18th-century old-house paradise lost, but a 19th-century one gained.

ON THE COVER: *The Cooper House was built in 1910 by a second generation coal mine owner in Bramwell, West Virginia. This grand Queen Anne reflects the opulence and craftsmanship of turn-of-the-century architecture.* PHOTOGRAPH BY JACK E. BOUCHER, HABS

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CIRCULAR CARPENTRY



BACK BEFORE THE LAST OIL crisis, I found myself a few weeks work with a small construction crew expanding the kitchen on a big old house. Though I was the kid on the site I got to be friends with Karl — the senior man down to his overalls. Karl had jobbed about in all kinds of carpentry, and I was a willing ear to his daily examples of better or different ways to do whatever we were tackling at the time. One morning he showed me a trick I've always been tickled by.

If you hold a reasonably shiny saw on a piece of moulding or small trim so that the blade acts like a mirror, you can cut accurate angles without a miter box. If the trim continues straight into its reflection without the slightest bend — which is pretty easy to see — you're cutting at 90 degrees. If the reflected trim appears at right angles to the actual piece — also easy to judge — you're cutting at 45 degrees. It's a good trick, though nothing more than a shortcut useful for work where absolute precision isn't necessary.

At the time I figured this nifty bit of carpentry was either Karl's own invention or a privileged piece of lore I had the luck to come into. Now I know better. Tips like this appeared regularly in the 1920s and '30s in *The Carpenter*, the union periodical, and I'll bet that's where Karl learned that

trick — or the guy he learned it from learned it. Chances are it wasn't new then. In *OHJ's* library there are carpentry books from the 1940s with "novel" methods to set a nail or fit a shingle that are identical to those in books from the 1870s. In all likelihood they were part of the trade long before they made it into print.



The mirror-saw trick — one bit of old-house carpentry repeated over generations.

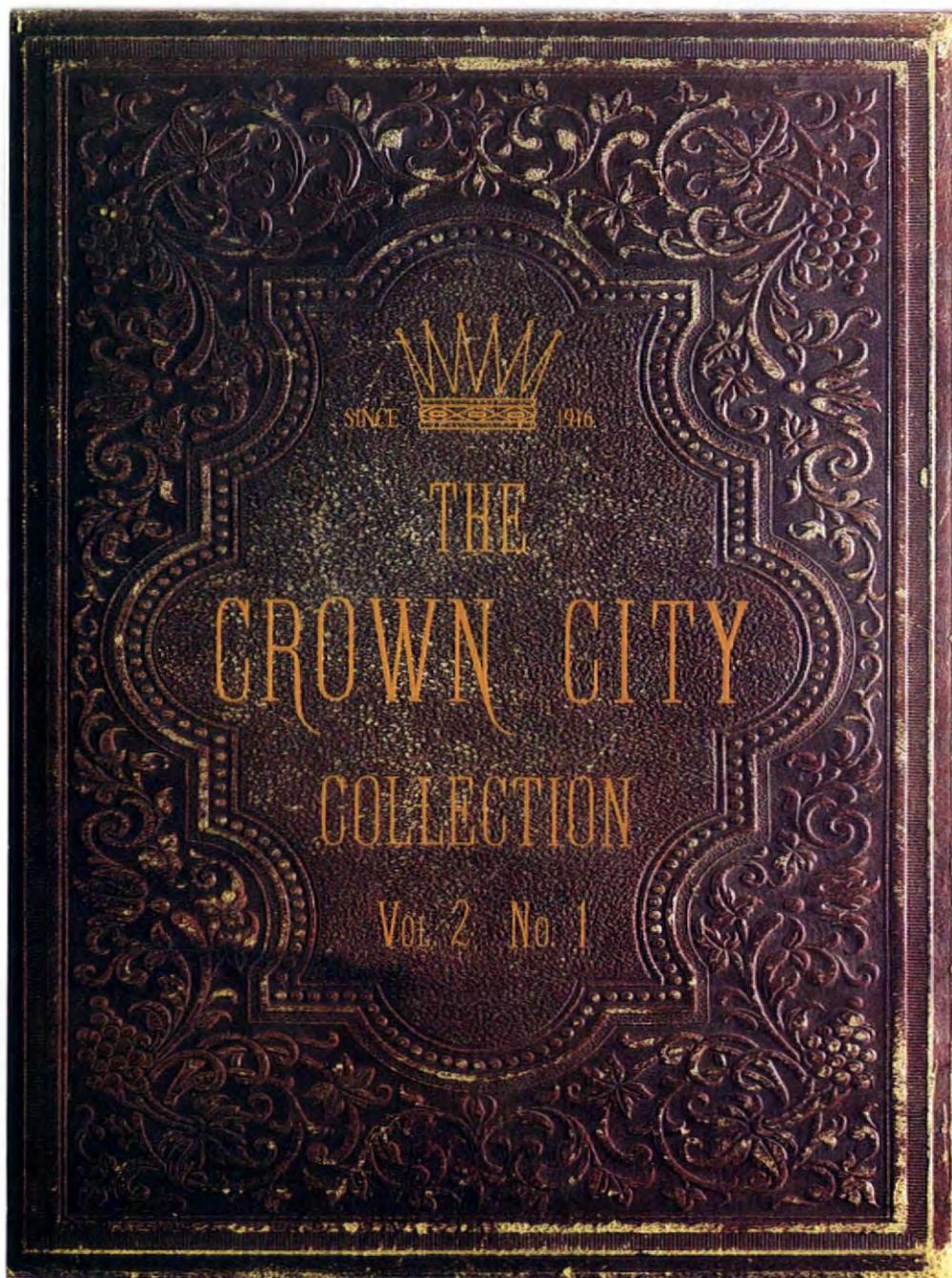
The point is, in carpentry and houses in general, good ideas never really go bad. What's old is new ground again for a fresh generation; fashions in building and decorating get reincarnated with each cycle of architectural taste. Like climbing a spiral staircase, we're retracing our steps each time we advance from stage to stage. A swinging pendulum

is directly related to a spinning circle — simple harmonic motion if you remember elementary physics.

This is especially true in old-house work, but with a special twist. We all spend no small amount of time recreating decorative finishes that were once passé and relearning construction techniques all but forgotten. However, restoring an old house often means dealing with the evidence of multiple cycles that overlap each other — say, a Greek Revival exterior that was subsequently Victorianized, then "modernized" in this era. Or better yet, how about a Mission Revival with a Queen Anne classical porch and Arts & Crafts interior — all original. Sounds wacky, but they're out there.

On one level, the central articles in this issue — octagons and round houses, compass work, making an eight-sided finial — came together because they look at building in-the-round with wood. On a broader level, these subjects (and graining too) are examples of just a few design ideas whose appeal has come full circle once again. Call it a reaction to the boxlike houses and white walls of our recent past or, if you're politically correct, recycling. I see it as a return to the best building around.

... SOMEONE DOES



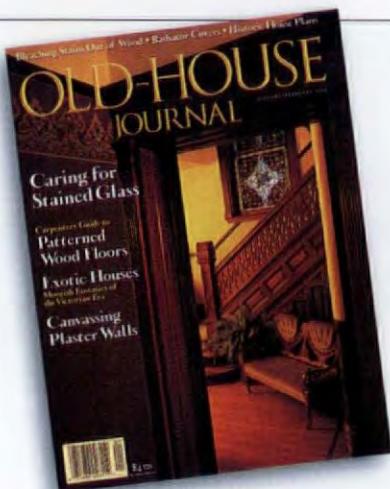
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Letters



Good Glass Guide

Dear OHJ,
FACED WITH A BULGING STAINED glass transom, your January/February 1994 issue was a timely arrival. Restoring my c. 1892 Queen Anne has been a slow process, and my limited budget has forced me to prioritize my projects. (You know, putting the money towards a new roof instead of new wallpaper.) However, I am now ready to tackle the restoration of the front entrance's damaged transom. After reading through "A Homeowner's Guide to Stained Glass" twice, I feel much more confident about choosing the right professional to handle the job. Thanks for another great issue of OHJ.

—JANE BROMLEY
Cleveland, Ohio

Stained Glass Update

"A HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO STAINED Glass" in your January/February 1994 issue is excellent, but let me suggest a couple of updates for your resources. *Stained Glass* is published by the Stained Glass Association of America and their address is 6 S.W. Second St., Suite 7, Lee's Summit, MO 64063; (800) 438-9581. And *Professional Stained Glass* is available from Joe Porcelli, Arts & Media, Inc., 28

South State St., Newtown, PA 18940; (215) 860-9947.

— ALBERT LEWIS
Brewster, N.Y.

German Patterned Floor

THANKS FOR THE GREAT ARTICLE ON patterned wood floors in your January/February 1994 issue. I couldn't resist sending you some photos of the patterned floors in our c. 1880 Victorian. They were designed and installed by Mr. Amon, a former owner of the house who came from Germany. Each piece of oak, maple, walnut, and mahogany were handcut using a small mitre box that he made. I knew that the floors would be beautiful, but I had no idea that they would turn out so nicely!

—TIMOTHY R. MACK
Rochester, N.Y.

Monumental Style

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK SHIRLEY Maxwell and James C. Massey for their excellent primer on the Egyptian Revival [January/February 1994, OHJ]. A thorough catalog of Victorian Egyptian Revival architecture in the United States and elsewhere can be found in Richard G. Carrott's book *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources Monuments and Meaning, 1808-1858* (U.C. Press, 1978).

We have collected Egyptian-inspired Victorian interior furnishing for many years. In addition to the chairs and candlesticks men-

tioned in the article, we have found Egyptian designs in gas lighting, mantel clocks, fireplace fenders, wallpaper, tiles, mirror frames, and even an armoire! The style's popularity rose and fell many times throughout the 19th century, but its remarkable persistence remains as eternal as the monuments that inspired it.

— DAN AND NANCY MATTAUSCH
Washington, D.C.

Exotic Encounter

I ENJOYED YOUR ARTICLE "EXOTIC Revivals from the Middle East" [January/February 1994 OHJ]. Two years ago, I had the chance to tour Olana while on a day trip in upstate New York, and it was great to visit once again through the pages of your magazine. I remember that every window framed a perfect view, a testament to Frederick Church's influence on Calvert Vaux's design. Now I look forward to more "exotic encounters" of the architectural kind. Opa-locka



Much to Timothy Mack's delight, he uncovered this beautiful and complex patterned floor in his c. 1880 house in upstate New York.

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Letters

and Nutt's Folly are on my list of places to see — and if I'm lucky, I may visit the Royal Pavilion in Great Britain, too!

— LISA SOSA
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Spot Solution

A FEW MONTHS AGO, I came across a small Craftsman-style table at a garage sale. It was basically in good shape and was a bargain, but there was a problem—a large, blue stain marred the table top. Thinking I could cover the top with leather to hide the stain, I bought the oak table. So you can imagine how pleased I was



A detail from the Moorish mansion, Olana: Polychromatic brick and stonework surround an ogee-shaped, three-part window.

to read Gordon Bock's "Out Spot, Out" in the January/February 1994 issue. Instead of hiding the stain, I'll

renovation, I have been unable to learn to appreciate silicone's virtues since I know its faults far too well.

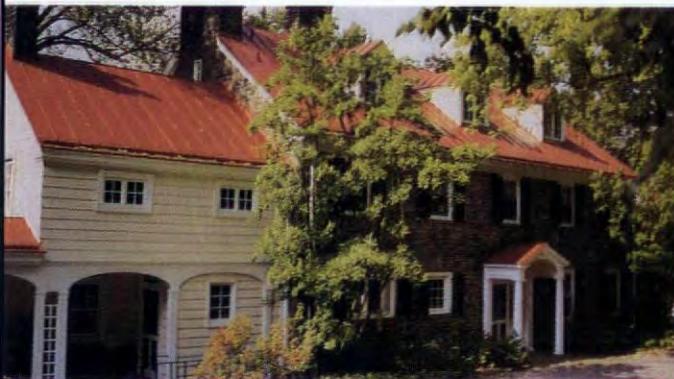
try removing it with oxalic acid. Since I'm always rescuing less-than-perfect furniture from flea markets and antique stores, I'll be referring to the wood-stain bleaching techniques in the article often.

— MIKE WILLIS
Chicago, Ill.

So-So On Silicone

I AM WRITING IN RESPONSE to your article on floors in the September/October 1993 issue. As I struggle with my renovation, I have been unable to learn to appreciate silicone's virtues since I know its faults far too well.

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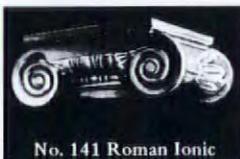
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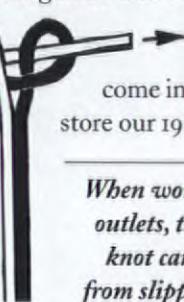
My house is no older than 1925, which makes it quite young in restoration terms. One of my predecessors (known in the family as "The Mad Silicone Sealer"), who surely must have slept through ninth grade science, seems to have thought that the condensation on the windows in winter must have meant that the windows were leaking. A bead of silicone caulk was placed around every window pane. This has had the unnerving effect of channeling the water into the corners of each sash where it has rotted the tenons and caused the fasteners to rust. So far, I have made emergency repairs to nine windows. This same person also must have felt that a nail hole or a crack was the moral equiv-

alent of a woman dancing naked down Main Street because I have dug out about 75 pounds of silicone seal from various parts of the house (particularly the floors) — and I haven't even started yet.

— EDITH M. WILLIAMS
Edinboro, Penn.

Fit To Be Tied?

BOTH MY WIFE AND I ENJOY YOUR magazine and look forward to the many helpful tips in each issue. They come in handy while we restore our 1928 Colonial Revival



When working on electrical outlets, the underwriter's knot can prevent wires from slipping off terminals.

home. Since I have to rewire some electrical outlets, the article "Retiring Old Wiring" in November/December 1993 issue was very informative. However, the use of an underwriter's knot (*see sketch*) on the socket connections was not mentioned. This knot is used to keep the wires from slipping off the terminal screw when the slack is pulled. The knot takes the strain so the terminals don't have to. This helps end the frustration of turning on a rewired fixture and finding it doesn't work because the wire pulled loose from the terminals. Keep up the good work.

— GARY AND DEBORAH BEARD
Chesterton, Ind.

Good idea! However, in this case, there was no stress on the wire (unlike in table or

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Letters

floor lamps), plus space is at a premium in the small sockets of a chandelier.

— THE EDITORS

Lattice Lover

LAST SUMMER, IN ADDITION to a paint job, I was able to get the lattice replaced on the back porch of my old house. A zealous former owner had ripped it all down, but family members told me that the lattice pattern was originally horizontal and vertical instead of the typical diagonal. So out

came the OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL November 1983, where I found the



The Clines' restored lattice porch creates a shady spot from the Florida sun.

milling specifications for the lumber as well as pattern choices. The lat-

tice runs up to the handrail on the second floor, which makes two nice sitting porches plus ladder and wheelbarrow storage under the house. At the same time I was replacing the lattice, neighbors on the next block were ripping it down. I may have the only lattice porch left in the historic district before long! Thank goodness for my 13-year supply of OHJ. Whenever I need something that's where I look first.

— CATHERINE FRYER CLINE
Jacksonville, Flor.



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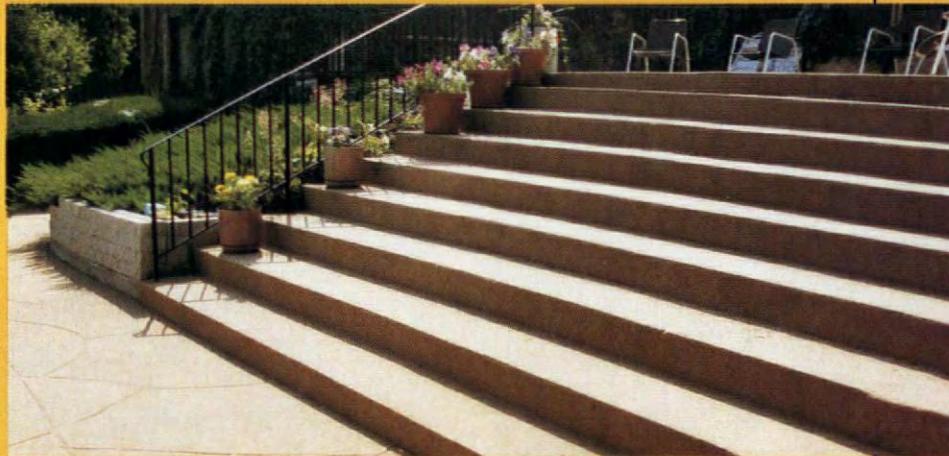
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Reading the Old House

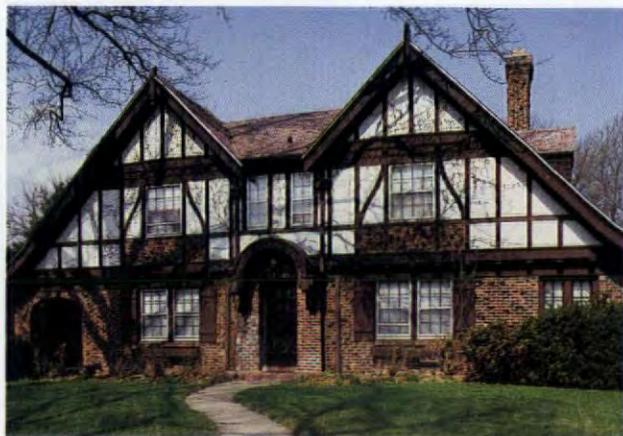
STALKING THE STOCKBROKER TUDOR

by James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell

OUR HOUSE WAS BUILT BETWEEN 1920 and 1930 in a style that is relatively common in our area, a New York City suburb. I have been told that it is "Stockbroker Tudor," a name inspired by the many Wall Streeters who purchased these homes as weekend retreats from life in the city. Our house is one of the few that still has the charming, diamond-paned windows. A second feature is a fairly extensive rock garden (now half-buried) that includes a pool, a stone bridge, and four stairways. Is the rock garden related to this style, or did the builder merely take advantage of the terrain?

— THOMAS P. LEMKE
Scarsdale, New York

STOCKBROKER TUDOR: THAT'S WHAT it was called then, and we'll stick with it! Appropriately, it conjures up a picture of a successful American businessman rushing home from the bustling city, to be welcomed on his large, green, relentlessly mown lawn by the sight of a happy family gathered at the door of their medieval English farmhouse — fully equipped,



Stucco, leaded casement windows, front-facing chimney, and steep roof lines key the Lemkes' 1920s house as English-style in the American suburbs.

of course, with every modern convenience that 1920s American technology could offer.

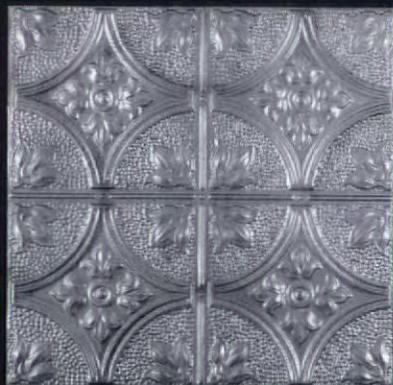
It is true, as you've heard, that bedroom communities like Scarsdale became popular as good train service simplified commuting from city to suburbs. In the late-19th century, railroads had made weekend getaway communities practical for well-to-do workers in many cities (Tuxedo Park, which gave its name

to the formalwear, is one famous upstate New York example). After World War I, however, most new suburbs were planned for daily commuting by rail, electric streetcar, or automobile (the presence of original garages and driveways tell their own tale).

About the style of the house the businessman came home to, there is no question that English Revival (most often called Tudor) was one of the most frequently chosen in these lovely, semi-rural communities. French- or Norman-style farmhouses and cottages were also popular, as were Mediterranean villas with Spanish and Italian features. Usually there was

More typically Tudor is the extensive half-timbering on this Kansas City, Missouri, home, though decorative rather than structural like the medieval originals.

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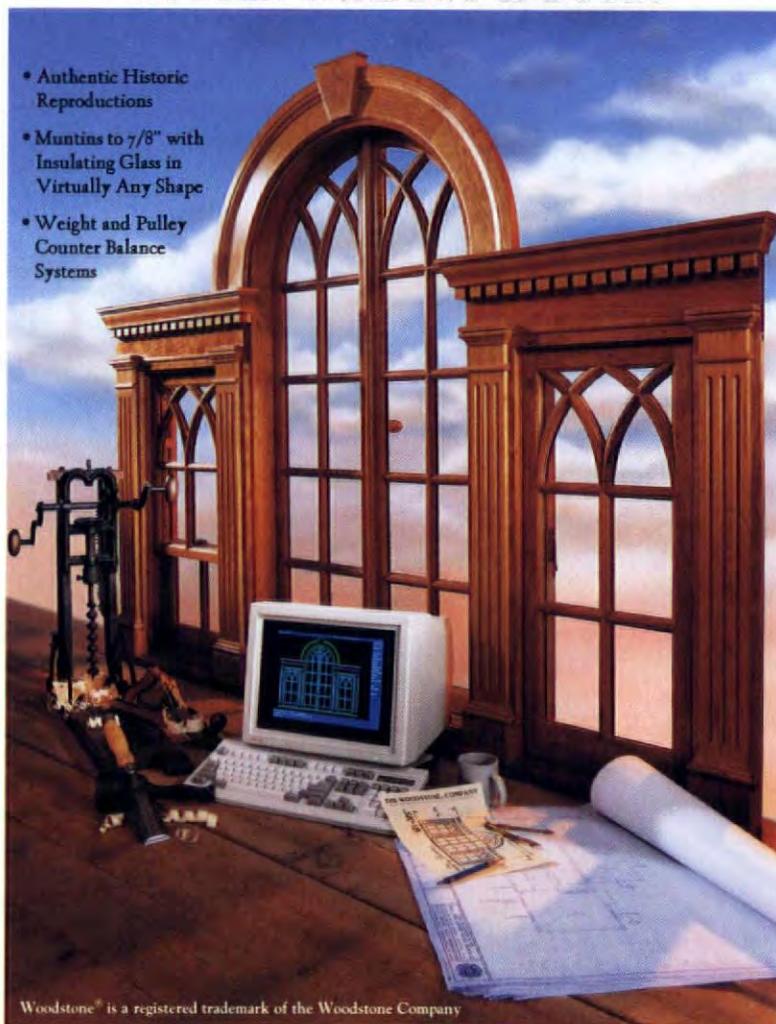
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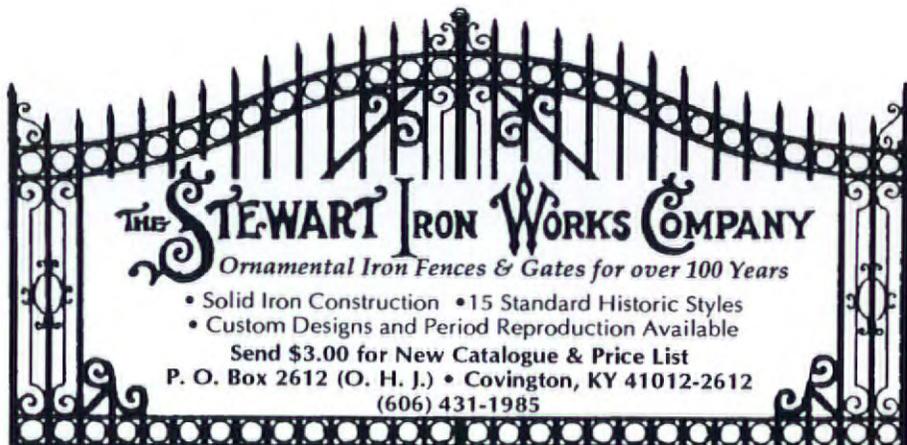


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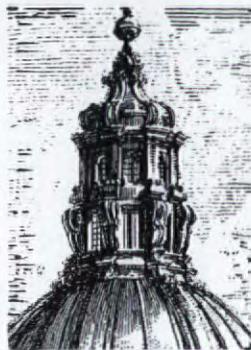
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Reading the Old House

an intermarriage of regional architectural traits in American houses, which in the European prototypes would have remained geographically distinct.

One advertisement of the era distinguished between Tudor or Gothic houses that used half-timbering, and the Modern English type that did not. In the former, "symmetry is sacrificed [for] rich decorative detail"; the latter might be "executed in brick, shingles and siding, as well as stucco [and] looks well in any surroundings."

This house is without a doubt English in inspiration, although in the U.S. "Tudor" usually assumes some decorative half-timbering. Certainly the steep, gabled roofline (especially the catslide roof above the recessed entrance), the hipped dormers with diamond-paned windows, and the massive brick chimney — placed in a typically conspicuous, front-and-center location — all read English style. The leaded-glass casement windows with diamond-shaped panes were a common feature of this style.

As to the rock garden, naturalistic gardens were very popular in this period, and one as elaborate as your discovery would have been a source of pride as well as enjoyment. In well-planned suburban developments, and particularly in the case of architect-designed houses built for an individual client, the site was carefully considered. The grounds were often professionally landscaped. Whether the garden was part of the original house and lot design, or grew out of the work of a talented owner, a rock garden on a steep or rocky site would be entirely consistent with the post-Victorian idiom of the Tudor-Revival style in America. What a lucky find!

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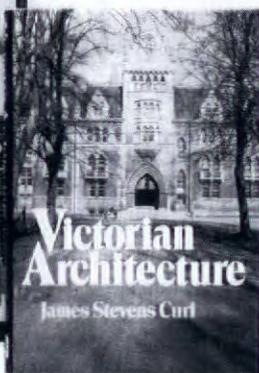
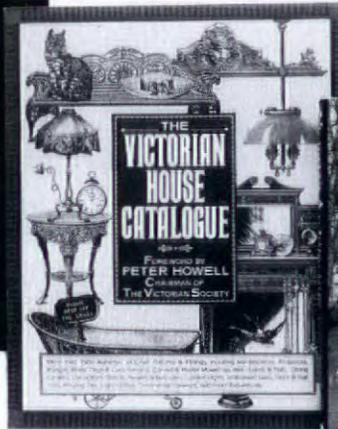
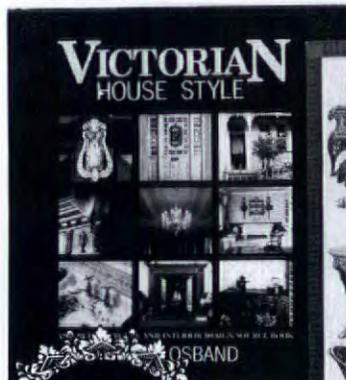
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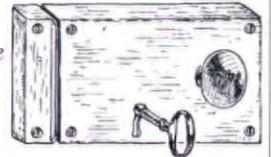
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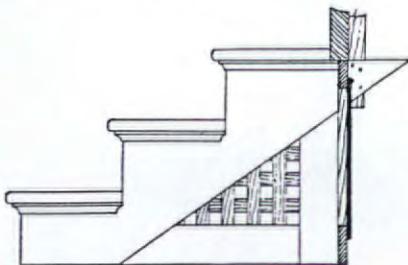
Ask OHJ

Stepping Back

♦ *The carpenter did a fine job building new wood steps to the porch of our 1846 house, but I neglected to tell him I wanted an exact replacement of the treads. I now have treads with square edges — not round ones. Do you think the square edges are in keeping with this older house style, or should I go over the edges with a router and add moulding underneath?*

— RUTH CHRISTENSEN
East Longmeadow, Mass.

NO MATTER HOW WELL BUILT, WOOD steps have a finite life outdoors, and the odds are against the last set being the first on your 150-year-old house. However, the details you describe are typical of interior steps and many porch steps built from before the turn of this century to the 1930s and later.



Run-of-the-mill porch steps from the 1920s; note the lattice enclosure.

Concrete Examples

♦ *In the village where I live there are about a dozen of these block houses, built between 1905 and 1910. I'm told that the concrete blocks were cast on site, but there must also have been molds for the amenities, such as fretwork and friezes. Is there any information on this type of construction?*

— PAUL PIETRZAK
Hamburg, New York

AS MANY OHJ READERS KNOW, CONCRETE construction was the wave of the future just after 1900, and block-making machines soon became a highly popular method for building with this material (see "Ornamental Concrete Block Houses," November



Fluted columns, piers, rings, and bases were just four concrete molds from the Sears "Porch Outfit."

1984 OHJ). Formed and poured, concrete tended to appear bland and monolithic, but in blocks it could be molded with ornamental or rocklike faces using dozens of patterns. Even better, special molds cast durable

balusters, fence caps, plinths, columns, and many other decorative elements otherwise made from wood or stone. Sears, Roebuck & Co. was one of the biggest suppliers of equipment, and the pages of catalogs up to the first World War (available in libraries or as reprints) tell much about the technique.

Overflow Overview

♦ *Our 1920s bathtub needs a new drain overflow assembly. Do you know the original maker of this tub and where we could obtain the necessary plumbing parts?*

— HELEN P. ADAIR
Delhi, New York

YOUR TUB APPEARS TO BE AN ENAMELED cast-iron tub with a roll rim. The footless tub-on-base and built-in design was typical of the '20s sanitary

[Continued on page 26]



Concrete block construction was pushed as an ideal small business by equipment makers, spawning thousands of houses like this c.1910 Foursquare.



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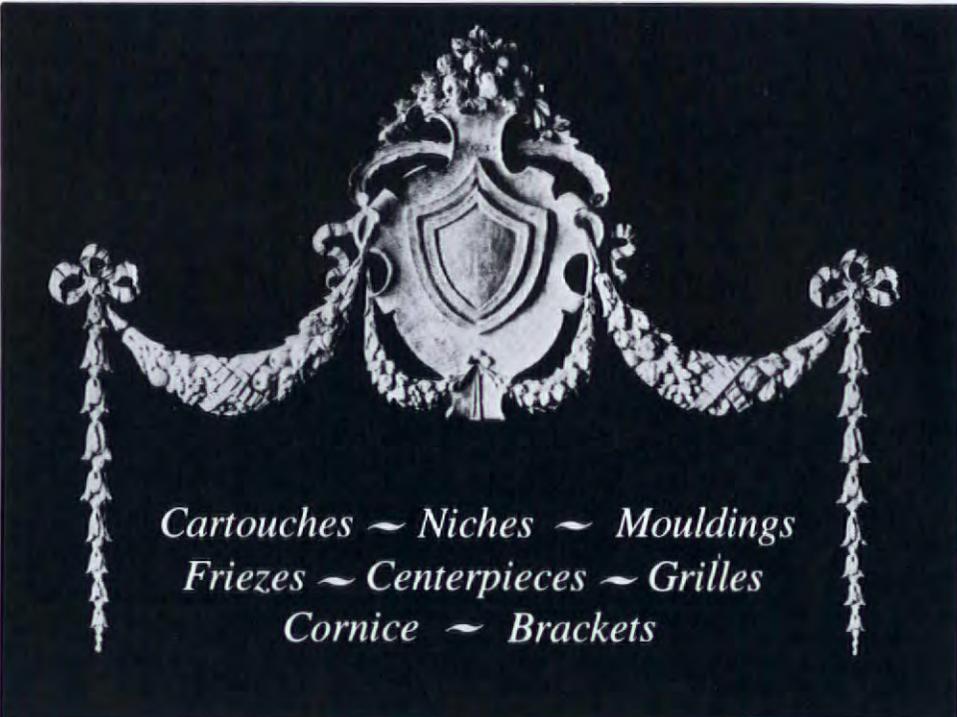
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Ask OHJ

[Continued from page 24]

efforts to eliminate the hard-to-clean spaces under and in back of footed tubs, and led the way to the one-piece tubs that are standard today. Crane, Kohler, and J.L. Mott were just three of many manufacturers at the time.

The attractive brass plumbing with its unusual lyre-shaped lines will be hard to duplicate and may, in fact,



not meet modern codes. Many old tubs have the water inlet installed below the overflow outlet — an arrangement that can allow a full tub of water to backsiphon into the inlet. This creates a potential for contaminating the supply with waterborne bacteria, such as those responsible for hepatitis. Most states require that the inlet be two pipe diameters above the flood rim of the tub to prevent direct contact with the water. One way to accomplish this is to have your plumber

The low fittings probably mean the water inlet is below the overflow on this early built-in tub — and at odds with modern plumbing codes.

GENERAL-INTEREST QUESTIONS WILL BE answered in print. The Editors can't promise to respond to all questions personally, but we try. Send your questions to: Questions Editor, Old-House Journal, 2 Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930.

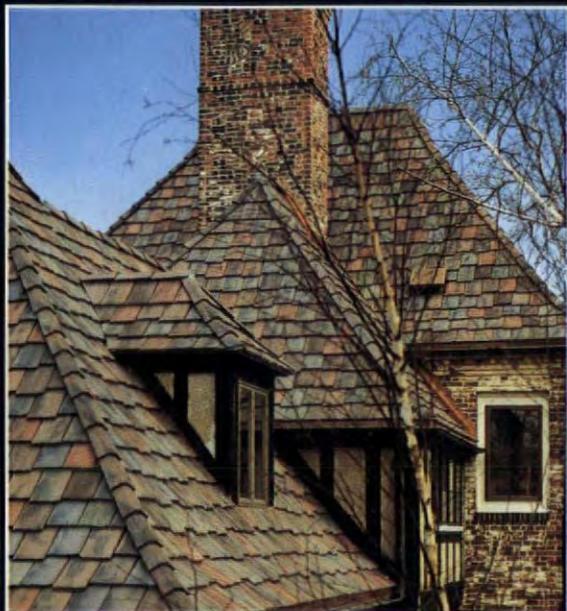
retrofit the tub with a gooseneck filler pipe that rises over the rim. Adding a vacuum breaker device used for whirlpool tubs may also work.

Retrofitting period tub plumbing can get tricky, but a good place to start for parts is The Antique Hardware Store (9730 Easton Rd, Route 611, Kinterville, PA 18930). They stock faucets, fillers, and overflows for many designs; measure the tub openings and spacing first, and call their technical line (215-847-2447).

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Outside the Old House

THE QUICK-AND-DIRTY GARDEN

by Eleanor Bailey

WHAT CAN BE DONE when you've moved into an old house just as the gardening season begins and you're too busy working inside to spend weeks outdoors? One solution is what I call the quick-and-dirty garden. This step-by-step approach buys you time, gets you into the garden, and helps you develop long-range landscaping plans.

Wait and watch: In April of 1992 we bought a wonderful 19th-century cottage with great gardening potential. I knew from my work as a landscape designer and gardener that it's wise to "wait and watch" during the first year in a new old-home. During this period of observation, old-house owners can learn more about the past uses and appearance of the grounds, and how house and garden can complement one another.

Take inventory: As spring un-

folded, I explored each nook and cranny to discover what ornamental plantings and garden spaces were now in my care. I found foundation plantings in need of pruning, three perennial beds and an herb garden ready for weeding and redesign, various patches of poison ivy to eradicate, and two untidy vegetable gardens. All of this was research material for the history of our house and grounds.

Pick a project: Our half-acre lot contained two vegetable plots, each about 20 x 16 feet. Given my limits, I decided to tackle the sunnier of the two and, if time permitted, to clear the other later in the year. My chosen bed was fenced with di-

lapidated, but serviceable, chicken wire. Outside one edge were the remnants of a perennial planting of peonies and daylilies — reminiscent of

typical early American gardens. Violets and ground ivy edged the remaining areas. One corner of the plot fell under a Norway maple. Before the tree leafed out, it was hard to tell just how much sun this part of the garden would get.

Prepare the garden: I began at the end of May, removing last year's toma-

atoes, and digging out fast-spreading weeds. As I cleared, I found bladder campion, a known "weed," in full bloom. To me, bladder campion is a rather pretty wild flower so I left a large clump in the center of the plot as a focal point for what was fast becoming my work of art. Around this center planting, I planned rows with a few clumps of flowers for informality and color. Knowing I would be planting in stages, I used a roll of black plastic to cover cleared areas as I prepared them. This kept new weeds from sprouting and damp spring soil from drying out.

Plan the plantings: In this first year, I was determined to spend as



Snapdragons with salt hay mulch.



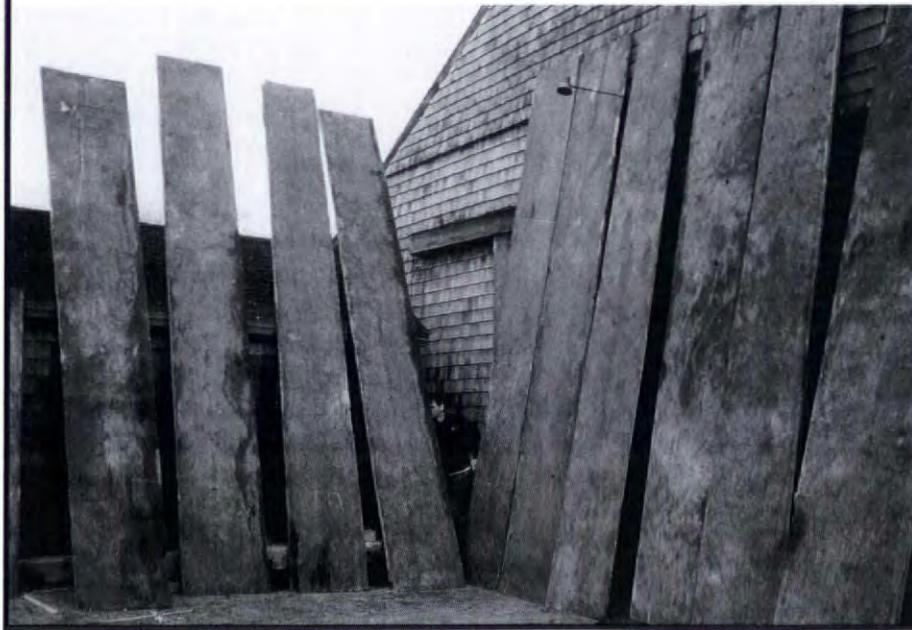
A view of the entire garden from a second floor window of the house shows two old window screens used as a gate and remnants of the old flower/herb bed along the right side.

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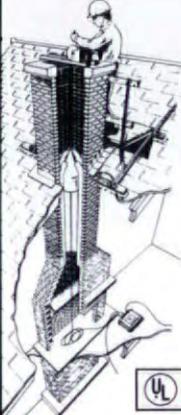
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Outside the Old House

little money as possible. One way to reduce costs would be to start plants from seed rather than to purchase flats. I had several seed catalogues on hand, and my garden plan evolved as a combination of annuals, tomatoes, and herbs. This very practical approach suited my budget, satisfied my urge to grow food, and allowed me to plant an aesthetically pleasing and "historically-likely" garden.

Plant, replant, transplant: As soon as one third of the garden was ready for planting, I bought two varieties of early tomatoes, and a flat each of basil and parsley, by this time selling for only \$1 apiece. I also bought three flats of small marigolds and planted them in clumps along with the "veggies." Marigolds are traditionally planted around kitchen gardens because their strong scent discourages animal raiders.

Plants for the Quick-and-Dirty Old-House Garden

THESE PLANTS ARE EASY TO GROW, and all were in use in North American gardens before 1850.

• Annuals:

Bachelor's button (*Centaurea cyanus*)
 French marigold (*Tagetes patula*)
 Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*)
 Pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*)
 Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*)
 Sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*)
 Zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*)

• Herbs & Vegetables:

Common sweet basil, parsley, onions, beets, squash, cucumbers, carrots, lettuce, beans, peas, spinach, broccoli and tomatoes.

Meanwhile, my seed order arrived. I quickly planted a row of linearis — an orange, daisy-like zinnia — two rows of nasturtiums in mixed colors, and a row of dwarf mixed-color zinnias. I like to start my seeds in raised hills, lay mulch in the valleys, then when the seeds sprout, draw the mulch over the hill. For this I needed salt hay; I invested \$10 for two bales of this popular coastal area mulch.

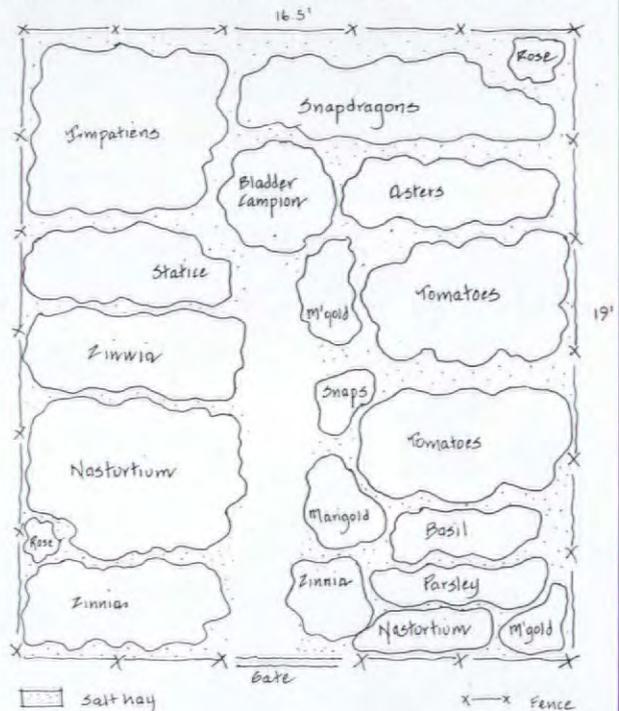
Since spring was well along, my nasturtiums and zinnias sprouted in a short time, and the tomatoes, basil, and parsley took off with a bang. The front of the garden was splendid, but in the back problems became evident. Now that the tree had leafed out, it was too shady for sun-loving plants. To compensate I bought flats of snapdragons and asters for the sunny areas and impatiens for the shady spot under the tree.

Accept freebies: A friend gave me two bare-rooted old roses, a Damask and a Tuscan Superb. The Damask went along the edge of the garden, between rows of annuals and I tucked the Tuscan in the back corner beyond the snapdragons. As typical 19th-century roses, these plants were an exciting match for my house.

Enjoy: Vegetable gardens and annuals really come into their own in August and from then until frost, my quick-and-dirty garden yielded a bountiful harvest of tomatoes, herbs, and flowers. As a landscape feature, it fit well with our simple cottage,

where owners might well have grown food for the table.

Discover and learn: During this first year in our old house, we have discovered that our yard, including part of the vegetable garden, floods dur-



My garden plan included a combination of annuals, tomatoes, and herbs.

ing very high storm tides. We also now know that our daylilies are the common orange variety, our peonies are the usual magenta, and our many small trees are overgrown and crowded. Our old-house grounds have revealed a lot while we waited and watched. In the meantime I have gardened with pleasure and productivity.

NOTE: FOR SOURCES AND INFORMATION on period plants, consult reference books such as Rudy and Joy Farretti's *Landscapes and Gardens for Historic Buildings* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1978).

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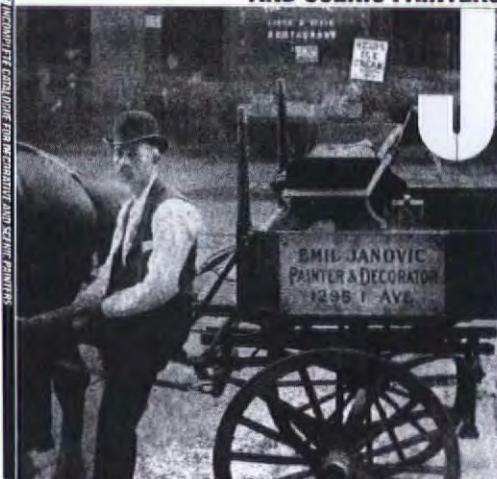
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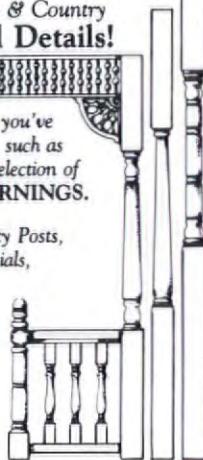
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Good Books

Circular Work in Carpentry and Joinery

by George Collings; annotations and illustrations by Karl Shumaker; Pub: Linden Publishing Co. Inc., 3845 N. Blackstone, Fresno, CA 93726; (800) 345-4447; 1992; 126 pages, b&w; \$28.95 ppd., hardcover.

CIRCULAR CARPENTRY, AS IT WAS practiced in the 19th century, is often a lost art to today's carpenter. However, the demand for curved work still exists, as so many old-house owners can attest. An excellent reference to the techniques of single and double curvature work is a republication of George Collings's *Circular Work in Carpentry and Joinery*. Originally published in 1886 in England, the new edition of this practical guide is actually two books in one. The original text is included in its entirety, but each page has been updated by Karl Shumaker with over 240 annotated illustrations that offer explanations and descriptions for the contemporary craftsman. The illustrations are clearly drawn and labeled, clarifying the procedures under discussion. The juxtaposition of orig-

inal text and new material in side-by-side columns makes the text extremely accessible for carpenters of any level. Collings discusses 144 different techniques and processes from elliptical heads, bull's-eye frames, and Gothic-headed frames to circular angle brackets, hip rafters, conical roofs, and skylights. This new edition of an old classic is one of the best reference books we've found on the subject, and a nice addition to a collection of period books.

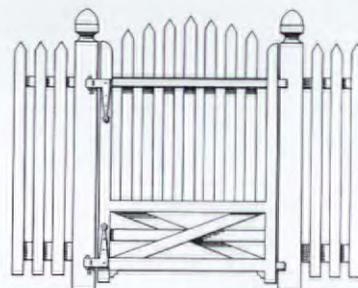
— L.M.

Fences: The Architects and Builders Companion

by Peter Joel Harrison, 2021 Fawndale Dr., Raleigh, NC 27612; (919) 676-0659. Pub: The Dietz Press, Richmond, Virginia; 1993, 144 pages (illustrated in b&w), \$26.95 ppd., hardcover.

WHILE WORKING ON HIS PROPERTY, author Peter Joel Harrison began searching for a single sourcebook of period fence patterns. Unable to find one, Harrison

spent twelve years documenting fences, gates, posts, and finials at a number of historic sites in New England and the South. *Fences: The Architects and Builders Companion* is the result. This handsome volume

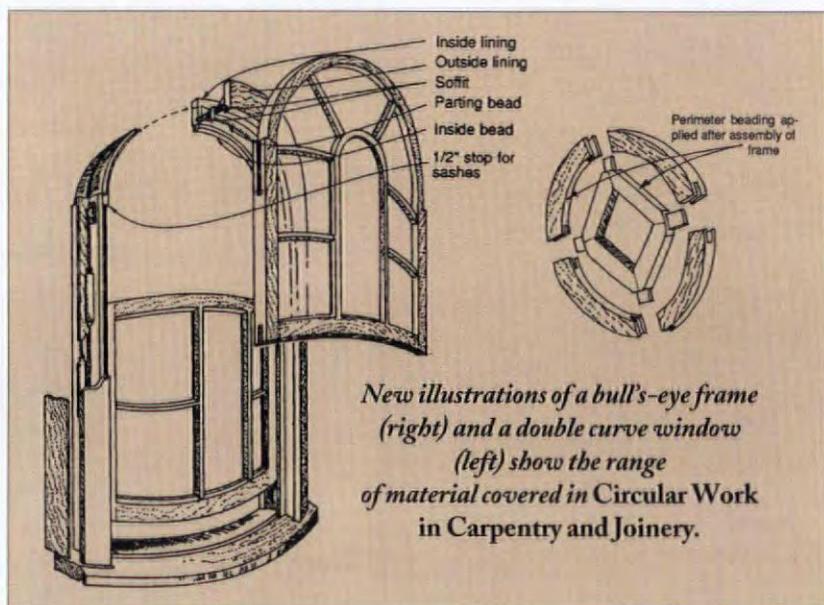


Colonial Williamsburg Williamsburg, Virginia

Turned posts and intricate gate bracing add visual interest to this Williamsburg, Virginia, gate and fence.

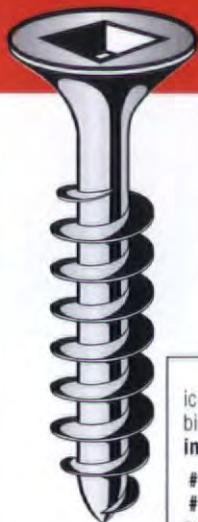
is a boon for Colonial homeowners, preservation architects, and landscapers who are planning on enclosing historic grounds because it's chock full of 18th-century to early-19th-century fence designs. Pages of detailed illustrations, done in the fashion of 18th-century copper plates, cover turned post designs, pales (59 patterns!), piers, board fences, and garden walls. Chapters showing intricate fence ornaments, such as finials, caps, balls, and urns, are included, too. The original locations (cities and states) of the fences are provided with each illustration, making it easy to choose a design common to your region. There is also information on the scale of height and projections, gate bracing, and joints for rails. Whether you're planning to enclose your yard with a double paled fence worthy of a grand manor or a simple but elegant board fence, this book will be a design inspiration.

— L.E.



New illustrations of a bull's-eye frame (right) and a double curve window (left) show the range of material covered in Circular Work in Carpentry and Joinery.

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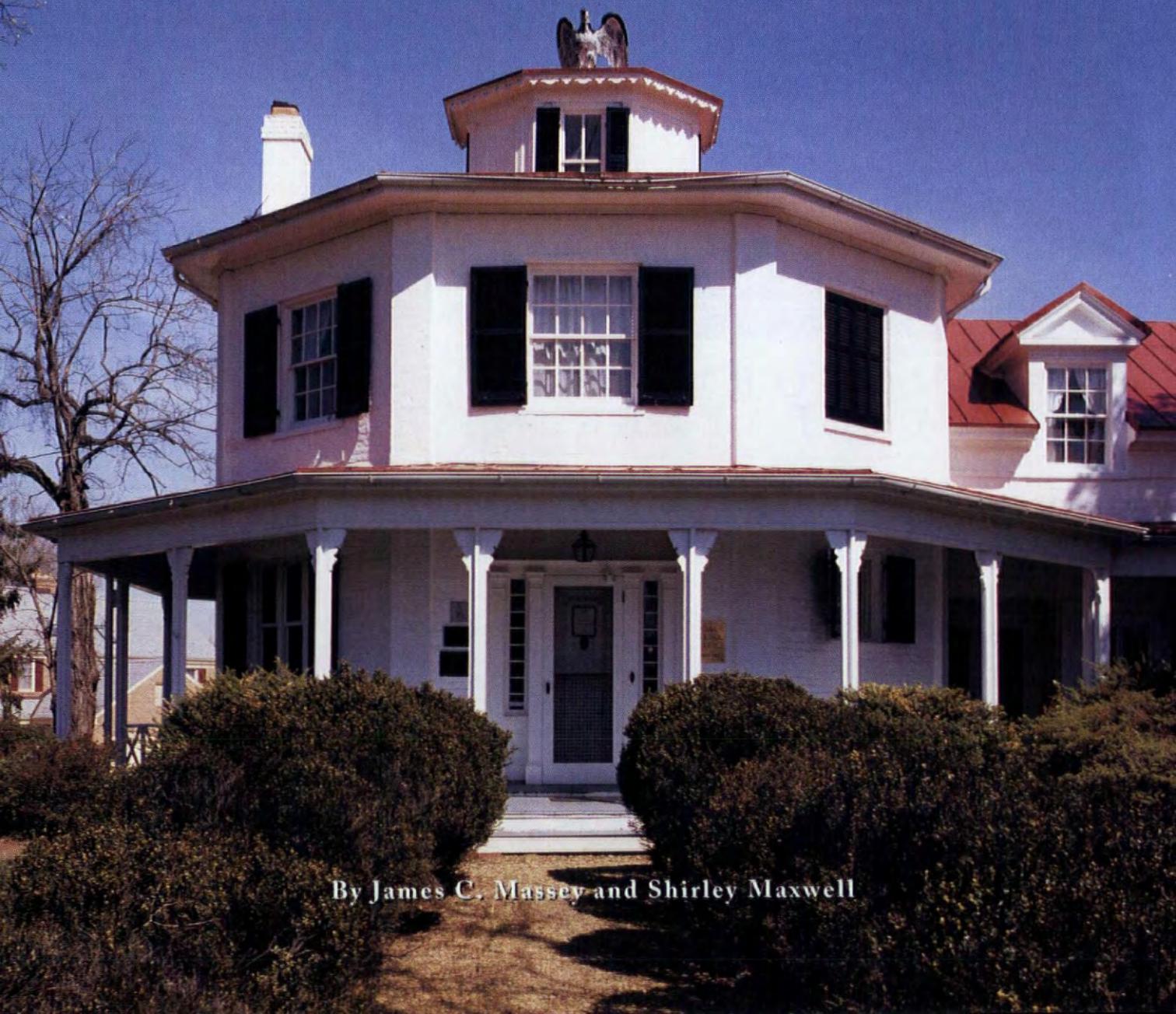
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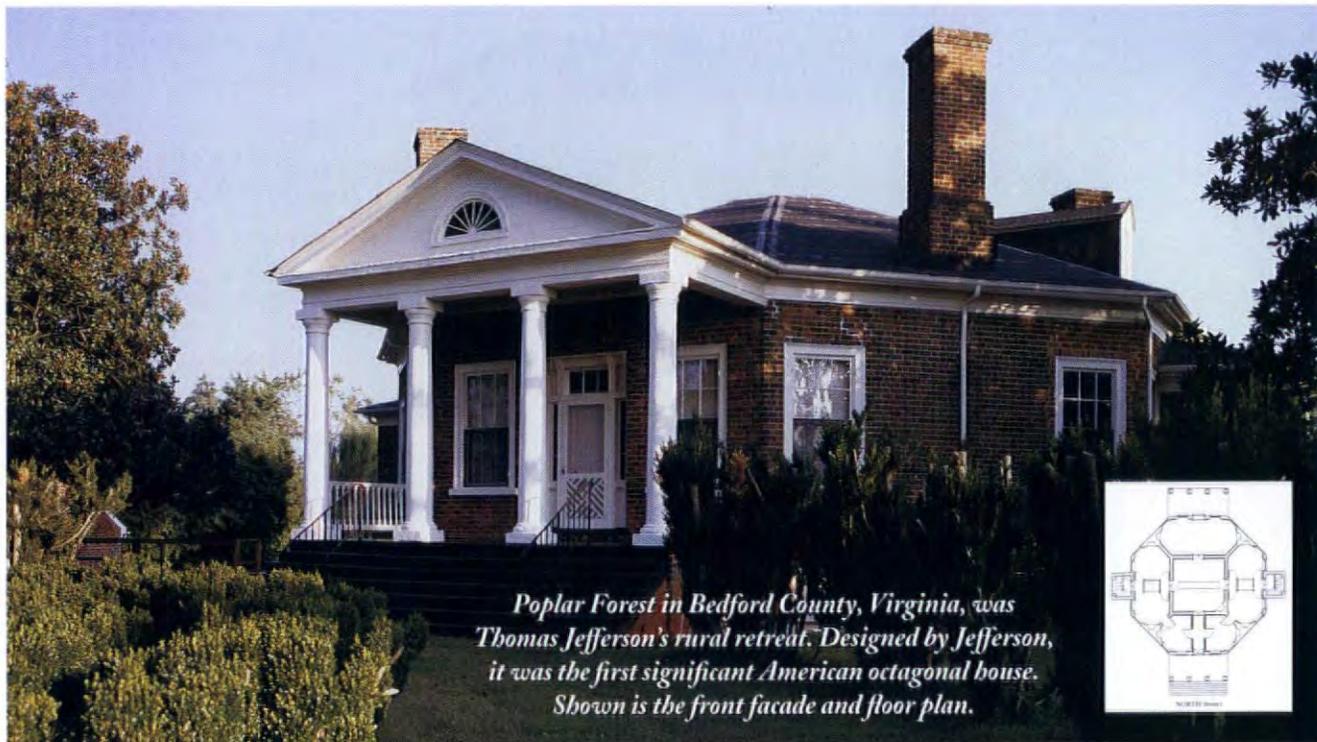
OLD-HOUSE
JOURNAL

ANYTHING BUT A
RECTANGLE

The Cyclical History of Octagonal and Round Houses



By James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell



Poplar Forest in Bedford County, Virginia, was Thomas Jefferson's rural retreat. Designed by Jefferson, it was the first significant American octagonal house. Shown is the front facade and floor plan.

EVERY SO OFTEN AMERICAN BUILDERS GET TO WONDERING why we build our houses as squares and rectangles when circles, octagons, and other offbeat shapes offer so many more interesting opportunities. Circles and octagons contain more interior space per square foot of wall area, for instance, so they cost less to build and heat. They make it possible to place windows so as to take full advantage of sunlight or breezes from any direction. What corners they have are shallow and easily cleaned, and the shapes themselves are intriguing and somehow full of promise. "Life will be different and better," they seem to hint. "Just climb out of the box and view the world through a few more facets — say, six or eight!"

Even in the earliest days of American history, buildings and building parts in the shape of circles and octagons were far from new. The ancient Romans used them. Medieval churches often included round or octagonal baptisteries. Later, Palladio and other architects of the European Renaissance embraced the idea of perfectly proportioned buildings that were based on Roman geometry, whatever the shape. Late-18th-century designers in France, England, and America, caught up in a quest for the ultimately rational, were captivated by the architectural possibilities of circles, ovals, and octagons.

Barns, schools, prisons, and churches were far more common than dwellings in these shapes (George Washington had a 16-sided barn, for instance), but on the residential scene

they also enlivened countless outbuildings, rooms, and bits of houses built at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Gazebos and other garden buildings in the octagon mode enjoyed a particular cachet.

JEFFERSON'S DREAM HOUSE

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S POPLAR FOREST, DESIGNED AS A retreat from the hordes of visitors seeking the president's company at Monticello, was neither the first nor the last American octagon, but it may be the first complete octagonal house. It is certainly among the most beautiful. The original design of the small building on the grounds of his plantation drew on classical Roman precedents, the Palladian Renaissance Revival, and a number of 18th-century buildings that Jefferson had admired during his travels in England and France. It was begun in 1806, during Jefferson's presidency, and completed — if anything he built can ever be said to have been completed — in 1809 near Lynchburg, Virginia.

Jefferson's masterful handling of interior space accounts for much of Poplar Forest's charm and interest. On opposite sides of the dining room, two elongated octagons provided matching bedroom-sitting room suites, with Jefferson's famous alcove beds separating the two sections of each suite. The entrance hall intersected another octagonal space, while the nearly oval parlor opened onto the rear porticos.

Despite some apparently unsolvable problems — the perpetually leaking skylight and incurably damp basement, to name the most important ones — Poplar Forest came very close to fulfilling Jefferson's ideal of classical beauty and personal comfort. "When finished," he predicted in 1812, "it will

The Glebe House in Arlington, Virginia, is a model Orson Fowler type of mid-19th-century octagon, complete with porch and cupola.



be the best dwelling house in the state, except that of Monticello; perhaps preferable to that, as more proportioned to the facilities of a private citizen."

But, Poplar Forest was, after all, a very personal dream, one not likely to satisfy the quite different needs of the families who would later inhabit the house. Alterations in the 19th century, particularly those after a major fire in 1845, turned the house into a rather commonplace octagonal Greek-Renaissance country house, obscuring the small, neoclassical villa of Jefferson's intention. Many of these later changes are now being revealed (and some are being reversed) as the house undergoes a long, open-ended process of research, conservation, and restoration. Jefferson, always one for careful thinking and reading, as well as for incessant putting up and taking down, would be the last to object to a slow and scholarly reexamination of his beloved retreat.

THE OCTAGONAL CRAZE

WHILE 19TH-CENTURY OWNERS WERE REMOVING THE SKYLIGHT, raising the roofline, lowering ceilings, finishing the basement, and adding bedrooms, gabled dormers, kitchen facilities, and baths at Poplar Forest, an independent craze for octagonal construction had begun to sweep across the United States. From coast to coast and border to border, the octagon seemed to be the shape of the middle decades of the 19th century.

From New York, the octagon fad spread widely. This fine example in Barrington, Illinois (Brown Octagon, c. 1850), has been painted in Victorian colors.

The best known proponent of octagonal houses was Orson Squire Fowler, a noted phrenologist. Fowler studied the bony prominences on the skulls of the famous and infamous as a means of determining and, he hoped, improving the moral character of his clients. By the late 1840s, he had earned enough money lecturing and writing about phrenology and other subjects (such as money, sex, housing, and the moral and physical benefits of the rural life), to enable him to turn his thoughts toward building a permanent home for his family.

After much deliberation, Fowler found what he considered a perfect building form, the octagon, and a promising new material, a type of aggregate cement that he learned about from its inventor, Joseph Goodrich, of Milton, Wisconsin. Fowler's 1848 book, *A Home for All: or a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building*, promoted the octagonal building form using board-wall construction. In 1850 he reported on Goodrich's "gravel" wall experiment (a mixture of lime, sand, and stones poured into wooden molds) in one of his periodicals, *The Water Cure Journal*. Finally, he revised and reissued *A Home for All* under the title, *A Home for All or the Gravel Wall and Octa-*

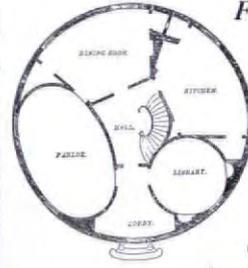
gon *Mode of Building*. The books attracted wide popular interest.

Fowler wanted, above all, to point the way to an exceptionally strong, economical, durable, comfortable, and attractive home for the common man. Home ownership, he believed, was the key to happiness, health, and good citizenship. To test his theories, he constructed his own 80-room house and lecture center on a rural site near Fishkill, New York, using the octagon form and a variation of Goodrich's cement. Fowler and his large, extended family lived contentedly in their enormous residence for only a few years before financial adversities forced its sale. The house survived until the 1890s, when it was demolished because of its crumbling concrete walls.

The doctrine of the octagon was particularly well received in Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and New York (Fowler's home state), where hundreds of octagons were constructed. In fact, with all the public praise heaped upon octagonal and circular buildings, it seems almost remarkable that they didn't become the most common house type of the 19th century. But, no. Most medium-sized towns from the period had one — and probably only one — octagon, a comment perhaps upon both the emotional appeal and the practical limitations of the form. For the truth is that while the octagon has many



The Enoch Robinson House in Somerville, Massachusetts, is a very rare mid-19th-century circular house with Greek and Italian details. It is now under restoration.



Floor plan of the Enoch Robinson house

advantages, it does present certain rather sticky problems, especially in the matter of the interior layout. In hands less skillful than Thomas Jefferson's, many of the most important advantages disappear altogether. In fact, a lot of leftover, odd-shaped corners and triangles result as traditional rectangular rooms are inserted into the octagonal plan. So, while hundreds of octagonal houses were built, thousands more were merely dreamed of over a copy of a Fowler book.

ROUND AND ROUND

CIRCULAR HOUSES ALSO ATTRACTED SOME ATTENTION IN the 19th century. In 1896, *Carpentry and Building*, a trade periodical, reported the construction of an "Anti-Cyclone Dwelling House," a circular house designed by and for J.T. Dorton of Orrick, Missouri, who had previously had "several experiences with cyclones, none of which was altogether pleasant." Dorton's three-tiered circular house was built of brick. Its two storeys, topped by a "Texas" or large cupola-cum-balcony, contained 11 rooms within a 48' diameter.



The Folly in Columbus, Georgia, is a famous double octagon of 1860. It is one house formed by two connected octagons.



The Sherley Mansion's gardener's house in Anchorage, Kentucky, is a Downingsque Gothic-Revival cottage (c. 1865) with a remarkable circular pavilion crowned by an octagonal peaked roof.

Dorton hoped that the circular shape and sturdy brick walls of his new dwelling would provide greater strength and wind resistance than an ordinary rectangular house.

The floor plan was less sophisticated than that of Poplar Forest, but the owner-designer, and presumably his wife, praised its step-saving convenience. Except for the square, windowless dining room, which was lit only through doors to the other rooms, each of the major rooms had at least one curved exterior wall and one large window. The dining room also contained the central heating system, which was directed to the opening and closing doors into the other parts of the first floor. Since his house no longer exists, we can only hope that Mr. Dorton's confidence in the cyclone-proof home was well-founded.

Other 19th-century interests were sometimes served by round houses or round corners. The Spiritualist houses of New York and Illinois, for instance, were part of the religious beliefs of their builders. Their rounded ends left no place for evil spirits to hang out.

The extraordinary circular Enoch Robinson house, built in 1852 in Somerville, Massachusetts, and now under restoration, is of board-wall construction. The short, horizontal planks that make up the structure are covered with clapboard siding. Pocket windows that slid up created some maintenance problems, particularly at the third floor (added in the 1860s) where the enclosing framework rose well above the roofline. While the circle was a rare shape for houses —

probably because it was more difficult to build than an octagon — it was frequently used for barns and other farm buildings well into the 20th century.

WITH OR WITHOUT CORNERS

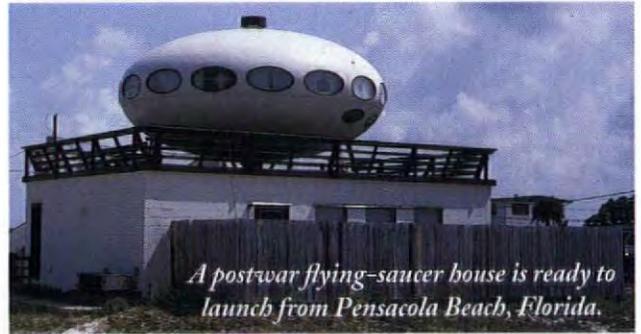
THERE ARE SOME CHARACTERISTICS THAT EARLY OCTAGONS and circles generally share. Cupolas and wraparound porches or balconies, for instance, are almost universal. Frequently, porches are found at every level, giving the delightfully improbable impression of a 19th-century space ship or a hot-air balloon made of brick or wood. Rooflines on octagons can be almost anything except gabled — flat (often used and usually leaky), pyramidal, hipped, mansard, or, to cite the most spectacular example, the great octagonal dome of the Armour-Stiner House in Irvington, New York. The roofs of circular houses were trickier, most often conical or pyramidal, perhaps octagonal.

Since the octagon is an architectural shape, not a style, it has always accommodated whatever frills and furbelows the builder's taste demanded. Jefferson preferred a formal, neoclassical treatment at Poplar Forest. Later owners added

Greek Revival decoration. While Orson Squire Fowler was not particularly interested in stylistic details, most owners of octagonal homes in the mid-to-late-19th century chose Italianate or Gothic ornament. The 1865 gardener's cottage at the Sherley Mansion in Anchorage, Kentucky, is a small Gothic Revival house with a full circular wing. From the conical roof of the wing sprouts a tall cupola/ventilator, its cornice decorated, like that on the rest of the house, with wood "gingerbread" trefoil ornament.

BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

THE FASCINATION WITH NON-RECTANGULAR SHAPES PERSISTED right into the 20th century, as Buckminster Fuller's futuristic Dymaxion House illustrates. Intended to take ad-



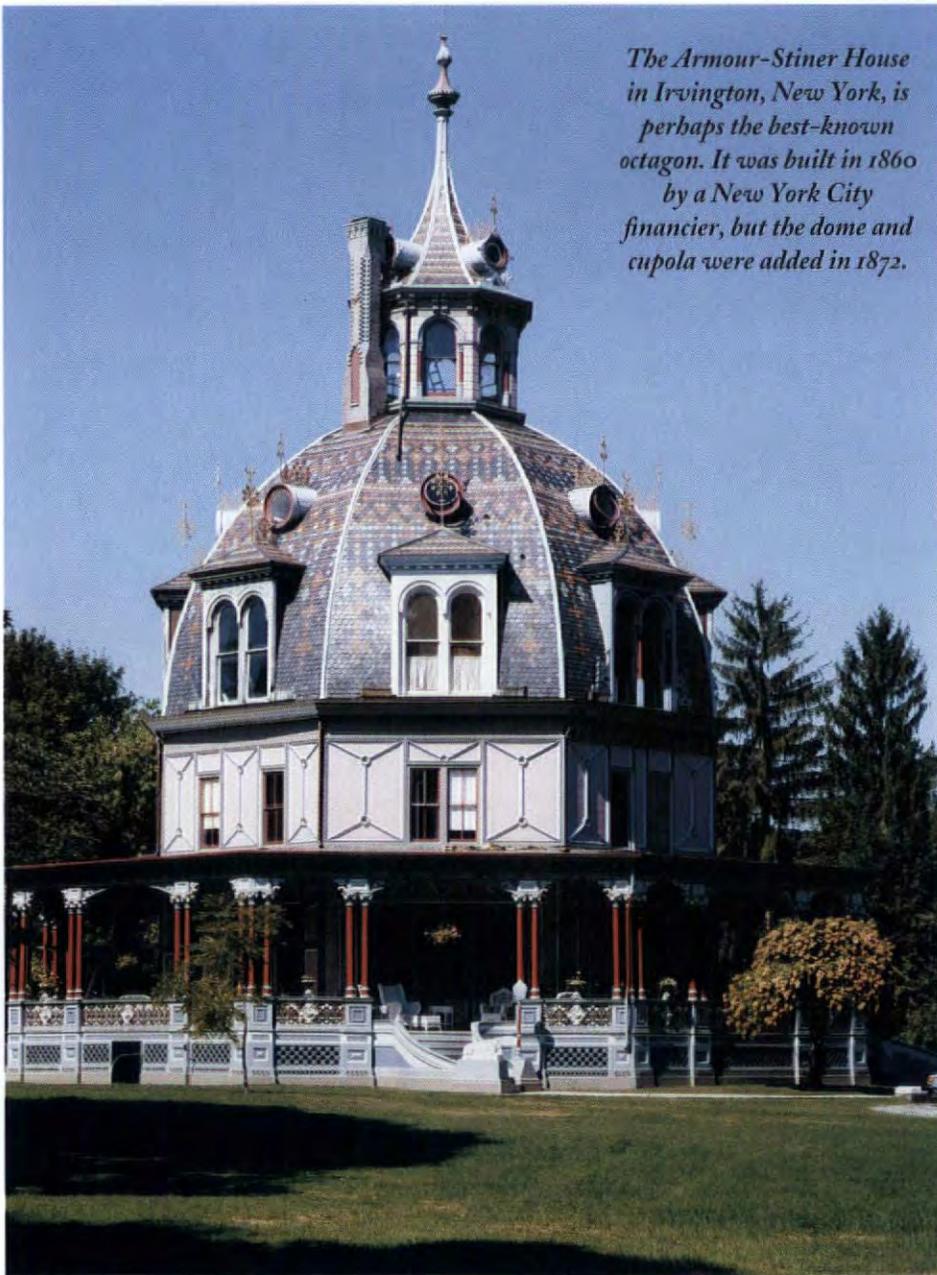
A post-war flying-saucer house is ready to launch from Pensacola Beach, Florida.

vantage of postwar technology and mass-production methods to provide houses for the middle and working class — and also to keep the workers in soon-to-be-surplus aircraft factories on the job — the aluminum and Plexiglas building never got beyond the prototype stage. The only surviving example, fabricated by Beech Aircraft in Wichita, Kansas, in 1944, was recently donated by the original owners and residents to the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village near Detroit.

Despite the promise held out by the Dymaxion House and other similar designs as the homes of the future, postwar buyers continued to prefer shoebox-shaped ranch houses or their old favorite, the Colonial cottage. Although they were only a little more willing to experiment with vacation houses, there are a number of flying-saucer beach cottages built between 1950 and the present to testify to a certain persistent, quirky vision.

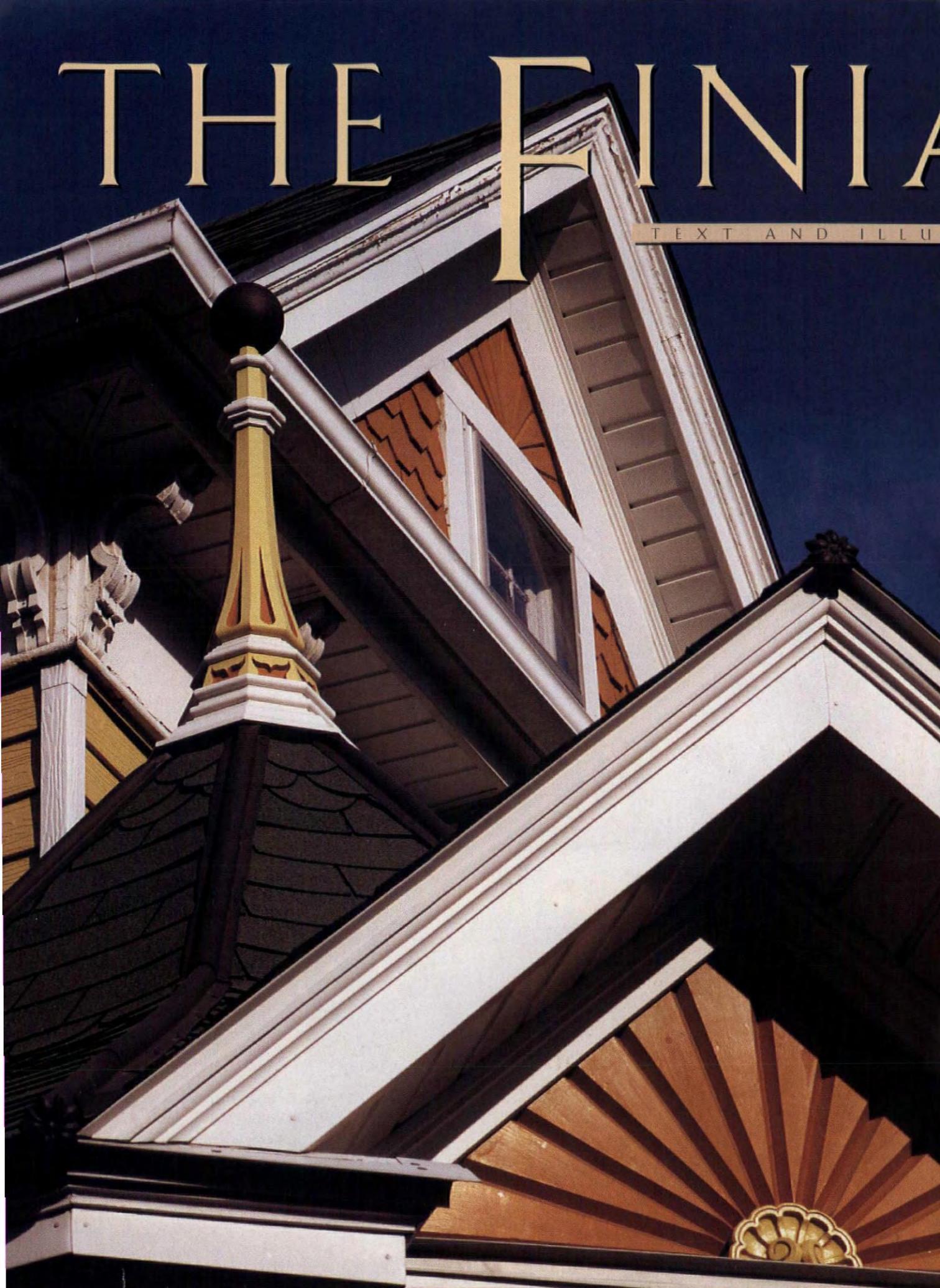
Indicative of the staying power of the unconventional form is a 1986 newspaper column in which an energy consultant urges his readers to look into the fuel conservation benefits of — no kidding — the octagonal house. More good news for octagon lovers: a recent writer on the subject estimates that perhaps 150 of the hundreds of 19th-century octagons that were built around the country still survive. So who knows? Between the past and the future, there may yet be an octagon for you. 🏠

The Armour-Stiner House in Irvington, New York, is perhaps the best-known octagon. It was built in 1860 by a New York City financier, but the dome and cupola were added in 1872.



THE FINIA

TEXT AND ILLU



AL TOUCH

RATIONS BY GERARD MACLACHLAN COLE, JR.

DESIGNING AND BUILDING AN OCTAGONAL ROOF ORNAMENT



*Threaded rod
joins the stack
of simple parts
that form my
eight-sided
finial.*

Like a TV soap opera and many a large old-house project, my porch restoration turned into an on-going epic. Weeks became months without a truly significant change in the story. Finally, it was time to put together the last episode: a finial to crown the “witch’s cap” roof on the porch pavilion.

This article describes the analytical method I used to design and build such a finial. You can use the same method when designing any complex form, whether a finial or some other kind of ornament missing from your house. ♦ My finial was designed so that I could build each rounded or shaped part with a minimum of machine tools — a router and a moulding head attached to my homeowner size 9" table saw. Although I did wind up using a large commercial bandsaw at a local signmaking company, by slightly modifying the design I could have done all my shaping with a router.

THE DESIGN PHASE

FIRST, I NEEDED A DESIGN. AS I SEARCHED SALVAGE SHOPS hoping to find just the right ornament, I found few finials and none just right for my house. So I began a windshield tour of old houses hoping to find examples of good design. After the field research, I developed my design guidelines. I wanted the finial's size and proportion to be in harmony with the house. I also wanted a design that made a gradual transition from the roof angle to the vertical. Most important I wanted the scale to be right—not so large that it overwhelmed the rest of the house nor so small that it looked like an afterthought.

Drawing on my work as a commercial artist, I sketched a number of rough concepts. To test the shape and size of the finial I made a rough, full-sized silhouette from the sketches. A photocopier is a quick way to enlarge original drawings to full size. This may require more than one enlargement, and some parts will likely wind up on a couple of sheets. These copies get pieced together on a window or a light table, making sure the center marks are lined up (see figure 2, page 43). Glue the combined sheets to a piece of cardboard and cut the concept out. Scrap 1x2s reinforce the silhouette and secure it to the roof.

From ground level it was easy to see if my concept was wide enough or tall enough to "work." You may find that your original is too small. Architectural appointments look massive before they're installed, but seem to shrink when on the building. If you need to make changes, cut a new silhouette. When I arrived at the approximate form, I began tackling the details of the design.

Drawings from which a project is actually built are called shop drawings. These drawings are done to scale (say, 3" to 12") and must be large enough so that you can accurately reproduce the project. If you can't draw, find a professional or semiprofessional with drafting skills to help you. Take along your rough sketch, illustrations from this article, and your silhouette. Shop drawings should clarify all the components used to make the finial shape (figure 1). The assembled finial looks complex, but each component is quite simple. It will help you visualize the final assembly if your shop drawing can be "exploded," with each part separated from its adjacent part.

The design may also be influenced by the stock materials available, such as moulding shapes, wood thickness, and hardware. On my project, I used stock cornice moulding for

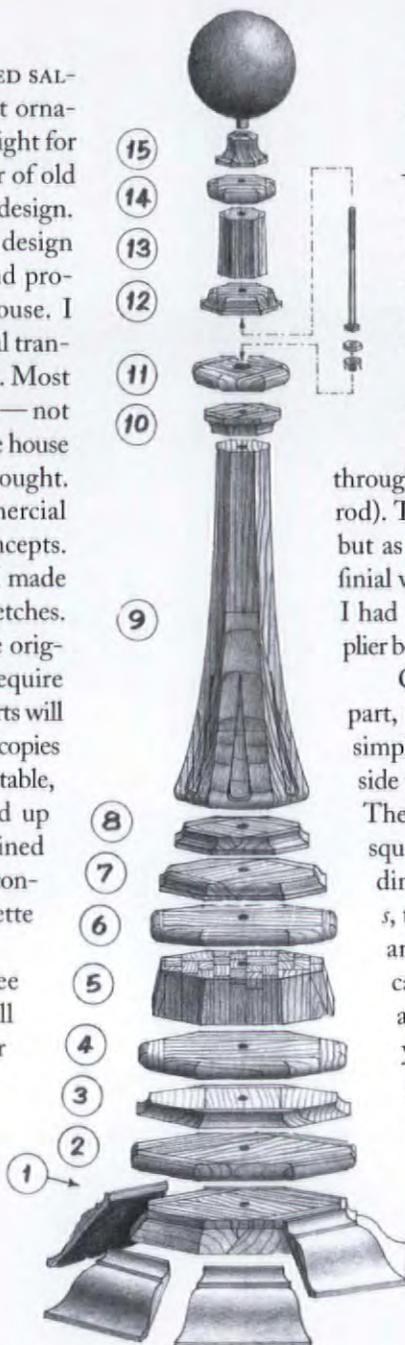


Figure 1: Exploded shop drawings show the individual components that assemble to 38" tall. I chose to glue-up each piece of stock; solid heartwood would also be durable.

the "petticoat" and a copper float tank from a plumbing supply house for the ball at the top. Also, if your roof structure already exists, study it so you can design your finial for proper attachment.

It is important to think through how all the pieces are going to be assembled. My design called for the lower column, parts #1 through #11, to line up along "all-thread" (threaded rod). The stock hardware-store rod is only 36" long, but as I was working out my design, I realized the finial would need 2" more than the standard length. I had to locate a 10' length from an industrial supplier before I was sure I could build the design I wanted.

On paper, I drew squares the size of each flat part, then constructed an octagon in them using a simple method. Knowing the desired distance from side to side d (figure 3), divide that distance by 3.414. The result is c , the distance from the corner of the square to the corner of the octagon. To verify, the dimension c multiplied by 1.414 should give you s , the distance of one side of the octagon. With an appropriate octagon on the workpiece, I carefully punctured the pattern with a pushpin at each of the eight corners to transfer it. (If you are a traditionalist, instead of a calculator you might use a framing square with an octagon scale.)

MAKING THE COMPONENTS

ALL THE FLAT PARTS IN MY FINIAL ARE made with breadboard construction (figure 4) to limit the amount of end grain exposed. I chose two-part resorcinol glues; epoxy or waterproof marine glues would be good too. Whatever glue you use, only apply firm pressure with the clamps. If you overtighten there is the danger of a dry joint.

Part #1 is built up from 2" clear Douglas fir stock. A weather-resistant hardwood such as mahogany is more expensive but a premium choice for durability. I shaped the piece on the table saw with a combination blade. The bevel matches the roof pitch and the back of the "petticoat" moulding. Part #2 is fashioned out of 1" stock, first routed on the bottom with a $\frac{3}{8}$ " round over bit. Routing the top the same way, except not to full depth, created a partial round. Watch for chip-out when routing across end grain.

I cut the cove on part #3 after it was nailed and glued to part #2 using the table saw moulding head with a 1" di-

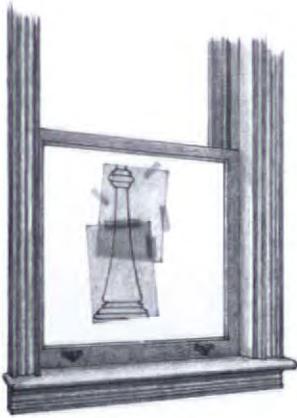


Figure 2 (above):
Line up enlarged sketches on a window or light table.

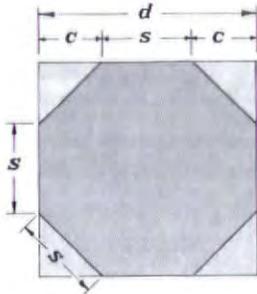


Figure 3 (left):
To construct an octagon within a square, divide d by 3.414 to find c .

iameter cutter (figure 5). The combination of the two cuts forms a cymalike reverse curve. Part #4 is rounded with a router.

The decorative section part #5 is built up using blocks of various sizes and exposes no end grain. This makes the carving come out smoother and gives the block better weather resistance. I shaped the part on the table saw and sanded it so I could trace the pattern for the carving — a design from my eaves brackets — onto all eight sides. Holding the part firmly in a vice, I like to carve with a narrow V-bit in a Dremel tool fitted with a router attachment. A square-cutting bit cleans up the centers. Parts #6, #7, and #8 are all shaped with the router using round over, Roman ogee, and cove bits.

The main column, part #9, is built up of 1" stock except for two select pieces of 2x at the core. The outside pieces start out shorter, but at least $\frac{2}{3}$ the length of the block so as not to be tippy while cutting on the big bandsaw at the sign shop. After tracing the column pattern on the sides and an octagon on each end, I began sawing out the form.

Working just outside of the line, I cut away each of the first three sides, taping the waste block back in place to support the column for the next cut (figure 6). I supported the upper end of the column with a small wood block when cutting the remaining side. Then I remarked the column free-hand and, using a jig to hold the work on-edge at 45° (figure 7), cut away the corners to rough out the octagonal shape. A belt sander held in a stand dressed the sides to their final shape and reduce the amount of sanding required. I worked on all four corners, periodically referring to the octagons at the ends, until all eight sides were the same. Carving was the same process as before.

Making the remaining wood pieces repeated most of the steps just described, except that I had to allow for attaching the copper ball at the top. The ball I used is an industrial tank float manufactured by Robert Float Valve and ordered through a local plumbing supply house. They are available in 5" and 6" diameters and mount via a brass fitting tapped with a $\frac{1}{4}$ -20 thread. Unfortunately, this fitting is too small to mate with my $\frac{3}{8}$ " threaded rod, so I devised a transition using a bolt and T-nut (figure 8). When parts #11 and #12 were fastened and glued together to make the transition work, the top six parts of the finial became a single assembly. Next time, I might try having a $\frac{3}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{4}$ " adapter made at a machine shop.

ASSEMBLING THE FINIAL

ASSEMBLY BEGAN BY STACKING THE COMPONENTS IN THE proper order and orientation to see if the finial would be straight. If the stack ran off center, rotating some of the parts or sanding their high sides corrected the situation. When I was satisfied, each piece of the arrangement got a mark on the same side. Then the various combined flat parts were glued and nailed together using galvanized finishing nails sparingly, and the collection was "clamped" with weights until the glue cured. After the glue hardened, I bored the center hole through parts #1 through #9 with a $\frac{1}{2}$ " bit, working from both sides after running a pilot hole. The other groups of components are assembled the same way.

On the top of my finial, I bored a $\frac{3}{4}$ " hole to a depth of about $\frac{5}{8}$ " to recess the T-nut and jam-nut below the top surface of part #11. The bottom of the hole must be reasonably

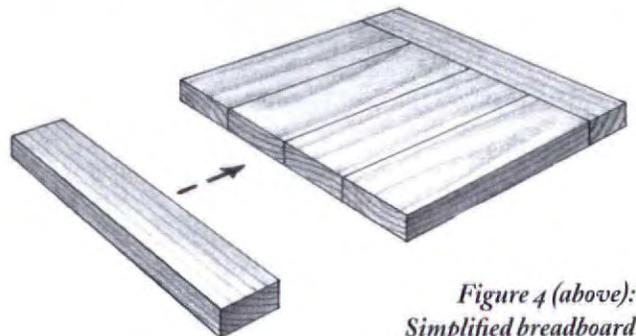


Figure 4 (above):
Simplified breadboard construction minimizes end-grain exposure by covering it with another board.

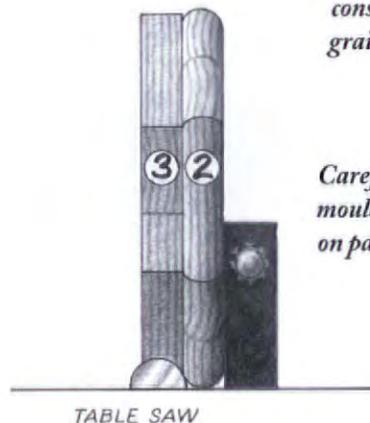


Figure 5 (left):
Careful work on the table saw milled the cove on part #3 so it mated with the edge of part #2.

TABLE SAW

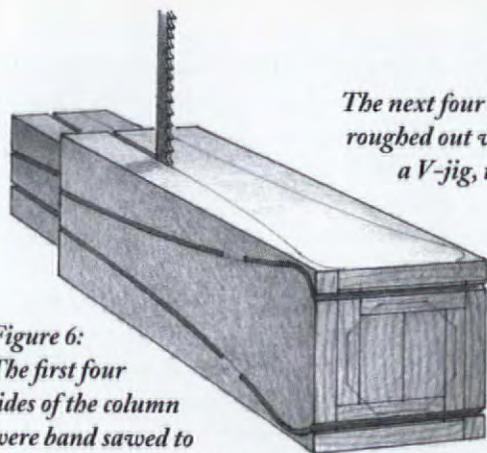
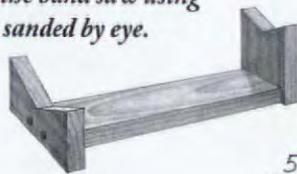


Figure 6:
The first four sides of the column were band sawed to the exact pattern, keeping the waste in place.

Figure 7:
The next four sides of the column were roughed out with the band saw using a V-jig, then sanded by eye.



To step down the thread size between ball and threaded rod, I ran a bolt through the last five components.

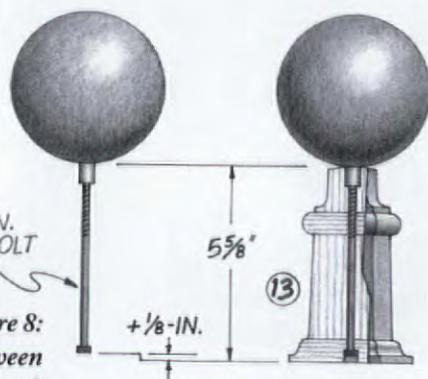


Figure 8:
To step down the thread size between ball and threaded rod, I ran a bolt through the last five components.

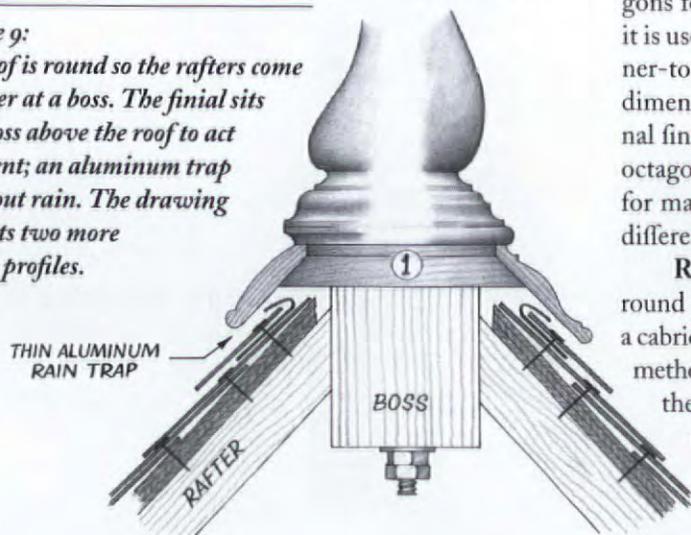
flat to accommodate the T-nut. The next step was to center-bore the whole column — a $\frac{1}{2}$ " hole from the top and a $\frac{5}{8}$ " hole (for a little slop factor) from the bottom — using a bit extender to get all the way through. I center-bored the upper column section with a $\frac{9}{32}$ " bit, enlarging the top hole to accept the ball fitting and chiseling the bottom hole square to recess the bolt head.

The petticoat is part of the finial's appearance, but it is also an alternative to using metal flashing and designed to complete the vent at the top of the roof. It is $4\frac{1}{2}$ " crown mould with the bottom edge flattened a little by planing off some of the curve with a table saw. Other stock mouldings have possibilities for this part as well.

The petticoat was glued and nailed onto part #1 with small galvanized finishing nails. I also reinforced the moulding miters with 1" brads in predrilled holes and small, fitted glue blocks inside each joint. If you take this route, I suggest working on only one side at a time, allowing the glue to cure fully first.

At the top of the finial, the all-thread screws into the T-nut just below the surface of part #II. A hex nut tight-

Figure 9:
My roof is round so the rafters come together at a boss. The finial sits on a boss above the roof to act as a vent; an aluminum trap keeps out rain. The drawing suggests two more design profiles.



ened against the nut secures the rod in place. At the base, the all-thread goes through a $\frac{1}{2}$ " hole in a roof boss — a post where the rafters come together that is built for this purpose (figure 9). The projecting thread got a sturdy flat washer, lock washer, and two nuts, as well as a coating of grease to inhibit rusting. I tightened and locked the nuts just enough to snug the washers in order to allow for some wood movement along the rod.

Nail holes, as well as imperfections in the wood, were filled before priming and painting. I attached the ball after painting, putting a small bead of silicone caulk around the fitting before it was screwed down. The finial has been up since 1990 and, to date, has only suffered minor paint failure and small delaminations in two spots (which may be due to overtightened glue joints).

OTHER DESIGNS

THE DESIGN OF THIS FINIAL STARTED WITH A PERSONAL need but, as mentioned, the idea can be adapted to hexagonal and even round finials. Some notes:

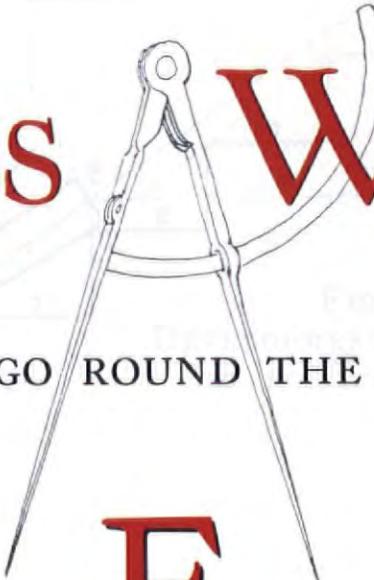
Hexagonal Finials — When constructing basic hexagons for designing the components of a hexagonal finial, it is useful to know that the widest dimension — the "corner-to-corner" span across the piece — is 1.155 times the dimension from side to side. Also, if you make a hexagonal finial using a procedure similar to the way I made my octagonal finial, you will probably need two sets of V-jigs for making the second and third pair of cuts, both set at different angles.

Round Finials — As earlier craftsmen knew, any round part that cannot be turned — from a ship's mast to a cabriole table leg — can be formed first as an octagon. The method is still valid. If you don't have access to a lathe, form the column as an octagon, then round off the corners carefully, checking for symmetry as you go.

Like another side of soap operas, the possible variations on the basic finial theme are practically endless.

Compass Work

MAKING WOOD GO ROUND THE BEND



E

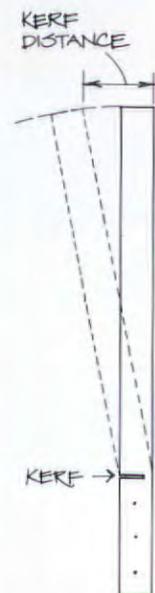
LLIPTICAL STAIRS, CURVED

wainscots, ogee arches and ocular windows, cylindrical towers and conical roofs — there are many examples of curved or circular carpentry in houses, especially in old houses. While the economics and aesthetics of modern building have made a religion of sharp angles and sheer planes, architecture before this century — notably the Georgian-inspired styles and those of the Victorian era — celebrated the sensual forms of circles, ovals, ellipses, and arches. Many of these ideas came from classical or medieval structures built of stone and plaster in the old world. After migrating to these shores they were usually rendered in North America's most abundant material: wood.

Creating curved carpentry is a bit of a tour-de-force. Trees grow straight and, unless you search for timber naturally formed in an arc (once actually done in wooden shipbuilding), it takes some cunning to coax a board around a corner. Compass work is the old-time name for the special techniques that pull this off. It's an apt one because, though not difficult, they require a command of high school geometry as well as woodworking tools. In any kind of compass work there is more than one way to "skin the cat." For starters, we've collected three basic methods for solving common problems OHJ readers have asked about. Let us know if you'd like to see more.

Kerfing and Keying

AKERF IS THE SLOT MADE BY A SAW IN A PIECE of wood. Kerfing is the technique of regularly slotting a moulding or board almost all the way through to let it bend. Kerfing weakens the wood, probably its most serious shortcoming. It also works better with softwoods than hardwoods, and tends to produce only a crude curve composed of flat spots or facets that have to be sanded out for a smooth appearance. However, it is an inexpensive and relatively simple process and therefore often used.



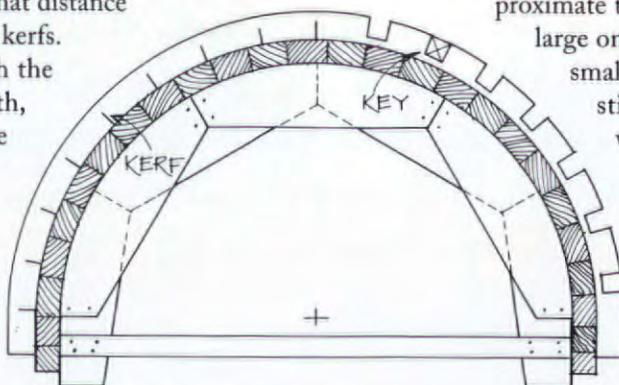
Calculating kerfs: The movement it takes to close one cut, measured a radius away, is the desired distance between kerfs.

just enough to close the kerf, that distance is the desired spacing between kerfs.

All kerfs must be cut with the same saw and to a uniform depth, typically within $\frac{1}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the surface of the board or moulding. This depth should be scribed or penciled first along the edge. Space out the kerfs with dividers, starting at the center of the piece, and take care to make the distances

The critical part of the kerfing process is spacing the kerfs so they produce the correct radius. If the the kerfs are spaced too far apart, the wood will not bend enough; if spaced too tight, a lot of wood is lost and the board may bend unevenly or break. A simple case explains the basic solution. Given that a 1"-thick board has to be bent around a semicircle, the circumference described by the inside of the board will have to wind up 2" shorter than the outside. This means that the kerfs will have to remove 2" of wood to allow the board to bend all the way. If the saw cuts a kerf of $\frac{1}{32}$ ", there will have to be 64 kerfs on the back of the board, evenly spaced.

There are several methods for calculating kerf spacing. One of the simplest and most useful is the stick method (at left). First, take a stick of wood equal in thickness to the material being kerfed and measure off the radius of the desired bend. Next, cut a kerf at one radius mark, then secure the stick below this point. When the stick is moved



The curved, paneled landing of this 1894 Queen Anne in Quincy, Illinois meets the semicircular steps it echoes in a typical Victorian interplay of compound carpentry.

laid off for kerfs exactly the same.

Once the work is cut, the kerfs are cleaned of dust, filled with glue (common carpenter's glue is fine), then fixed in place. In the best work they're bent first on a form over a piece of veneer, then clamped until dry (see below). A form also makes kerfing of the convex side possible. In this method, the kerfs themselves are veneered over to produce a finished surface.

Where the project is not too exacting, the stick method can be used to arrive at pretty accurate kerf spacing for an ellipse as well (see drawing next page). If you ap-

proximate the ellipse shape with circles — a large one with a radius twice that of two smaller ones at the sides — using two sticks measured off to these radii will produce two sets of kerf spacings. When varied along a single moulding, these spacings come close to the increasing and de-



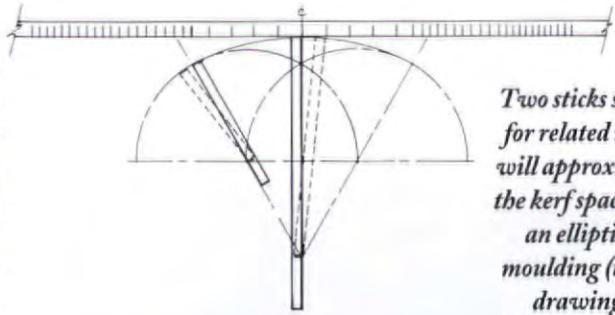
This bead moulding from a mid-19th-century baseboard shows the precise hand-cutting needed to kerf the piece close to the rounded profile.

A form built to the necessary curvature will shape work that is kerfed (left) or keyed (right).

creasing curvature of the ellipse.

Keying is a bending process very similar to kerfing and usually better for producing a concave curve. In keying, grooves are cut in the moulding to the same depth as for kerfing and using the same spacing method. Once the moulding is bent around a form, the grooves are filled with keys — close-fitting wood strips that are glued in place. Laminating a veneer strip over the keys increases the strength and makes for a sturdy piece once the glue is dry.

Both kerfing and keying are regularly used in interior trim, particularly for the individual narrow pieces of baseboards and mouldings. It also appears occasionally in panel



Two sticks set up for related radii will approximate the kerf spacing of an elliptical moulding (top of drawing).

work and less frequently outdoors where other, more durable curving methods are impractical. 

—GORDON BOCK

Laminating Trim

DURING A RECENT PROJECT I NEEDED TO REPRODUCE some interior trim for an 1842 house built in the Greek Revival style. The door in a curved wall required two different casings. On one side, there was the typical Victorian plain board with a single $\frac{1}{2}$ " edge bead; on the other side, a fancier pattern of two, large parallel coves running down the middle — what I call a “double scallop.” Both styles were fairly simple to make in the shop with a couple of router bits. The real challenge was getting the header pieces to fit the convex and concave curves of a wall with a $3\frac{1}{2}$ " radius.

There are a number of methods for making curved trim. I could have band sawed the pieces out of solid stock and then milled them. Another possibility was steam-bending. (Here on the Maine coast, local boat yards provide plenty of resources for this process.) Instead, I chose laminating, a familiar method that would allow me to complete the work in a timely manner with excellent results.

To make the beaded concave casing, I laminated three $\frac{1}{4}$ "-thick pieces of $4\frac{1}{2}$ " Eastern white pine. The $\frac{1}{4}$ " was thin enough to bend easily and, when laminated, the three thick-

nesses would add up to $\frac{3}{4}$ ", the same dimension as the side casing. I selected clear, knot-free boards with fairly straight grain. To create the arc, I built a form of framing lumber in the same curve as the wall. This held the pieces in shape as they were clamped. All three laminations were laid up at one time using regular carpenter's glue, clamping from the inside out, and left to dry overnight. The following morning I set a

$\frac{1}{2}$ " beading bit in a table-mounted router and ran the laminated header through to get my $\frac{1}{2}$ " bead. Then I sanded and primed the piece and attached it to the jamb.

I took a different approach to produce the convex header casing. This time I milled the top piece first with the two scallops, then planed down the back to get a $\frac{5}{16}$ " thickness. I made another form to the arc of this header and glued the top piece to two other $\frac{5}{16}$ " lam-

inations — adding up to 1" of finished trim. The next day there was a slight spring-back when I unclamped the header (making the form radius slightly tighter than needed would compensate for this), but after applying a little sandpaper and elbow grease, it matched the side casing perfectly. 

—ROBERT POOLE

(Poole Construction, RR1 Box 106, Brooksville ME 04617)



Laminating a moulding requires gluing several thin pieces together and thoroughly clamping them in a form, a method that produces stronger results than kerfing.

Siding Circular Walls



Beveled clapboards are common siding on circular towers and walls, but in order to lay horizontal they must be cut in an arc.

CLAPBOARDING OR WEATHERBOARDING A CIRCULAR wall poses an interesting problem in carpenter geometry. When you try to lay bevel siding the normal way — with the back of the board at an angle to the wall — the ends of the board bow down out of line with the middle of the board. If you nail the middle in place and force the ends up, the top edge buckles out at the middle of the board. This problem arises because the circumference described by the top edge of the board is smaller than the circumference at the bottom edge. The back of the board is actually part of a conical surface that doesn't match the true cylindrical surface of the wall.

The simplest solution to the problem is to use rabbet-edge siding. Often known as Dolly Varden siding, it is cut away at the butt edge so it laps over the top of the previous board. This allows the back of the siding to lay flat against the wall, avoiding the greater/lesser diameter problem. Rabbet-edge siding is a stock item at many lumberyards, or it can be ordered through them from lumber products manufacturers.

However, if the curved wall must match the appearance of adjacent flat walls, you can't just cut a rabbet in the standard bevel siding or weatherboards used on the flat walls and expect it to match. This will reduce the reveal, the depth of the siding's butt edge, and show up as thinner shadow lines when sunlight rakes across the wall. To retain the reveal and lay true, the siding has to be shaped.

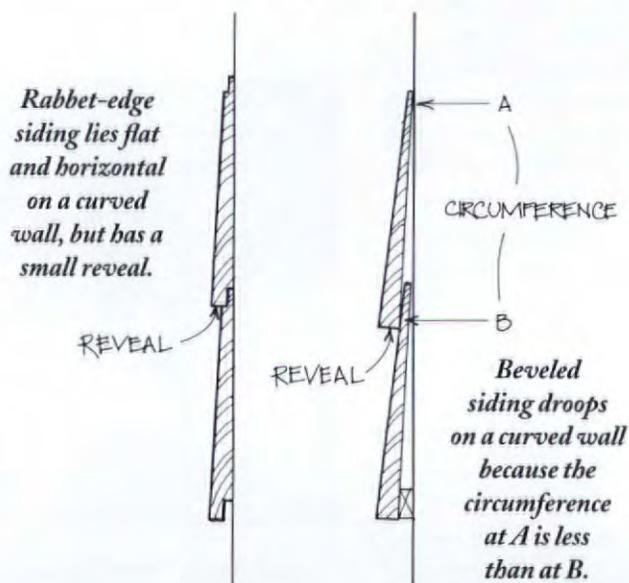
CURVES AND BEVELS

TO MAKE CURVED WALL SIDING YOU FIRST MAKE A PATTERN for cutting narrow, bowed boards out of wide, straight boards. It is possible to calculate the curves and angles with geometry, but it is easier to use the following empirical method.

1) Begin by ripping out a straight strip of wood that is as thick as the top edge of the siding and as wide as the overlap. Nail this strip at the base line of the wall. The strip shims the bottom edge of the pattern board out from the wall just like the top of the siding boards further up the wall.

2) If the wall has a water table trim board or level base, take a pattern board that is wider than the required siding and bend it around the wall so the ends touch the top of the board or base. Tack down the ends with nails. At the center of the pattern board the bottom edge will be bowed up over the top edge of the water table or base, leaving a gap.

3) Using a compass set to the width of the gap, scribe the bottom edge of the template board to match the base. (If there is no base or water table board, tack short lengths of thick boards set horizontally with a level to scribe against.)



4) Take the board off the wall. As it flattens out the scribed line becomes a curve. Draw a curved line parallel to the scribed line to represent the top of the siding. Cut both lines on a band saw and true up the curves with a hand plane to complete the pattern.

To make siding, start with boards that are the thickness of the lower edge of the siding and wide enough to allow for the curve. Lay the pattern on the board, trace around it with a pencil, and saw out the bowed board. The final step

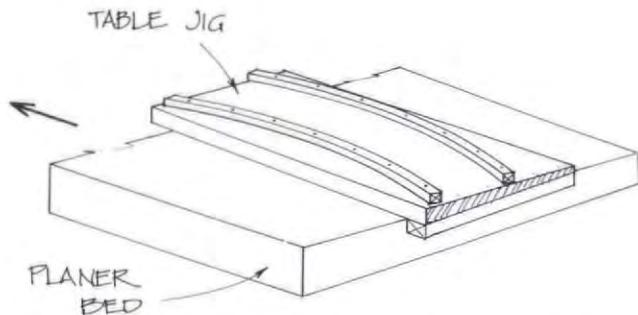
is to bevel the boards. A hand plane or hand power-planer may suffice for beveling just a few boards; a wall of siding will mean production work.

For beveling a quantity of siding, build a table jig out of plywood that lays on top of the bed of a good-sized thickness planer. Angle the jig to match the bevel of the siding, and fasten it down to the bed. (The exact method — be it clamps, cleats, or screws — will depend upon the machine.) Add a low, curving fence on each side of the table that matches the curve of the pattern so as to guide the bowed boards through the planer. Test the first few planed boards on the wall to see if the curve of the template needs any refinement before running the rest.

Select wood that is free from defects such as knots, splits, checks, sap pockets, and sapwood. Straight grain is especially important. Boards with grain that rises up or dives down into the surface will be more likely to splinter and break when bent. Lumber with these special requirements usually cannot be ordered from the yard pre-selected. If you are siding an entire house, do the curved walls first, going through all the boards to select the ones that are best for bending. If you are only siding curved walls, plan on over-ordering a lot from which to select.

INSTALLING THE SIDING

JOINTS WITHIN A HORIZONTAL SIDING COURSE ARE USUALLY avoided, but sometimes they're inevitable. Over the long term, butt joints on curved siding may tend to split and lift. Adding flashing under the joint will protect it from water entry if the joint fails. Cut 2" to 3"-wide strips of sheet metal flashing as wide as the siding (spun-bond polyolefin housewraps such as Tyvek or Typar can also be used). Place a strip un-



To set up for production planing, make a jig angled to the bevel of the siding and adapted to mount to the thickness planer bed.

der each butt joint as it is nailed down.

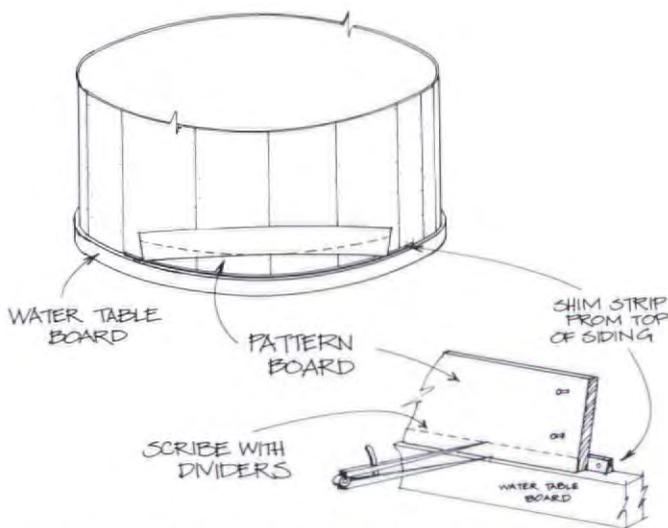
Screws work better at butt joints because they can be driven with more care than nails. Thin, high-strength dry-wall screws work best. Use a corrosion-resistant type with small finish heads. Pre-drill holes and countersink the screw heads for filling later. If you decide to nail at the butt joints, use a ring-shank nail and lay out the joints to meet over vertical studs. Select nails that are long enough to penetrate the sheathing and studs at least 1 1/2". Stresses are less along the lower edges of the siding than at joints so nailing is usually adequate here — about every 12" to prevent uneven lay. Watch out when working on towers with a small radius that are sheathed with vertical boards. When bending siding over wide boards a hollow is created at the middle; if you nail into this space the siding is likely to split. Tack thin, vertical furring strips as backers where this may be a problem, or nail only near the sheathing edges where the siding touches wood.

WATER AND STEAM BENDING

AS THE RADIUS OF A WALL DECREASES OR THE THICKNESS OF the siding increases, the harder it is to wrap wood around the curve. Soaking the siding in water can make it more flexible and easier to work with. To make a soaking tank, simply build a rough wooden box and line it with poly sheeting. Set the tank up in the sun and fill it by running a hose from a household hot water heater. Soak the siding for anywhere from a few hours to a day, testing as you go to avoid oversoaking the material. When soaking several pieces at once, keep them separated with short sticks at each end so the water can wet both sides of each board.

Walls with a radius of under 10' may require steam bending. To do this, steam is fed into one end of a steam box that is long enough to enclose a few clapboards. Once steamed, the clapboards are removed and bent in place before they stiffen. Steaming requires careful setup and handling to avoid the danger of burns or an explosion. For more information on steam bending, consult a library for books and literature on traditional wooden boat building.

— JOHN LEEKE

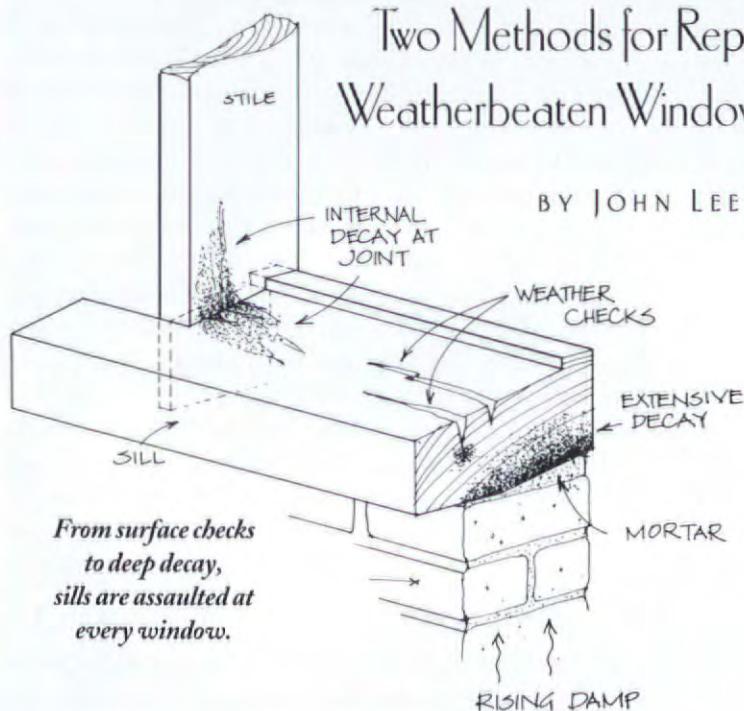


Making a pattern board: Place the board on the wall so the ends touch the base leaving a gap at center (exaggerated for clarity). Then scribe the gap measurement along the bottom to trace a curve (inset).

Curing Ailing Sills

Two Methods for Repairing Weatherbeaten Window Sills

BY JOHN LEEKE



REPAIRING AND PRESERVING WOOD SASH WINDOWS REGULARLY makes more economic sense than complete replacement, especially if you consider the historic character and value of original windows. The deciding factor is often the sill's condition. When the sill is deteriorated, the window is often condemned, frame and all. If the sill could be repaired, the window could be saved. Here I'll describe two methods I've used to deal with sills in poor condition.

THE SILL IS A STRUCTURAL PART OF the window frame, which holds both the sash snugly, yet lets them slide open and closed freely. A weather seal is formed where the bottom rail of the lower sash meets the sill. The sloping sill drains away rainwater that washes down from the window and wall above.

Timber-frame houses built during the 1700s and early 1800s usually have simply constructed windows where the sill is housed in dadoes at the lower end of vertical stiles. Windows in later buildings may have more complex framing with finish sills supported by subsills of wood or stone. More parts mean more chances to trap moisture and start decay.

I find two different conditions are common in deteriorated wood sills. Window sills on the north and east sides of the building are typically damp with decayed wood that needs to be treated or replaced. Sills on the south and west sides are often dried out with deep cracks that need to be filled. Each condition requires its own treatment.



An ice pick wasn't necessary to find the decay going on under this metal-clad sill.

Diagnosing Decay

FUNGAL DECAY IS A COMMON CONDITION found in north and east sills. With a minimum of sun exposure to dry them, moisture can build up in the wood. Decay often begins at the joints where the sill meets the vertical frame stiles. Rainwater seeps into the joints and is trapped between the parts. Combination storm windows can trap rainwater if the storms are sealed too tightly where

they meet the sills. Moisture can rise up in masonry walls causing extensive decay along the bottom of the sill. Heavy paint buildup on the top of the sill keeps the wood underneath from drying out and contributes to the problem. Adding sheet metal flashing over the



Poly sheeting keeps the sill dry and flips up for work.

entire top and face of the sill for a quick repair will trap even more moisture.

When inspecting a window sill I look for evidence to support what I suspect. Paint peeling down to bare wood on the sill, casings, and siding beneath the sill indicates high moisture levels in the wood. I use an ice pick to probe the joint for soft, decayed wood that breaks into short fibers. I also probe for decay in the bottom of the sill along the joint with masonry. Sometimes it's possible to probe the sill bottom from the building interior, through deteriorated plaster, for instance, or open woodwork joints under the stool (the inside sill).

In a really bad case the joint that attaches the sill to the frame sides may have rotted out, letting the sill drop an inch or more over the years. The original sash or a later replacement may have been refitted to account for the gap, or a board may have been added on top of the sill. Never build up the sill with filler or a board; that's just a cover-up of the real problem at the joints.

Repairs and Replacement

TO RESTORE LIMITED DECAY IN THE old sill and stile joint, I consolidate the decayed wood and rebuild the joint

with epoxy consolidant and filler. The wood must be dry for an epoxy treatment to penetrate so I protect the gap left in the wall when the sill is removed. I store the sill in a dry, well-ventilated place so it will dry out too.

While the stiles are in place, I treat the ends with consolidant and rebuild the dado joints with filler (see "Sash Window Workshop," Sept/Oct 1991 OHJ). This is easy to do when the top shoulders of the joints are still sound. If the shoulders are not sound, the rest of the frame may have to come out to treat the stiles.

While it is possible to treat limited decay with the sill in place, it can be difficult to tell the true extent of the damage without removing the sill. Suspect sills can often be removed without disturbing the rest of the frame or interior casings.

To remove a sill while leaving the rest of the frame in place, first take out the sash. Then determine how the sill is attached. On the exterior, wood siding may fit into a groove in the bottom of the sill. If so, remove the siding. You may find interior woodwork or plaster lath nailed to the interior edge of the sill. In these cases, work the joint between the sill and the stool loose with a stiff putty knife. Then saw through the nails with a hacksaw blade or reciprocating saw.

If the dado joint nails are rusted away, you may be able to wiggle the sill loose and pull it out. If not, saw across the sill right near the joint using a nail-cutting blade in a reciprocating saw. Then cut the sill into thirds across its grain with the reciprocating saw or a hand saw. Finally, split the sill out with a chisel and mallet, removing it piece by piece.

If the old sill is beyond help, I make a new one out of decay-resistant wood, or wood treated with a water repellent preservative. Here in New England I tend to use the traditional eastern white pine, selecting the board for

narrow annual growth rings and all heartwood — characteristics that resist decay. Then I orient the annual rings on the end-grain of the board so they are vertical to the top surface of the sill (see drawing page 49). This helps prevent weather checks. Weather checks form when the annual growth rings are parallel to the sill surface because the medullary ray cells create a weakness in the wood.

In most jobs I use the old sill as a pattern for making the new sill, adding a siding groove and drip bead if the original didn't have them. To preserve the historical character of a sill, be sure to match any decorative mouldings present on the face, and match the length and thickness of the old piece exactly. This may require 3" or 4" - thick lumber. Wood this thick is not stocked at the typical lumberyard. Allow extra time for special orders or locating another source. Check local sawmills or woodworking shops. Ask for pine that has been drying under cover for at least two years.

When the new or preserved sill is ready, fasten it in place with galvanized or stainless-steel drywall screws to avoid the shock from pounding



Before treating, deep weather checks can be cleaned with a scraper made for the purpose.

nails. Seal the joints with a long-life paintable caulk such as a polyurethane- or polysulfide-type.

Wrestling with Weather Checks

SILLS ON THE SOUTH AND WEST SIDE of the house often have deep cracks or

weather checks. When bare wood is left exposed to the weather, small checks that are barely visible open up. The sun shines in and ultraviolet rays deteriorate wood fiber on the insides of the checks, widening them. Then rain-water soaks into the cracks. The damp-dry and freeze-thaw cycles open the checks wider and deeper. These checks range in size from a hairline in sills that are just a few weeks old, to ¼" wide and ⅜" deep in sills that are decades or centuries old.

Weather checks are easy to see if the old paint has weathered away. Even if the sill has been painted recently, breaks in the new paint film may indicate weather checks underneath. Often, surface weather checks will be the only damage on a sill. Do not mistake a weather check for a split sill, which will be cracked all the way



(top) Priming checks with epoxy consolidant. (middle) Working epoxy filler into checks. (bottom) Scraping away excess filler.

through from the top surface to the bottom surface.

After extensive comparative testing of over 10 products, I have found epoxy paste filler to be the only material for filling weather checks that I consider a permanent treatment—that is, lasting five or more years. It will adhere to the sides of the checks, flex with seasonal wood movement, and provide a good base for paint.

Heavy paint buildup has to be removed from the surface of the sill for epoxy treatment. The cracks should be fairly clean and dust-free so the consolidant soaks in easily. A specially ground scraper is used to clean out the checks. Look for deep decay by raking out a few of the largest checks. Then cover the sill loosely with poly sheeting to dry it out. Drying might take a week or a month, but the wood must be low in moisture so the cracks are at their widest when you fill them.

Prime the checks by filling them with epoxy consolidant. This step is necessary to insure that the filler to come will adhere to the sides of the check. Epoxy consolidant is a two-part liquid that will penetrate decayed wood fibers and cracks. It then hardens into a flexible plastic, renewing the strength of the treated wood. Apply the consolidant directly into each check with a narrow, spouted squeeze bottle so the consolidant doesn't go all over the surface. Most of the consolidant will soak into the wood if it is dry.

When the consolidant has cured, fill the checks with epoxy paste filler. This filler is consolidant resin mixed with powdery thickeners that hardens to a solid mass with characteristics similar to wood. The epoxy must completely fill the checks. For deep or very narrow checks, begin with a batch of filler that has a loose consistency and almost flows in the checks on its own. Spread this on and into the checks with a putty knife. Ram the filler deep into the bottom of the checks with the end of the knife. Then force a stiffer mix of epoxy into the checks. This will push the softer epoxy as far as

possible into the checks, expelling any air voids and assuring the check is completely filled. With this amount of pressure the epoxy will rebound above the surface leaving a slightly higher mound along each check. Leave this mound in place and let the filler cure. If you level the filler it may shrink slightly below the surface as it cures and require a second filling.

When the epoxy has set, but before it becomes hard, trim off the excess filler. This is most efficiently done with a very sharp, hook-type paint scraper. (If you don't have a sharp scraper, just smooth the filler flush when applying it and return for a second filling if there is any shrinkage, sanding the epoxy down to the wood surface with 50-grit paper between fillings.)

Don't be tempted to cover the whole top surface of the sill with epoxies. More of a good thing is not always better; a skimming might limit the wood's ability to dry out, or be too brittle and crack with wood movement.

I sometimes build up the surface to even out the inner edge of the sill where it meets the sash. This provides a fairly uniform surface for the sash and weather stripping to make a weather-resistant seal.

Suppliers

ABATRON, INC.

33 Center Dr., Dept. OHJ
Gilberts, IL 60136
(708) 426-2200

*LiquidWood consolidant and
WoodEpoxy filler are good products if
you are new to the use of epoxies.*

CONSERVATION SERVICES

8 Lakeside Trail, Dept. OHJ
Kinnelon, NJ 07495
(201) 838-6412

*Flexible Epoxy Consolidant and
Patch are adaptable to varying
conditions, but require some
experience.*



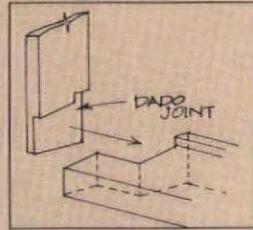
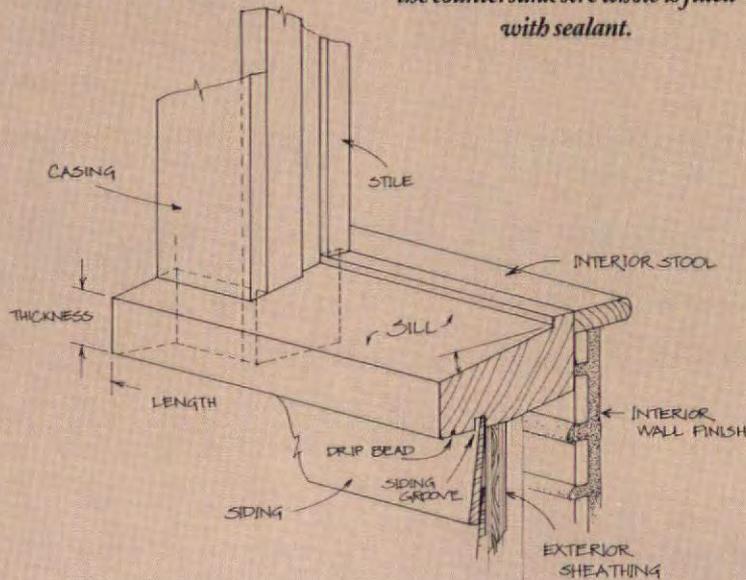
▲ Removing the sill exposed decay in this dado joint at the lower end of the frame stile.



▲ Sealant is applied on the top surface of this new sill where the end of the facing board will sit. After installation, the countersunk screw hole is filled with sealant.



▲ The new sill replaces the original which was severely decayed due to water entry.



◀ Removing an old sill as well as installing a replacement requires understanding the joint at the stile. Underneath, shingles or siding may tuck into a groove, and a drip bead stops water from running back to the wall.

Painting for Protection

ONCE THE SILLS ARE TREATED OR REPLACED, sand the surface to prepare it for painting. On treated surfaces the result should be alternating stripes of epoxy-filled checks and bare, untreated wood that allows moisture to escape from within the sill. Of course, paint protects the bare wood, but the non-epoxy strips still allow some moisture movement out of the wood.

Paint the sill with a primer and two topcoats of best quality exterior house paint. My traditional choice is oil-based paint because it is easily repaired and maintained. Acrylic latex and high performance elastomeric coatings are also starting to show good long-term results. Using a paintable water repellent under the primer gives

added resistance to the standing water so common on sills. Start the paint coats from the seal with the sash and go over all the sill. It is very important to paint the underside of the sill to complete the protection.

Once damaged sills are repaired you'll want to be sure that they are inspected for breaks in the joints and paint film every year or two. Follow up with spot paint-and-sealant maintenance as needed. Avoid future moisture buildup, wood decay, and sill damage by following these guidelines:

- Check sills every two years for breaks in paint film; maintain as needed.
- Leave ventilation holes or a slight gap between storm windows and sills.
- Remove impervious coverings, such as a sheet metal, added over wood sills.
- Clean clogged gutters above sills or

install them where missing.

• Prune or move shrubbery back at least 2' (10' for trees) to improve air flow.

In my restoration business, when I estimate costs for the sill work just covered I use these figures for an average sill: 2 to 4 hours to epoxy weather checks and paint 3 coats: 6 to 10 hours to make a new sill and install it, leaving the frame in place. A few hours work on one neglected window may not seem to be worth reckoning, but when faced with a house full of 20 or more, it's very useful to know where your time's going to go. 🏠

John Leeke is a preservation consultant who helps homeowners, contractors and architects understand and maintain their historic buildings (RR1 Box 2947, Sanford, Maine, 04073; 207-324-9597).

GOING WITH THE GRAIN

HOW TO PRODUCE MAHOGANY GRAINING EFFECTS
BY STEVE JORDAN



MAHOGANY — JUST THE MENTION OF IT SUMMONS VISIONS OF RICH PATINAS AND EXPERTLY FASHIONED WOODWORK. During the so-called Age of Mahogany, from about 1725 to 1850, many affluent homes boasted handcrafted furniture, doors, and paneling of mahogany imported from Santo Domingo, Cuba, or Honduras. Even for the wealthy, genuine mahogany was expensive and difficult to acquire. Thus, many people opted to have their furniture or interior finishes made from local woods and painted to resemble mahogany. The mahogany grainer's skill had to please demanding clients and discriminating eyes. ♦ In many fine homes, grained doors were often surrounded by painted trim. This formal treatment can be seen at George Washington's Mt. Vernon, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, and Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. Entire rooms of graining — covering doors, casings, and wainscots — were also common, especially in rural homes. The flamboyant crotch figuring, also known as flame or feathered mahogany, was a favorite for panel insets, while ribbon-cut and plain-sawn figuring was used for rails. ♦ During the late Victorian period, walnut, oak, rosewood, and maple graining often embellished all of a room's millwork. Although most popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries, mahogany graining is coming into its own again with the recurring interest in decorative painted finishes. Restorers who want to add the sumptuous look of ribbon-cut or crotch-figure mahogany to their old house can do so with some simple materials, a little practice, and the following steps.

T O O L S

TWENTY YEARS AGO, AS I GUSHED OVER MY first encounter with graining, I asked veteran painter Frank Maino of Memphis, Tennessee, what he used to achieve his remarkable grained doors and mantels. "Anything I can pick up," was his terse way of telling me that the doors I admired were 99% skill and not the products of mysterious tools or paints. Specialty brushes really do make the job easier, but many common brushes will also work. Here's what you will need:

Enameling Brush. Apply primers and ground coats with quality brushes — China bristle brushes for oil-based products; synthetic bristle brushes, such as nylon/polyester, for water-based products.

Grainer. I prefer an artist's fan brush, but thin, throwaway 1" or 2" brushes are excellent for applying heart grain and ribbon figuring.

Flogger. An unusually thin brush with very long bristles used to slap pores into freshly applied glaze. A 3" or 4" siding brush will also do the job.

Stipler. An untapered brush used to apply small pores by tapping the wet glaze with the end of the bristles in a



straight up-and-down motion. A worn sash or shaving brush makes a good substitute.

Blender. A badger blender brush is excellent for softening harsh effects and adding the finishing touches that set your work apart from all the rest. These are expensive brushes, generally reserved for water graining. A good, affordable substitute is the Symphony goat hair softener (series 8120) available at many art supply stores. Soft hog bristle softeners usually work well with oil glazes. You can get good results without a blender by feathering the glaze at just the right moment with a soft, new brush.

Mottler. This brush has short, stiff bristles, and is designed to remove glaze from a surface to create a mottled appearance. Any worn-out brush will make a good mottler.

Rags. Save those old 100% cotton T-shirts — you'll be surprised what you can do with a rag and ingenuity.

PLANNING YOUR PROJECT

THERE ARE MANY VARIETIES OF MAHOGANY AND MAHOGANY look-alikes. In dozens of furniture and millwork stripping projects, I've noticed that much of the mahogany with a deep

RIBBON-CUT FIGURING



An example of ribbon-cut figuring in a piece of mahogany.

RIBBON-CUT MAHOGANY is characterized by a random pattern of light and dark streaks running with the grain. It is a man-made effect created by machine-cutting the wood.



1

The first application of your glaze is called "rubbing in."



2

Spread the glaze over the surface. Use a clean brush to drag out the glaze uniformly.



3

Slap diagonal pores into the wet glaze with the flogger. (This also can be done last.)



4

The next day, reapply the same glaze. Wrap a clean rag around your fingers and drag in the characteristic streaks. Avoid straight lines.



5

Just before the patterning sets up, soften the markings perpendicularly or opposite the grain.



6

On day three, apply a very thin over glaze, well dragged out. Mottle the area, taking care to avoid repetition.

red color was stained or covered with a tinted clear finish. This is apparent when the color melts off with the stripper and finish. Most aged mahogany is not deep red but a rich amber brown. Still, you must decide what your idea of the perfect mahogany finish will be — a rich, mellowed amber or a deep burgundy. Always refer to an actual example or photograph of the wood you are imitating.

SURFACE PREPARATION

AS WITH ANY PAINTING, A GOOD GRAINING JOB DEPENDS ON meticulous surface preparation. Clean and sand smooth old painted or varnished surfaces. Remove any old wax, oil, or silicone residues that might create adhesion failure between the old and new paint. Sand glossy paint and

varnish thoroughly until the old finish is dull. Use 120-grit paper; lower grits will leave scars. Fill gouges or nicks with an appropriate filler such as wood dough, polyester resin, or epoxy fillers. Shallow imperfections are best left alone.

Whether painting over old paint, varnish, or new wood, use solvent-based, alkyd enamel undercoat — it

Oil glaze formula:

1 part glazing liquid to 1 part mineral spirits to 1/4 part boiled linseed oil

Colorant (I used burnt umber for my basic glaze then added permanent red and a trace of black for an over-glaze.)

ensures a good bond between coats and creates an excellent sanding surface. You'll get better coverage by tinting the enamel undercoat approximately the color of the ground coat. Apply all coats of paint following the grain of each board, taking care not to overlap where boards meet at right angles. Allow the undercoat to dry for one day, sand smooth with 220-grit sandpaper, and clean off the dust with a tack cloth. If the undercoat, or any coat of paint, gums up your sandpaper, the paint is not dry enough to sand; give it another day.

G R O U N D C O A T

THE NEXT COAT OF PAINT IS CALLED THE GROUND. ONE ground coat over the primer is usually sufficient, but two

Beer/vinegar glaze formula:

1 part beer (or vinegar) to 1 part water

A pinch of whiting to spread over the glazed surface or to dip your brush into as you rub in the glaze.

Note: *Do not mix thinly.*

coats might be needed for best coverage. Alkyd oil-based enamel in a low sheen is perfect. (See "Ground Coat Paint" on page 60 for suggested products and sources.) If using latex enamel for a ground, apply it thinned to avoid the brush marks common to these quick-drying products. A terra-cotta colored ground was typically recommended during the 19th century, but I have also seen mahogany graining over mustard yellow and white grounds.

CROTCH FIGURING



An example from a c. 1800 mahogany sideboard with exceptional crotch figuring.

CROTCH-MAHOGANY HAS an indicative "flame" figuring and is also referred to as flame-mahogany. This is a natural grain pattern produced where the tree branches off.



1 *Apply the glaze in an upside-down U-pattern.*



2 *Immediately blob an extra amount of the glaze down the middle of the U.*



3 *With a rag, wipe out highlights from the center, avoiding symmetry.*



4 *With a small brush, add indicative wing-like details.*



5 *As the glaze begins to set up, soften your work with a blender by brushing diagonally across the surface.*



6 *Using a piece of rubber, cardboard, or plastic wrap, wipe out the light highlights that radiate up and out from the center of the figuring.*

GRAINING GLAZE CAN BE MIXED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS DEPENDING ON your experience, preferences, available materials, and the weather. While still wet, oil glazes are easily worked — giving the grainer plenty of time to make changes or start over — but once dry, they cannot be removed. Beer or vinegar glazes dry quickly and can be wiped off when dry, but this rapid drying time demands quick work. Latex glazes fall somewhere between the oil and vinegar/beer methods in working time and, as with oil glazes, cannot be removed when dry.

Beer/Vinegar Glazes. Graining with beer or vinegar and pigment is usually called distemper graining. Although this method seems difficult at first, it is relatively easy to do, and allows effects that are not possible with oil glazes. For the pigment, artists' watercolors or gouache work well for very small projects such as picture frames; powdered and universal colors are best for larger projects such as doors and trim. Stale beer was the favored vehicle for a distemper glaze until prohibition when vinegar became the choice by default. Either beer or vinegar will hold the pigments on the ground and allow a varnish finish coat. **(Use solvent-borne varnish only, latex varnishes will melt your work.)** You will also need some whitening because watery glazes tend to crawl over the ground.

Latex Glazes. As the demand for water-based (latex) glazes increases, many decorative painters have formulated their own glazes using latex varnishes thinned with glycerin or Flood's Floetrol to slow down the drying time. Several manufacturers have recently begun to fill the demand for off-the-shelf products. As with the homemade versions, however, their wet-edge time is usually shorter than oil glazes. These products are best for

smaller projects until you become proficient.

Oil Glazes. Early grainers mixed their own graining glazes from secret formulas passed along for generations. Linseed oil was the central ingredient with turpentine as thinner and powdered colors ground-in-oil as the pigment. Wax, whiting, varnish, and soap were used in varying degrees to make the glaze handle and react as the grainer desired. These additives were called the *megilp* and gave the glaze its "stay put" quality. Today factory-prepared glazing liquids free

us from this mysterious alchemy. These versatile products are designed to be tinted on the job site and thinned as desired.

Because the working life of your glaze is affected by humidity and temperature, remember the following as you formulate your glaze:

1. Thinning glaze with mineral spirits or turpentine is usually adequate for typical projects such as doors and trim.
2. If keeping a wet edge

is a problem, sparingly add linseed oil, Penetrol or kerosene to increase drying time.

3. For a speedy drying time, use VMP Naptha for your solvent.

4. Colors ground-in-oil increase drying time.

5. If your grain pattern will not "stay put," use more glazing liquid and less thinner.

Many grainers combine the beer and oil techniques to double the amount of work that can be done in one day. For example, pores can be flogged in with watercolor and beer and within 30 minutes, an oil glaze can be applied directly over the pores. This also works with crotch figuring by first applying the grain with watercolor and subsequently adding highlights or pores with the oil glaze. Always wait 24 hours before applying the finish varnish over an oil glaze. 🏠

Steve Jordan painted 17 years before he became Rehab Advisor for The Landmark Society of Western New York.



GROUND COAT PAINT

The ground coat paints I have had best results with are Devoe & Reynolds' *Velour Eggshell*, Benjamin Moore's *Dulnamel*, and Pratt & Lambert's *Vitalite*. They are available from the following suppliers:

Janovic/Plaza, Inc.

30-35 Thomson Avenue,
Dept. OHJ
Long Island City, NY 11101
(800) 772-4381

Johnson Paint Co., Inc.

355 Newbury Street,
Dept. OHJ
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 536-4838

A Tale of Two Houses

by Jean Hanff Korelitz



I

CAN REMEMBER THE MOMENT OLD-HOUSE FEVER

first bit me in earnest. I was standing with my husband on the mud floor of a tiny Irish cottage that had been painstakingly moved to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum near Belfast, Ireland, where we then lived. It was exactly the kind of cottage Irish peasants had been trying to get *out* of for years, but that didn't matter to me. I loved that filthy floor, the chilly whitewashed walls, the primitive furniture, and the fireplace crane. ♦ Naturally, a one-room cottage was not practical for us, but from that day on we began to pay closer attention to old houses. After Belfast (our first home together) we lived in five houses in three years, from Paul's native Ireland to my hometown, New York, and from Cambridge, England, to California; some of the houses were nice, some were awful, all were rented. We dreamed of something primitive and stark, something with age you could see. Our longing was for old houses unsullied by "improvements." We became purists, making allowances only for the barest of 20th-century refinements. We liked the kinds of houses that were preserved as museums and populated by tour guides that told you things like, "They used this to pound cornmeal," or "They did all their cooking in this fireplace." Even in those houses, our eagle eyes would pick out reproductions, replaced elements, or anything that looked a little too finished.

After painting the siding and shutters, we planted some saplings from the grounds of the Massachusetts house on the half acre of our New Jersey home (above). Stoop-sitting with baby Dorothy and Oscar (inset).



In the living room of the 18th-century house, the bare wood floors bore the markings of 250 years of traffic.

Finally, in central Massachusetts, we hit the jackpot. At the end of a private dirt road, smack in the middle of 175 acres, the Garrison Colonial was perched between two meadows with only a single electric cable connecting it to the 20th century. Apart from that, and its barely rudimentary heating and plumbing, the house was as pristine as the day it had been built — 250 years ago. It may have been just another rental in our nomadic history, but it felt very much like “our” house, and for the next 18 months not a day passed when we did not sense the acute privilege of living in it.

Naturally, there were some sacrifices in the comfort department. The winters were frigid and the “modern conven-

iences” were neither particularly modern nor terribly convenient — but so what? We were madly in love with the house’s isolation, its fireplaces and beehive oven, the breathtaking views from each twelve-over-twelve window, and the two centuries’ worth of footfalls on the wide-board floors. Our dog, Oscar, ran amok in the fields. Our friends, visiting for the first time, crowed, “It’s so old!” We wanted to stay forever.

Fate, however, had other plans for us. A much better job in central New Jersey, coupled with the frustrating news that the Massachusetts house was now for sale at an out-of-the-ballpark price, soon had us sadly heading south to the land of strip mall and turnpike. We’d had two years of old-house bliss and were ready to buy a house of our own, but our standards were now unrealistically high.

We told our real estate agent that we wouldn’t look at anything built after 1850, and for six months we inspected forlorn older homes obscured beneath restructured interiors and “improved” designs, with perhaps one feature kept to illustrate their historic past. We lingered over a mill where George Washington was said to have bought grain for his army (all-new interior) and gave hard thought to a log cabin in nearby Bucks County (lovely but tiny). Finally, we peered beneath two layers of exterior siding and found

Despite several winter days with frozen water pipes and flickering lights, nothing compared to waking up in the Massachusetts Garrison Colonial and looking out over a field that Robert Frost might have immortalized.





the wood clapboards of a house we thought we could love, an 1820 Federal saltbox in Mt. Rose, New Jersey, not far from Princeton. While it may have lacked the outright character of the Massachusetts house, the Mt. Rose house had been left basically alone. To its basic two-over-two structure, a kitchen ell had been added in the late 19th century and a fairly sympathetic two-storey addition had been built in the 1960s. While it had no extraordinary features, it did have good floors, pretty plaster walls, beams in the kitchen, and a nice steep staircase.

Uncovering the Clapboards

AS IT HAPPENS, MT. ROSE DOESN'T EXIST ANYMORE, EXCEPT on some maps and in the history books, due to its grisly 15 minutes of fame when the Lindbergh baby was found in the woods. It was once a thriving town with its own schoolhouse, shops, and blacksmith, but Hopewell, two miles up the road, got the railroad and Mt. Rose atrophied into its current state: a gathering of 19th-century houses clustered around an asymmetrical crossroad with a stoplight.

During the 1950s, an enterprising salesman went from one end of our road to the other selling asbestos shingles to virtually every house, including ours. When the previous own-

Two layers of asbestos and aluminum siding were removed from the Mt. Rose house to expose the original clapboards.

ers moved in 25 years ago, they didn't like the shingles so they slapped aluminum siding over them, which left us with two layers covering the wood, and no guarantee about what state the wood would be in when we finally got down to it.

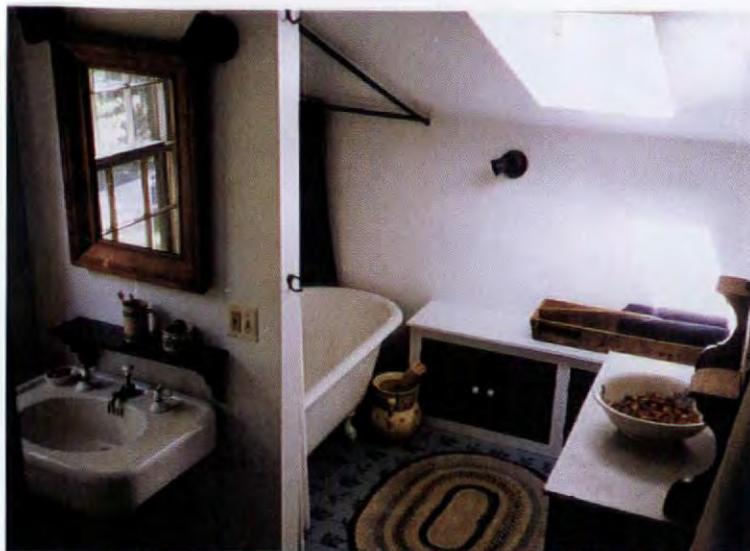
After we bought the house, we planned to confine our do-it-yourself efforts to the more aesthetic interior elements, so we needed a contractor for the bigger jobs. However, our first interview with a contractor was not promising. We told him that we wanted to remove the siding.

"Why?" He said.

"Goodbye and thank you," we said.

Then we met a local contractor who responded to our request with the phrase we would hear many times from his lips: "That's no big deal." (As in: "You want to add a third storey? That's no big deal.") He and his team removed two narrow wooden decks from the front as well as the two huge bayberry bushes that virtually hid them. Once the porches were gone, we had an inkling of how the house would ultimately look.

Then it was on to the siding. For weeks, asbestos and aluminum hit the ground like an ongoing hailstorm until



The bathroom's layout was tricky to arrange because the floor was also the kitchen's ceiling.

the graying clapboards (and a few bees' nests) were bared to the sun for the first time in decades. Generally, we were lucky; only ten percent of the boards needed replacement. Ironically it was the rotten wood on the 1960s addition that needed a total overhaul. (That makes sense, doesn't it? The antique siding was fine, but the modern version was trash.) We had a few sets of shutters which were original to the house, and had others milled to match. White paint with colonial green trim finished the job, and the house would have looked at home in a New England village.

Making Room for the Bath

INSIDE, WE HOPED OUR LUCK WITH WOOD WOULD EXTEND to the kitchen floor, and so it did. The contractor took up eight layers of linoleum, carpeting, and 1920s newspaper to reveal wide and primitive floorboards that exceeded our hopes. Only two were dodgy, and those were replaced with some barnwood from behind the contractor's house. He also removed the hateful formica countertops and replaced them with pine, and built a white picket perimeter fence to contain our feisty dog, Oscar.

Meanwhile, Paul and I were not idle. We sponge-painted virtually every wall in the house, lending depth and texture to the plaster. We also stenciled a few walls and floors, and tried our hand at graining all the doors facing the central hallway. We learned from our mistakes — and there were a few doozies — but we took as our guide the color card from a milk paint supplier, and our choices were mainly good.

Our last big project, slipped in under the wire before our daughter Dorothy was born last summer, was turning a spare room off the master bedroom into a wardrobe and bathroom. We were lucky enough to find a wonderful c. 1926 clawfoot tub and pedestal sink through a Massachusetts

company, who used a New Jersey-bound customer to transport them to us (they paid him in porcelain faucets). Fixtures had to be placed with care because the room's floorboards were also the kitchen's ceiling, and we wanted to box in as little of the ceiling as possible. Ultimately, this meant that you can sit on the toilet and wash your hands in the sink at the same time, and that only people 5'6" or under should attempt to shower — but that's another story.

First-time visitors still shake their heads and say, "It's so old!" We say, "You want to see old?" And out come the pictures of our much-loved Massachusetts home. (After all, once you've lived in a 1740 house, everything else is modern.) True, we love our new old house, but that Massachusetts house at the end of its own dirt road is something of a Paradise Lost to us, made even more poignant by the fact that the people who bought it have altered it in ways too horrible to detail. When we returned for our first and last visit a year ago, we saw that what had once been

a house staunchly rooted in pre-revolutionary design is now a house that might well have been built last week. In a very real sense, there is one fewer old house in Massachusetts, but perhaps the modest restoration of our Mt. Rose home redresses the balance, if only a tiny bit. 

Eight layers of linoleum were lifted off the wide board floor in the kitchen. Fortunately, only two boards had to be replaced.



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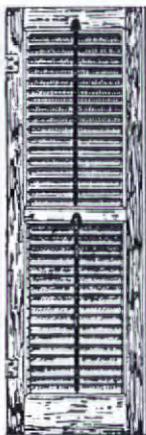
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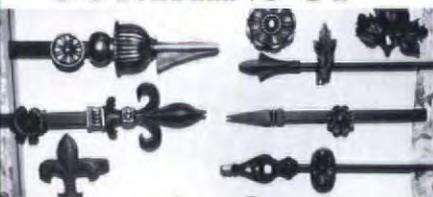
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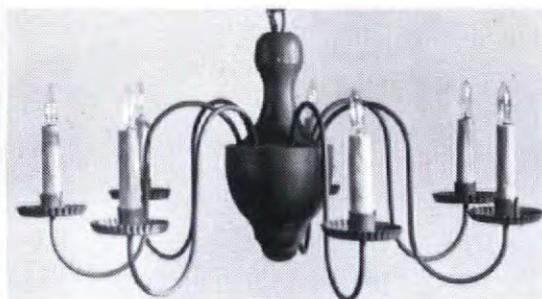
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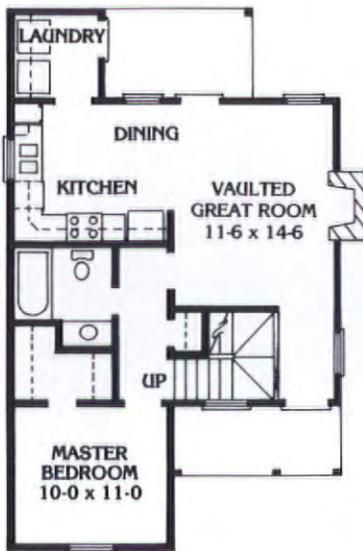
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GABLED-ELL HOMESTEAD

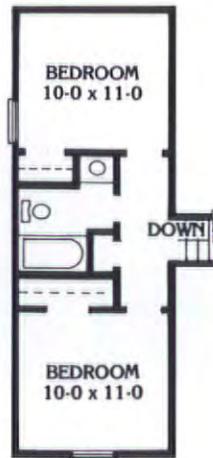


THE DECORATIVE SHINGLES ON THE FRONT GABLE and the spindlework on the porch single out this country cottage as of the Victorian era. Although small, the open floor plan is inviting, and the first floor master

bedroom is neatly tucked away from the living area. The vaulted great room adds to the sense of spaciousness. Upstairs, two equal-sized bedrooms share a bath.



first floor

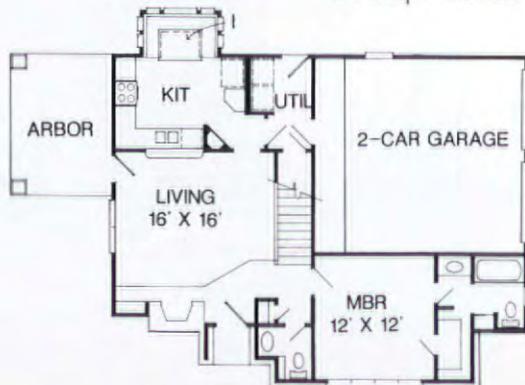
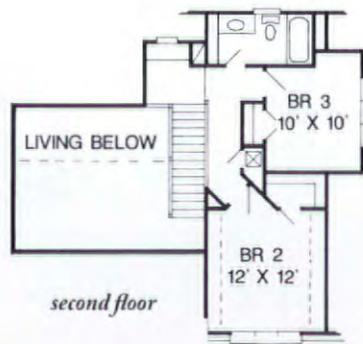
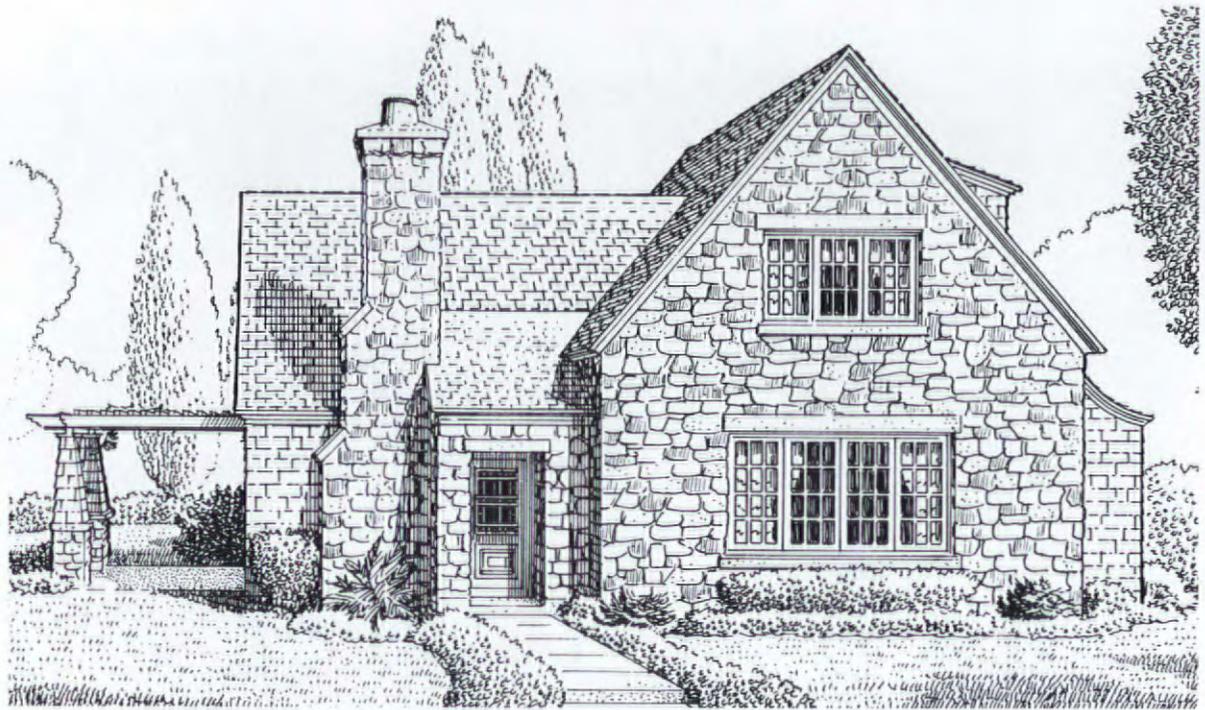


second floor

Plan HR-46-VI

Cost.....	\$170
Set of 5.....	\$230
Set of 8.....	\$270
Bedrooms.....	3
Bathrooms.....	2
Square Footage.....	1,098'
First Floor.....	702'
Second Floor.....	396'
Ceiling Height	
First Floor.....	8'
Second Floor.....	8'
Overall Dimensions	
Width.....	26'
Depth.....	40'

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Plan LG-09-PV

Cost.....	\$170
Set of 5.....	\$230
Set of 8.....	\$280
Bedrooms	3
Bathrooms	2½
Square Footage	1,370'
First Floor.....	861'
Second Floor.....	509'
Ceiling Height	
First Floor.....	9'
Second Floor.....	9'
Overall Dimensions	
Width.....	41' 4"
Width (w/arbor).....	51' 4"
Depth.....	37' 6"



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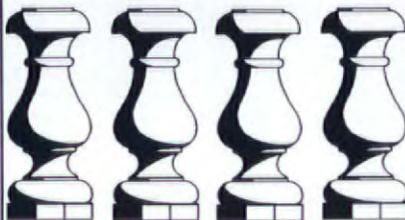
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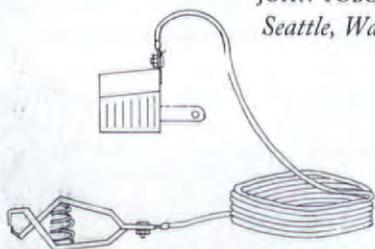
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— JOHN TOBOLA
Seattle, Wash.



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— JESSICA KRAKOW
San Francisco, Calif.

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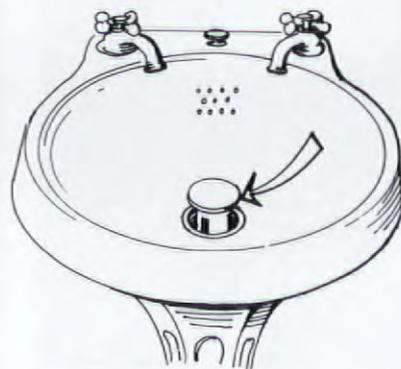
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drain rim in the basin.

- 4) Squeeze a thin bead of clear silicone caulk around the plug's lip.
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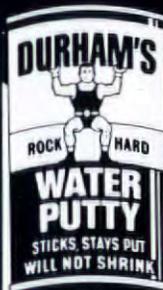
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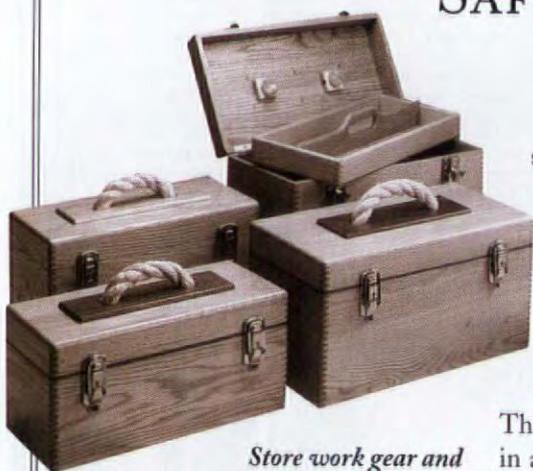
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by Lynn Elliott



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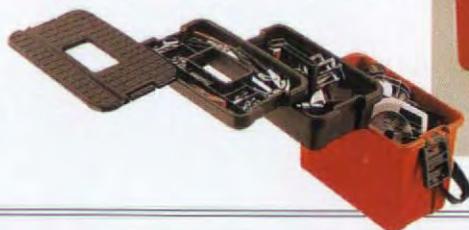
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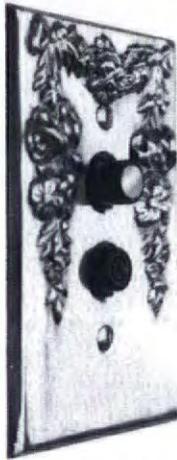


(above) Reduce the risk of strains and injuries with Ergodyne ProFlex back supports, knee pads, and anti-vibration gloves. (below) The SST tool box contains three storage trays and is strong enough to be used as a sawhorse.



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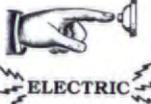
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Wallpaper Paster

IF YOU'RE HANGING PRE-PASTED borders or wallcoverings, put away your water trays and



(above) Wallpaper Pal is an all-in-one system that activates pre-pasted wallpapers. (right) Shur-Line's 4" rollers and paint grid will make quick work of any paint job.

brushes and check out the Border Buddy and the Wallpaper Pal, two new systems that contain an activating adhesive. The roll of wallpaper is held in place at one end of the device, and then the sheet is pulled across the adhesive, which is evenly distributed without dry spots. There are two versions of Border Buddy available: one for attaching borders to painted surfaces and the other for affixing border to wallpaper. Custom Building Products, 13001 Seal Beach Blvd., Dept. OHJ, Seal Beach, CA 90740; (310) 598-8808.

Paint Grid

WHEN PAINTING WITH ROLLERS, try using a paint grid from Shur-Line. The grid can be inserted directly into a five-gallon pail, eliminating the need for a paint tray. Shur-Line also offers a line of 4" foam and fabric rollers with 12" or 16" handles. The paint grid costs \$1.50; the rollers are \$4 and \$4.50. Shur-Line, Inc., 2000 Commerce Pkwy., P.O. Box 285, Dept. OHJ, Lancaster, NY 14086; (716) 683-2500.



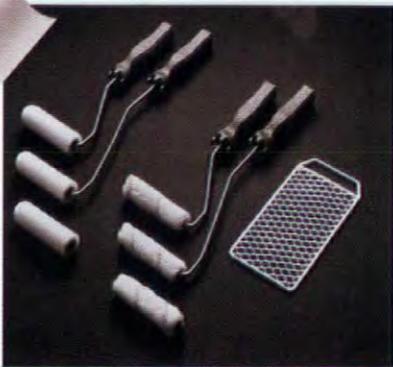
(above) Keep tables from tilting on uneven floors with Wobble Wedges. (below) The KleenEdge Painter's Tape sticks to difficult surfaces.



folded pieces of cardboard under the dining room table as well as level kitchen cabinets, air conditioners, and water heaters. A six-wedge package costs \$1.98. Focus 12, Inc., 1705 14th St. #360, Dept. OHJ, Boulder, CO 80302; (800) 635-4494.

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SOME AREAS CAN BE DIFFICULT to mask during paint jobs. Daubert's High-Tack KleenEdge Painter's Tape has an extra-strong adhesive to hold fast on tough surfaces, such as concrete, freshly sanded areas, and greasy or dusty spots. It is offered in 60-yard rolls. Daubert Coated Products, Inc., 1 Westbrook Corporate Center, Dept. OHJ, Westchester, IL 60153; (800) 634-1303.



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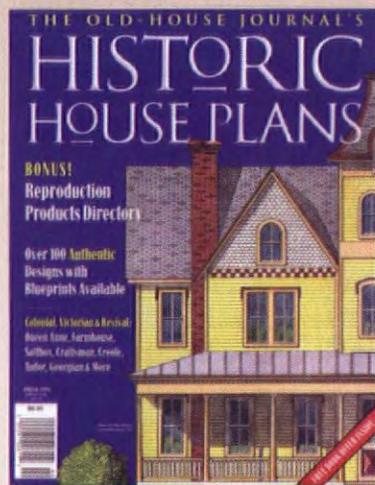
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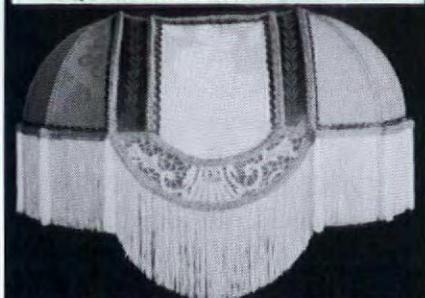
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Real Estate

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NORWALK, CT—Authentically renovated and updated c. 1903 Victorian listed with Historical Society, 3-storey plus full basement, 4 bdrms, 1-1/2 baths w/wainscotting and clawfoot tub, "tin" ceiling kitchen, living room, dining room w/fabric treatment of walls and ceiling. Walk to train, easy commute to NYC. \$175,000. Call (203) 852-1892.

WINDHAM COUNTY, CT—1784 center chimney Colonial, 8 rooms, 1-1/2 baths, 6 fireplaces, wide board floors, attached 2-car garage, 800 sq. ft. office space, and 8-car storage, quiet village setting. Perfect for restorer, home, business or office. \$189,900. (203) 456-1920.

BLUE ISLAND, IL—1929 Arthur Seyfarth House, Colonial Revival, grand staircase w/balcony, formal living and dining rooms w/marble fireplaces, library, solarium, attached garage, original kitchen cabinets, original lights, 3 bdrms, 3-1/2 baths w/original fixtures, full basement. \$250,000. (708) 385-3661.

CHICAGO, IL—Built as the Senator's home, this vintage Victorian mansion

features much original charm including a lovely staircase, hardwood floors, wood trim, original lighting fixtures, a modern kitchen, wraparound porch, turret and large lot. This home is located in the Old Irving Park area of Chicago, a neighborhood of charming larger homes set on sweeping lots with much to offer. The house has 17 rooms including 8 bedrooms and 4 baths. Eligible for landmark designation. \$349,000. Call Elaine Frietsch at (312) 794-1633.

JOLIET, IL—Majestic 1891 Limestone Mansion. 15 Rooms, 3 foyers, 5 fireplaces, open staircase, elevator to finished basement. Decorative plaster walls and ceilings and original oak, cherry and mahogany woodwork. B&B potential. Near both Harrah & Empress Riverboat Casinos. \$315,000. Dave Henderson, Bell Realty (815) 744-1000.

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BELLEVILLE, KS — 1849 Queen Anne at the "Crossroads of America" (US Hwys 36 & 81). 13 rooms, full attic, half basement. Interior restored in 1981. 2 frpl, pocket doors, open front stairway, ornate woodwork, and stained glass throughout. Perfect B&B. \$100,000. (708) 479-5270.

BERKSHIRES, MA—Mint 1812 Center Hall Colonial. Fireplaces, wideboard floors, original mouldings, 3-4 bdrms. Cross-country ski heaven plus river frontage! Country but convenient to Northampton and Pittsfield. Restored Civil War ell could be income-producer. \$199,900. Call (914) 235-6000 for brochure/details.

BERKSHIRE COUNTY, MA—1769 Georgian House on protected 115 acre farm. Mature landscaping, orchards, pastures, and hayfields (70% open land). Both the 32x36 2-1/2-storey house and 32x60 1850's barn require restoration.

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FITCHBURG, MA—1894 Victorian w/7 large rooms w/cypress woodwork, 3 bdrms, 2 baths, 1 fireplace, very large kitchen and closets. \$125,000. Call (508) 345-4113.

WESTON, MA—Known as the Nathan Hager house, this venerable Weston landmark built c. 1786 combines beautiful Georgian and Federal detail throughout it's expansive 12-room interior. Very bright and well maintained, it also has a 3-room apartment option. Exclusive. \$463,000. Call Post Road Realty. (617) 891-4111.

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LAGRANGE, MO—2-storey pre-Civil War home on 5 lots. 5 bdrms, 1 fireplace, 2 baths, 9 rooms total. Needs major restoration. \$25,000. Call (314) 655-4679, after 5:30 p.m.

GATES COUNTY, NC—Pipkin-Goodman-Edwards House. 1750-1775 clapboard gambrel-roof house. Federal and Greek revival interiors. Needs complete rehab. Within commuting distance Edenton/Albemarle Sound and Norfolk/Suffolk/Virginia Beach. 1850 sq. ft. \$11,000. Preservation/NC. (919) 832-1651.

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WATERVILLE, OH—Located right on the river in Waterville's historic district, this home's interior has been renovated. Includes artist's studio, well lighted, with natural gas heat. House and studio have window walls overlooking the river. \$119,000. Contact: Jill (419) 691-9588.

WELLINGTON, OH—1873 Victorian brick Italianate, beautifully restored. 13 rooms, 3-4 bedrooms, 1-1/2 baths, back and front staircases, pantry, original woodwork and chandeliers, ornate porches, gazebo and 2-car garage. Located in historic district ("Spirit of '76" village) near Oberlin College, 35 miles west of Cleveland. \$159,000. (216) 647-5002.

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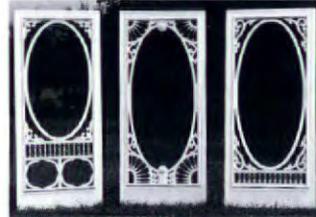
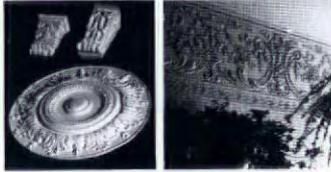
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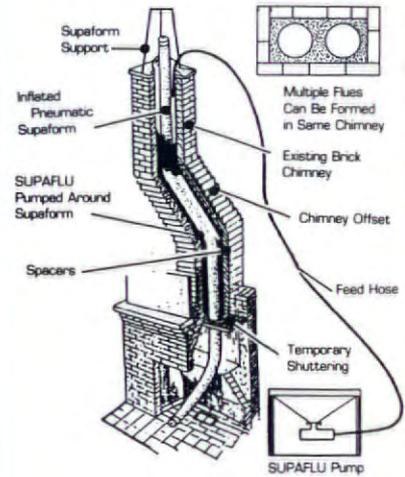
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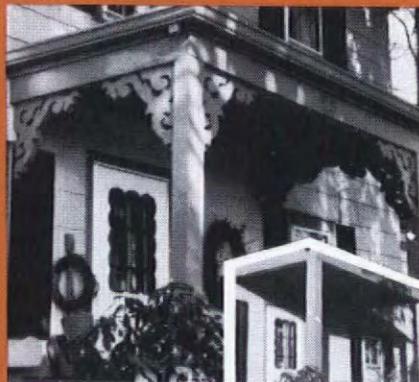
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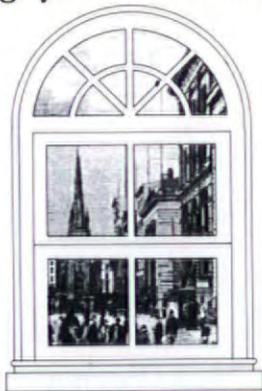
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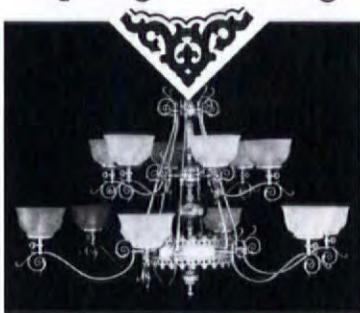
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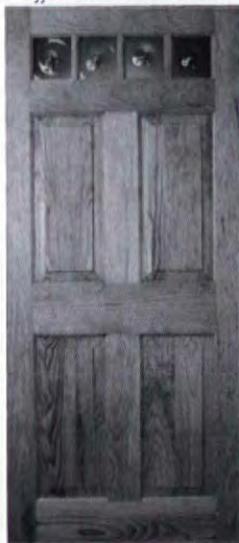
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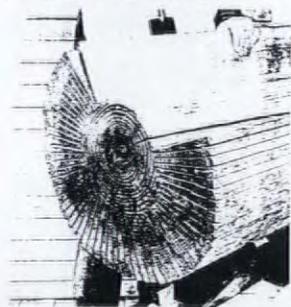
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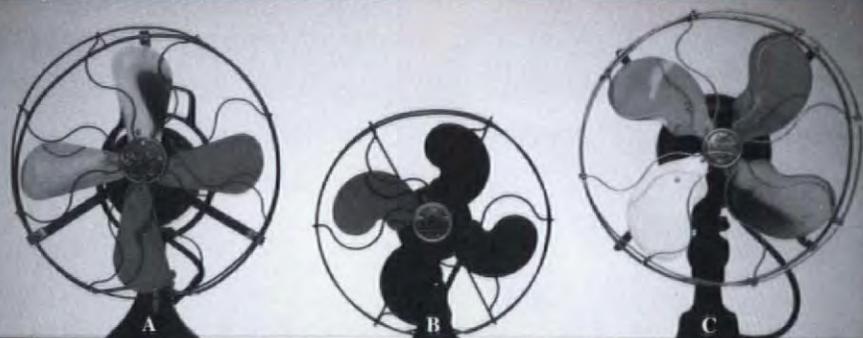
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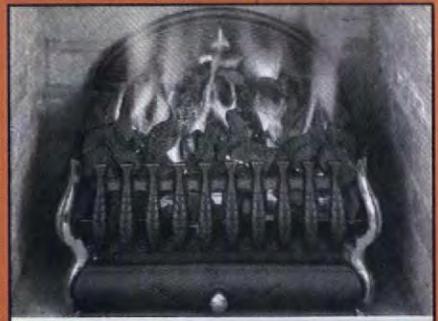
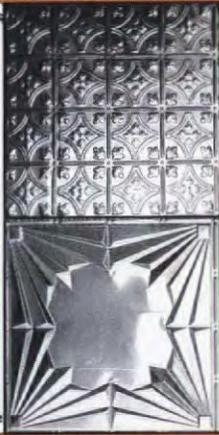


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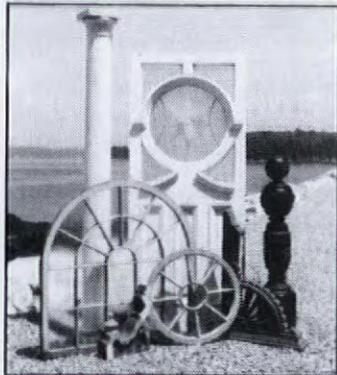
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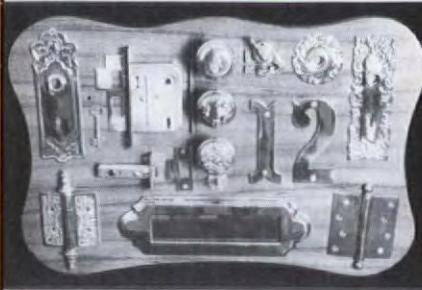
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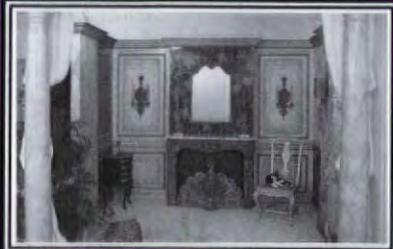
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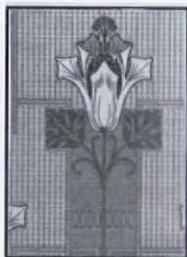
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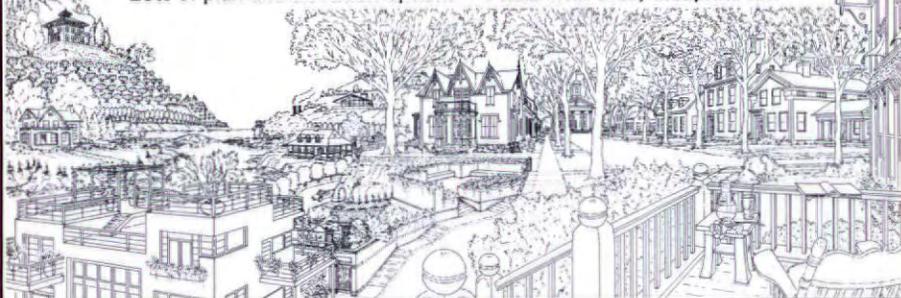
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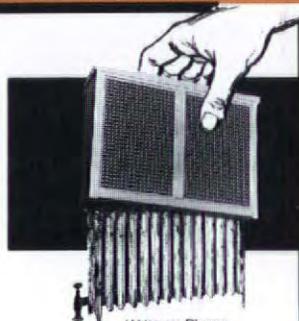
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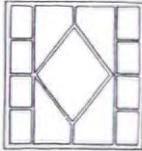
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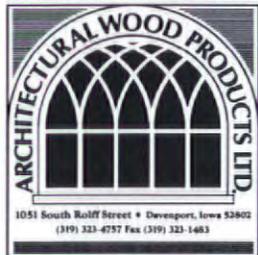
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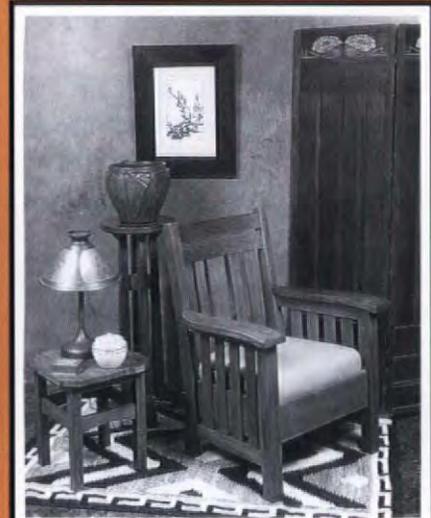
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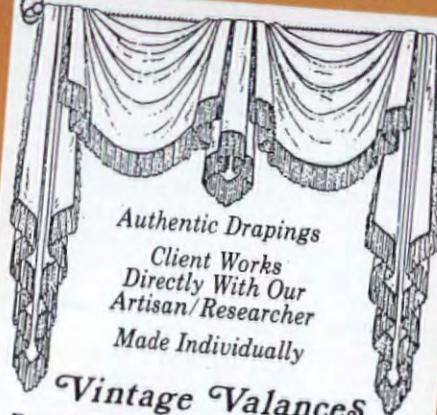
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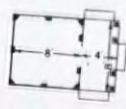
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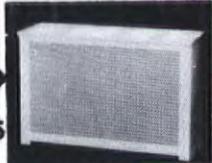
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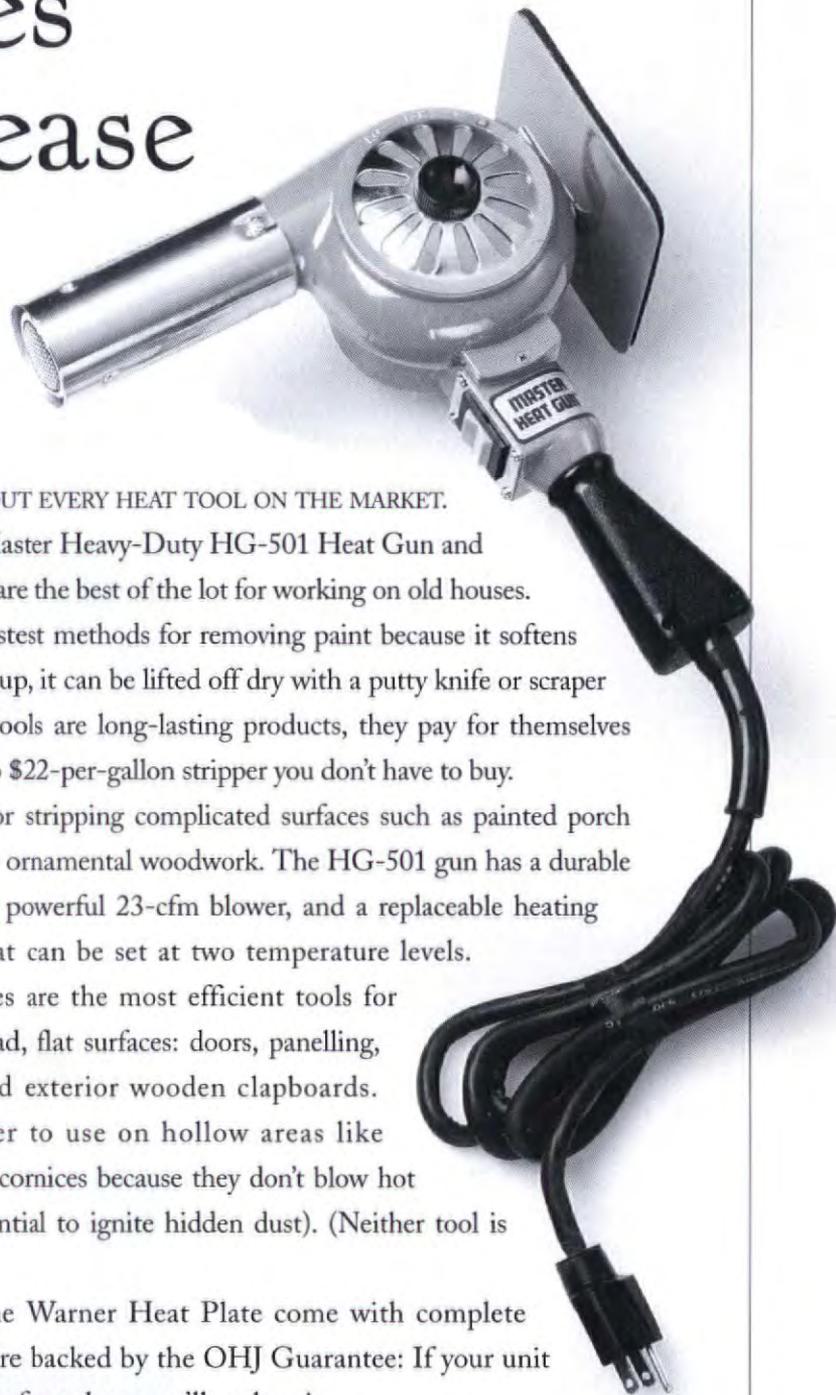
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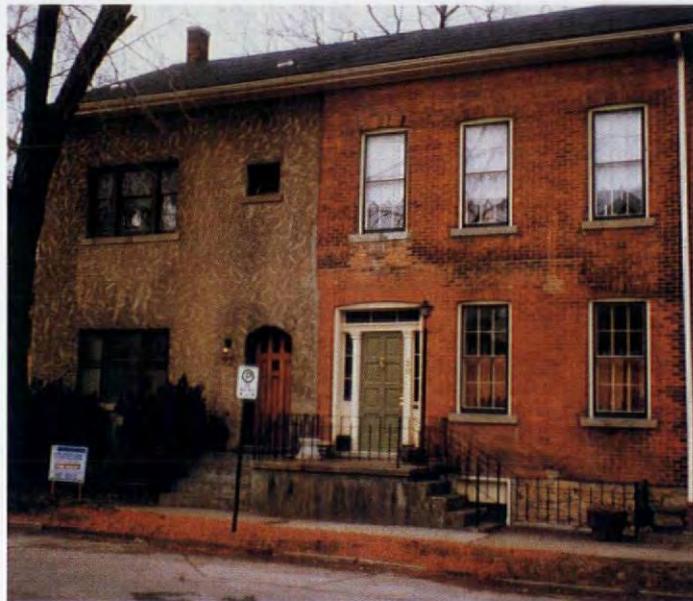
Remuddling

Subtle Remuddles

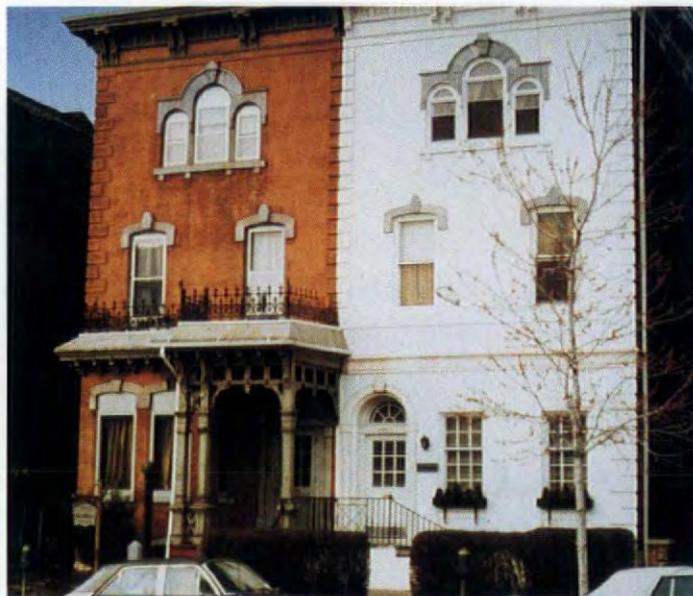
REMUDDLING IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED with contemporary renovations — adding, say, substitute siding and post-modern windows to create glaring anachronisms — but here's a pair of party-wall buildings that quietly suffered stylistic switcheroos earlier in this century. In Ontario, Canada, one half of this c. 1830 Georgian duo decided to go Arts & Crafts with the rest of the neighborhood. On its own, the stuccoed exterior, three-part windows, and arched doorway of the Craftsmanized house probably wouldn't catch your eye. However, next to the single windows and sidelighted door of its Georgian partner, it sets up a head-on collision between two centuries of architectural style.

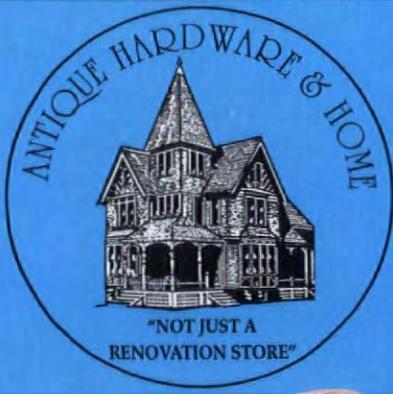
The architectural shift in the second example, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is even closer to call. Before World War II, this stately Italianate town house couple were mirror images of each other. Due, no doubt, to the Colonial Revival craze, the left-side mate lost its ornate portico and the first-storey windows were changed to six-over-six versions. Adding a doorway fanlight, an obligatory white paint job, and green window boxes completed the transformation. No matter which side you're on, it's clear the 20th-century updates of these buildings are now out of context with their better halves. Still, *are* these houses remuddled? You decide.

WIN FAME AND \$50. If you spot a classic example of remuddling, send us clear color slides. We'll award you \$50 if your photos are selected. Remuddling Editor, Old-House Journal, 2 Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930.



Time Warp: A 19th-century Georgian town house meets a 20th-century Arts & Crafts conversion in St. Catharines, Ontario (above). In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, an exuberant brick Victorian contrasts with a stark white Colonial Revival redo (below).





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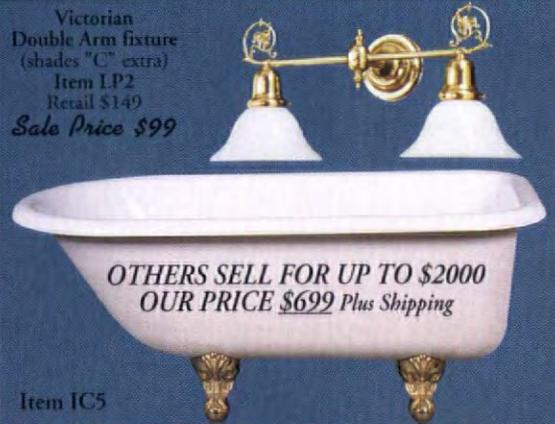


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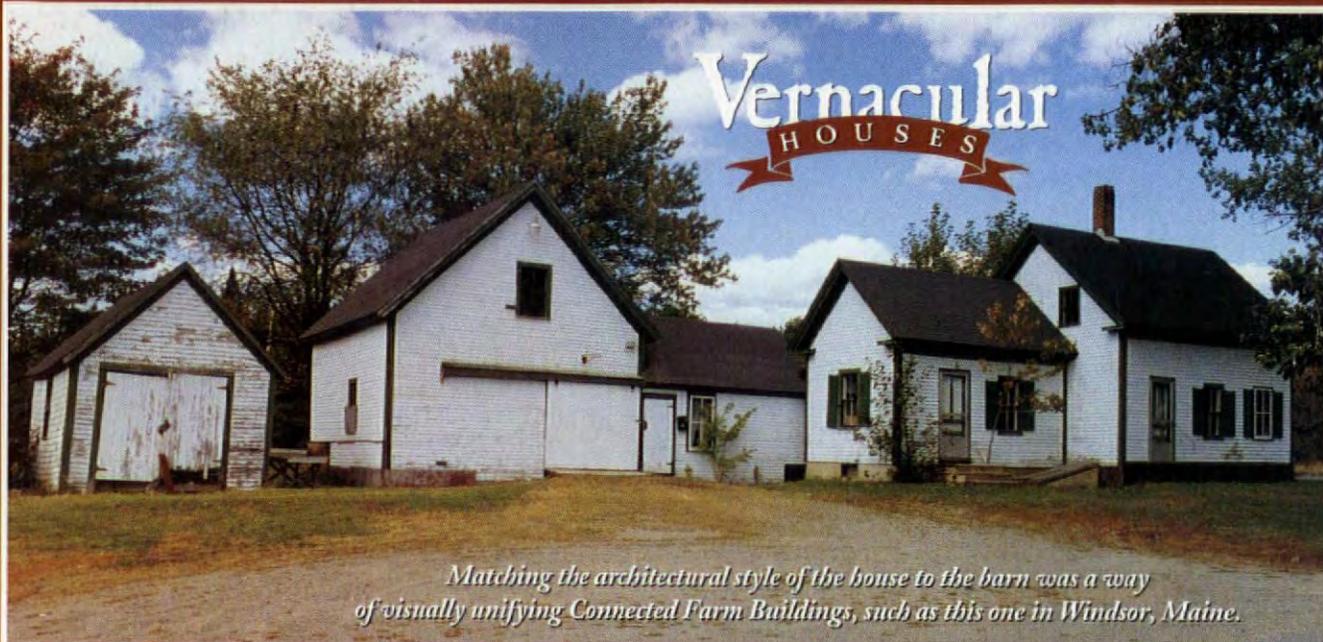
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Vernacular HOUSES



Matching the architectural style of the house to the barn was a way of visually unifying Connected Farm Buildings, such as this one in Windsor, Maine.

CONNECTED FARM BUILDINGS OF MAINE

BIG HOUSE, LITTLE HOUSE, back house, barn.” The old saying describes the arrangement of Maine farm buildings into a single unit that enjoyed enormous popularity in the 19th century. Thousands of Connected Farm Buildings were built from the 1830s on, and the characteristic string of rooflines remains a common sight in rural Maine.

The typical 4-part arrangement of Connected Farm Buildings: (from left to right) barn, back house with privy, little house with two kitchens and a woodshed, and finally, the big house.

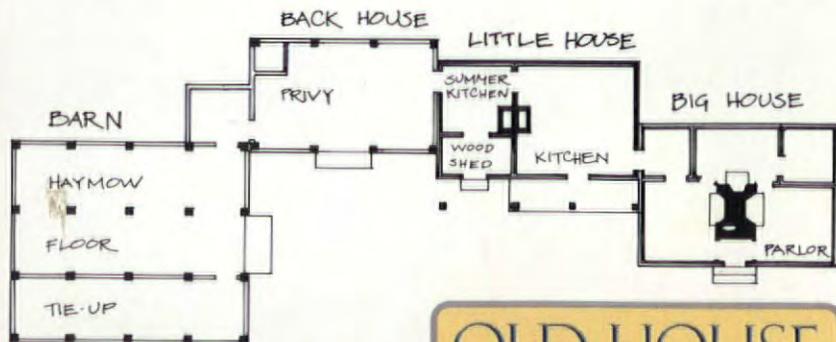
The configuration came about as farmers in Maine (and to a lesser extent, northern New England) achieved relative prosperity. “It met the requirements of a more commercially oriented, mixed-farming, home-industry operation, which had become the only viable means of farming in New England,” writes architect Thomas Hubka, who has studied the tradition.* Success on the hardscrabble Maine soil demanded diversity, hence the assemblage: In the big house were the parlor and bedrooms; in the little house, a kitchen, summer kitchen, firewood storage, and women’s work

area; the back house might have held a wagon bay and workshop, in addition to the loo, located next to the barn. The barn housed animals and their feed. The yard in front of each structure had related uses.

These diverse workspaces allowed farmers to augment traditional farm products with things like lumber, clothing, and blacksmithing — all under the same roof. While some farm journals initially pooh-pooed the alignment, farmers recognized its efficiency and employed oxen power to rearrange their existing buildings. Later homesteads were built or expanded this way.

Not every Connected Farm Building forms a straight line, nor are they limited to four structures. Some of them ramble through as much as 80 years’ worth of additions. The configuration maintained its popularity until farming ground to a halt early this century.

— HANNAH HOLMES
Portland, Maine



OLD-HOUSE
JOURNAL

* *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn* by Thomas C. Hubka, 1984 (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England).