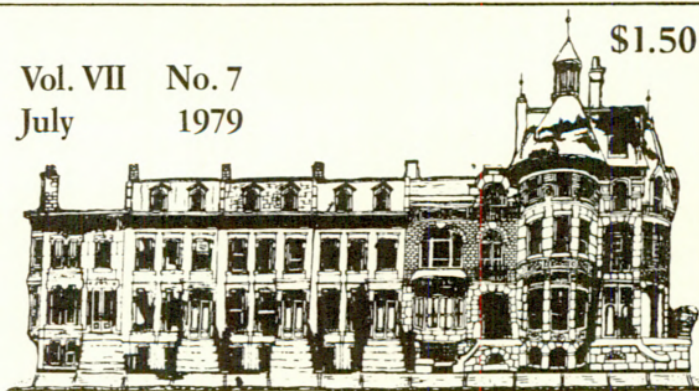


# THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

Vol. VII No. 7  
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Restoration And Maintenance Techniques For The Antique House



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## Coming Next Month

REPAIRING A COLONIAL ROOF

By Catherine & Donald Minnery, Vermillion, S.D.

**W**E LEARNED the hard way about making repairs in stucco. Before sharing our experiences with other Journal readers, however, we wanted to expose our repair work to the rigors of South Dakota's winter and spring weather. Although this weather has been harsh, our repair work has held up well.

OUR HOUSE is a somewhat plain stuccoed 1½-storey bungalow-inspired structure built around 1915. When we purchased it in 1976, we knew some work was needed on the exterior. Two small areas of the stucco had cracked, and some of the lath was exposed. But once we started work on the house, it became clear that every side of the house needed some work. We ended up replacing nearly all of the front facade.

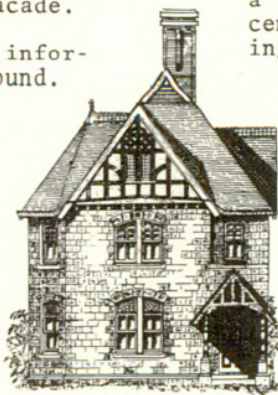
WE SEARCHED IN VAIN for helpful how-to information on stucco repair. Little was found. And none of what we found dealt with matching texture of large areas of new work to the old stucco. Our stucco appeared to have been applied in at least two coats—and small chips of stone and perhaps shell chips were applied to the top coat before it dried. It appeared that we would have to improvise a method using available materials.

FROM OUR PREVIOUS RESEARCH, we knew that a "soft" stucco mortar would

probably be desirable because it would be more elastic than a rigid portland cement mortar (see OHJ, June 1979 pp. 66-67). An elastic stucco would seem to have a greater chance of adhering to the wood lath during the wood's swelling and shrinkage with changes in moisture. But the stucco would also have to withstand moisture without weakening. So we decided that a good first or "scratch" coat would be:

1 part lime  
1 part portland cement  
5 parts sand

WITH THIS STARTING POINT, we purchased a half ton of sand, a half ton of pea gravel, a 50-lb. bag of lime and a 50-lb. bag of cement. We used a wheelbarrow as a mixing container, and a hoe served as our mixing tool. To apply the stucco, we purchased two trowels.



WE STARTED OUR WORK at the back of the house—reasoning that our initial experimental work should be in the least conspicuous area. Our application technique did indeed improve markedly as we gained experience, so we were very happy that our initial efforts are relatively inconspicuous.

(Continued on pg. 77)

# The Old-House Journal Receives Award From The National Trust

THE STAFF AT The Old-House Journal, busily making preparations to celebrate our sixth anniversary, was delighted to learn that we had been selected to receive a coveted award from The National Trust for Historic Preservation.

THE GORDON GRAY AWARD for achievement in preservation was presented by James Biddle, president of the Trust.

MR. BIDDLE, in announcing the award during ceremonies at the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., said in reference to The Journal: "This eminently practical guide addresses the most basic questions of renovation and maintenance for the owner of an historic house. Not only does it fill a vital need for the exchange of information among preservationists, but its usefulness is helping to attract new people to the field. You are rendering an outstanding service to the cause of preservation."

A TOTAL of 16 individuals, organizations and corporations were honored at the annual awards ceremony. The National Trust presents the awards as part of its mission to promote historic preservation in the United States.

## THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL<sup>®</sup>

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THE TRUST IS AN EDUCATIONAL and charitable organization chartered by Congress to help Americans preserve sites, buildings and objects of national significance or interest, and has more than 155,000 members.



The staff of The Old-House Journal happily exhibits the Gordon Gray Award presented by The National Trust. The award consists of a certificate plus a silver goblet—a replica of a goblet ordered from London in 1777 by Justice Benjamin Chew. The

original is in The Trust's collection at Cliveden—Chew's country house in Philadelphia. Left to right are: Joan O'Reilly, Charles Johnson, Clem Labine, Carolyn Flaherty, Mike Carew and Patricia Poore. (Photo By Jim Kalett)

# An Old Stone Federal House Redeemed

By Barbara Schiller

**T**HE HOUSE PROUDLY BEARS a plaque proclaiming its birthdate. The stonework is beautifully crafted. The trim is carefully painted. Through the windows one can glimpse mellow old furniture. The grounds and garden are a delight.

IF YOU'VE EVER WONDERED about the lucky people who can afford to live in a house such as this, here is the story of one such family--Margaret and Carey Brush of Cooperstown, New York.

IT IS NOT A STORY of unlimited wealth. Carey is one of the staff of nearby Oneonta College. During the summers the Brushes rent rooms to people taking seminars at the New York Historical Association. It is, however, a story of great devotion and unceasing work to restore Greystone, their thirteen-room late-Federal style house built in 1831.

GREYSTONE HAD FALLEN on hard times even before the New York Historical Association had received it as a bequest in 1970. Feeling it wasn't feasible to retain ownership, they put it on the market in 1971. In March of that year the Brushes were shown through the house. The walls were smoked and streaked from the malfunctioning furnace and leaky roof.

**F**IFTEEN DISHPANS were placed in various positions in the attic in an attempt to catch the leaks. Much of the wallpaper was hanging in strips from the walls. The plaster was cracked. The kitchen was a nightmare. The second and third floors reeked of bat guano. The garden was a jungle. At least seventy five window lights were cracked. Carey could put his arm in up to the elbow between the wooden frames and the exterior stone walls of most of the windows.

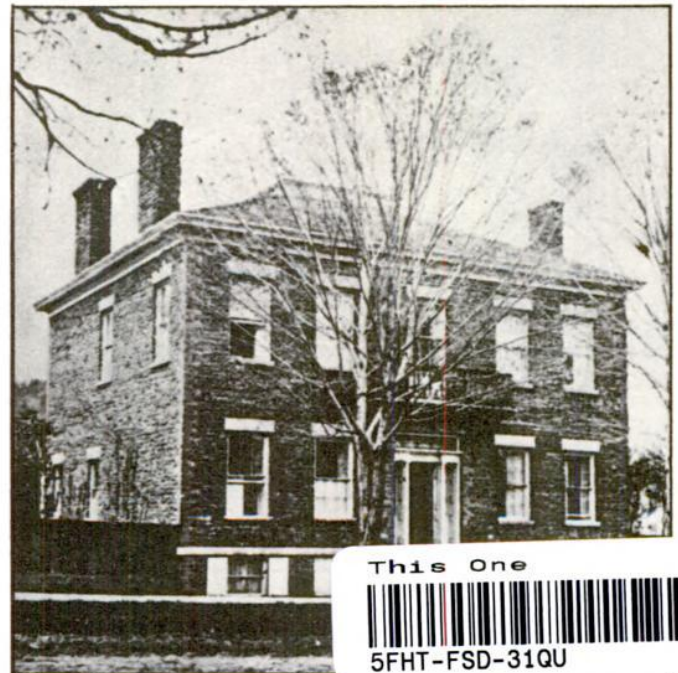
THE BRUSHES BOUGHT GREYSTONE. It was the realization of a dream. For many years they had talked of buying and restoring an historic house. Now they had one.



IN MAY, their twenty-one year old son, Bart, moved in and camped out for three months while doing all the dirty work involved in cleaning out the accumulation of a decade of neglect.

IN AUGUST, Margaret and Carey moved in. They had no kitchen, but they did have an ambitious five year plan. Rising costs and inflation have extended that plan another five years.

THEY PLANNED TO DO all the preparation work before the professionals came on the job to upgrade the plumbing, the heating and electrical systems. Chimneys had to be replaced. The garden was to be weeded, the shrubs cut back a third and a fence built in the 1930's to be scraped and sanded. The entranceway



The original section of Greystone is a forty-square-foot structure built of grey limestone. Dormers, porches and a wooden kitchen wing were added in the 1890's.



The main entrance is the only touch of richness on the classically simple facade. The paint was burned off the entranceway and it was painted white with a black trim.



The main entranceway, circa 1867.

was to be restored, too. But that first year the major work was centered on Greystone's interior.

**S**O THE BRUSHES scrubbed down everything, steamed off the old wallpaper and burned off all the paint. They learned by doing. The living room had been painted a light grey. Not very pretty, so Carey carefully painted over it. By morning his handiwork was peeling off. The light grey color wasn't paint, it was grease.

OF NECESSITY the second year was devoted to work that required less expenditure of money--garden shrubs were cut back and the lawn reseeded. Pointing was begun on the exterior stone walls.

**M**ORE WORK WAS DONE UPSTAIRS during the third year. New fixtures were installed in the bathroom. The master bedroom was completely renovated and restored--ceiling, walls, floors and fireplace. Outside, fences were restored and new gates put up. All exterior blinds were removed until they could be stripped and repainted.

THE THIRD YEAR saw the wooden trim of the stone part of the house painted and some storm windows installed.

THE FOURTH YEAR was the year of the bats. 150 gallons of bat guano had been removed from the attics a few years before, but the smell remained--overpoweringly so in one of the bedrooms. The chimney which had been so hospitable to the bats had to be scraped, sanded and remortared, the room totally renovated.

**R**ESTORING THE EXTERIOR OF Greystone is a long term ambitious project--one that the Brushes feel will give them great satisfaction. The fifth year was Operation Dormer. Leaky dormers were removed and the original Federal style hipped roofline was restored. More work was done that fifth year to restore the exterior appearance of Greystone. Porches built in 1890 were removed, grey steel clapboard siding was applied to all exterior walls of the kitchen wing and the 1890 windows were replaced with the six over six windows in the same style as those in the stone part of the house.

SINCE THEN THE BRUSHES have done some interior decoration, and work in the garden. Their son is building a windmill so they can look forward to having their own source of energy.

OVER THE YEARS while all this work was going on, Margaret set about researching the history of Greystone, both as an aid in restoration and as a labor of love. As she says:

"FOR NEARLY A CENTURY AND A HALF Greystone has endured. For most of those years, it has been well preserved, but twice neglect has endangered its existence. Now, once again, it is beginning to exhibit a vibrant and unified appearance." ❄

(Stucco—Cont'd. from page 73)

**F**OR REMOVING the loose stucco, we used a claw hammer and a small chisel. Sheets of plastic were used as dropcloths around the bottom of the house; this made for easier clean-up. To remove the stucco, we chiseled a clean line around the damaged area. Then with the hammer claw—or hammer and chisel—we pulled the loose stucco off.

THE LATH USED on our house consists of wide planks with keys or grooves cut into them. All of the old material had to be removed—especially from the grooves in the lath so that the new material would have a firm anchor.

FITTING THE CHISEL under the loose stucco, we could slide it along the groove and remove the surface material plus the stucco keys in the grooves fairly easily. At this point we should recommend that anyone doing this work should be wearing a good pair of safety goggles, heavy work gloves, and a hat with a brim.

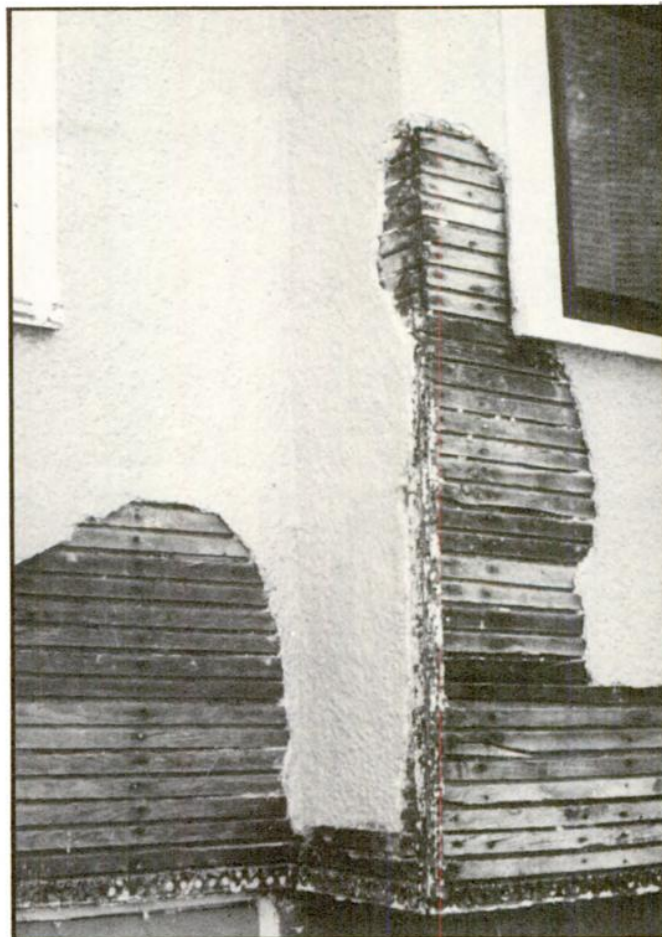
DURING THE REMOVAL PROCESS, don't get carried away and take off too much stucco at a time. If a heavy rain should come along, you can get a lot of water damage inside your house. Generally, we removed only what we knew we could replace that day or the next.

### The Repair Sequence

THIS WAS THE SEQUENCE we normally followed in the stucco repair process:

- Loose stucco removed.
- Lath swept clean of all loose material.
- Any small areas of lath that were damaged were repaired by nailing wire lath in place.
- Any rusted corner beads were replaced with new corner beads.
- Wood lath was dampened by spraying lightly with a garden hose set for fine spray.
- Apply first coat of stucco (scratch coat)
- Cure first coat for several days, sprinkling it with water from time to time if direct sun or dry weather causes stucco to dry too rapidly.
- Apply top coat.
- Wait 1-3 hours, then wire brush top coat, using mild pressure. This exposed the pea gravel that gave the stucco texture.

**O**UR FIRST ATTEMPT at stucco application was rather comical. An apprehensive friend watched while we awkwardly tried to pretend we were masons. Most of the stucco mortar was splattering onto the ground. Our friend mercifully left. We soon realized that we were missing something other than experience: We needed a board to hold the stucco mortar close to the wall while we pushed it into place with our trowels. Masons call this mortar board a "hawk."



Loose stucco has been stripped, exposing the lath below. All stucco adhering to the lath must be removed so that new material will bond tightly.

WE CONSTRUCTED our own hawks out of some shelving pine and some thick dowel rod. Armed with these new tools, we soon had our first area covered. We noticed that a steady pressure is needed for easy application. A gentle but firm pressure with the trowel plus a smearing motion (like icing a cake) gave best results. This also produced ridges in the scratch coat that help the top coat to adhere tightly. In addition, the scratch coat should be scratched with a piece of wire lath or the tip of your trowel to create cross-hatch markings on the surface to create bonding places for the top coat.



### Matching Stucco Texture

**M**ATCHING THE TEXTURE of the existing stucco required much trial-and-error. We mixed test batches of the top coat stucco mixture, varying the amount of pea gravel. The mixture we finally used contained the following:



Don Minnery is applying the finish coat over the scratch coat. Dark section at bottom is the finish coat that has already been wire-brushed for texture. Light area to the right is the original painted stucco.

- 1 part lime
- 1 part portland cement
- 4 parts sand
- 1 part pea gravel

THIS MIXTURE, plus the wire brushing technique mentioned earlier, gave a satisfactory match between new and old work.

THE ONLY PROBLEMS with our work that we noticed was that a few hairline cracks showed up in a couple of places...and sometimes the new patch shrank a bit from the old stucco. We attributed this to too much water in a few of the batches of mortar, and an excessively fast rate of curing caused by some hot dry weather. To fix the hairline cracks, we filled them with architectural grade caulk before painting.


THE ONLY OTHER PROBLEM we had was in developing uniform pressure with the wire brush when we were brushing the top coat. On a few occasions, we scrubbed too hard with the wire brush near the edges of the patches, which meant that the texture didn't match as closely as we would have wished.

WE APPLIED SEARS Masonry Primer to all the patched areas, following directions on the can as to proper curing time to allow for the stucco. We followed with a coat of regular masonry paint over both the old and new work.

### Costs and Cats

**O**UR PROJECT, though ultimately successful, was at times quite scary. Seeing the front of the house stripped to its bones was frightening. Neighbors kept commenting on our courage. One other problem that we encountered, which hasn't been mentioned earlier, was keeping our cat—and all the neighbors' cats—out of the sand pile!

THE BIGGEST BONUS for us was the economy of the entire project. We ultimately purchased 2½ tons of sand, 1 ton of gravel, 250 lb. of cement and 250 lb. of lime. The entire cost for this material—plus the tools we mentioned—was about \$95.00.

ALTHOUGH IT WAS HARD WORK, we both agree that the project was more enjoyable than stripping the 8 fluted legs on our dining room table! 

## More About Stucco

By The Old-House Journal Technical Staff

**S**TUCCO HAS BEEN USED since Egyptian times as a coating for the inside and outside of buildings. So it can certainly be thought of as a "traditional" building material. Up until the late 19th century, it was most common to use stucco as a coating over brick and stone walls. With the advent of the Tudor revival and bungalow styles, stucco was applied over wood (and later, wire) lath.

BRICK OR STONE BUILDINGS of 18th or 19th century vintage sometimes had a stucco or "parging" applied as a waterproofing sealer. Often, this stucco was a simple lime and sand mortar—identical to the "soft" mortars used in the construction of masonry walls up to the mid-19th century. Sometimes animal hair was added to the stucco mixture for added mechanical strength.

HOMEOWNERS with an old stuccoed building who find that they have brick or stone underneath are often seized with the urge to strip off the stucco "to expose the natural beauty" of the stone or brick. Such a stripping operation should be approached with GREAT CAUTION—and only after consulting with a masonry expert who is familiar with old buildings. The stucco was doubtless applied for very sound reasons, and stripping it off could cause serious water penetration problems inside the house. An added consideration is that it is almost impossible to remove stucco from masonry (especially brickwork) without some mechanical damage to the stone or brick and the mortar joints.

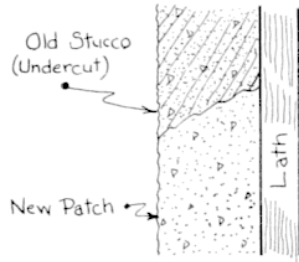
**A**LTHOUGH EACH STUCCO REPAIR problem has to be analyzed in terms of its own peculiarities, there are a few general principles to be observed in every case:

1. Priority should be given to preserving as much of the original fabric as possible. Many stuccos will last 100 years or more. The problem that usually arises is that the stucco comes loose from its lath or substrate. Defective areas should be cut out and new patches put in place.

2. When patching stucco, the replacement material should match the original as closely as possible in composition of the mortar, texture

and physical appearance. For example, a hard portland cement mortar would be inappropriate for patching an old lime-sand stucco, since different rates of expansion and contraction are likely to cause the new work to pull away from the old.

3. When cutting out defective areas for patching, the old remaining stucco should be undercut to provide firm bonding for the patch. Feathered edges between new and old work should be avoided, as these are very prone to cracking.



## Lime or Cement Stucco?

**O**BVIOUSLY, the biggest problem in setting out to patch stucco is determining the composition of the old work. Stucco that was applied after 1870 is more likely to be based on portland cement rather than lime—but date alone is far from an infallible guide. Here is one test for a "soft" lime stucco:

TAKE A SMALL SAMPLE and crush it into a fine powder. Then put the powder into a glass with hot water and stir vigorously. If the bulk of the stucco dissolves, leaving sand and other aggregate at the bottom of the glass, then you are dealing with a lime-sand stucco.

AN ALL-PURPOSE STUCCO for patching the traditional lime-sand stucco would be:

**BASE COAT**—Two coats doubled up to a thickness of 5/8 in.

- 5 parts hydrated lime
- 15 parts aggregate (match to original)
- 6 lb./cu. yd. hair (½"-2" length, free of dirt, grease and impurities)
- 2-3 parts (maximum) Type II portland cement for workability

### FINISH COAT

- 1 part hydrated lime
- 3 parts aggregate

THE USE OF ANIMAL HAIR to strengthen stucco was common (but far from universal) in 19th century work.

## Repairing Cement Stucco

**P**RACTICE VARIES between applying stucco in two coats or three coats. In general, the rule has been to apply stucco in two coats unless a fancy special finish is called for. In that case, a third coat would be used.

AN EARLY 20th century masonry manual gives these instructions and formulas for stucco work:

**FIRST COAT (Scratch Coat)**—3 parts sand, 1 part cement, hydrated lime equal to 10% of the weight of the cement. Add small amount of cow

hair. Apply 3/8" to 1/2" thick and scratch it with trowel or piece of wire lath.

**SECOND COAT (Brown Coat)**—Apply following day. Dampen first coat, and apply brown coat to 3/8"-1/2" thickness, using same formula as above. Float surface with wooden float and lightly cross-hatch. Spray surface lightly to keep it from drying out for three days.

**FINISH COAT** (applied if special decorative finish is required)—Apply after brown coat has dried for a week. Use same mixture as first coat. Before applying the finish coat, the brown coat should be moistened with a garden hose so that it doesn't draw water out of the fresh stucco. Thickness of finish coat can vary, depending on texture sought, but it should always be at least 1/8 in. thick.

IF ONLY TWO COATS ARE BEING APPLIED, the second coat can be applied as soon as the first coat is stiff enough to accept the top coat; i.e., after some of the moisture in the scratch coat has evaporated but before it has set completely.


THE HIGH PORTLAND CEMENT CONTENT of this stucco makes it "hard." This would be appropriate for patching buildings where the stucco in place is based on portland cement.

## Other Stucco Hints

**B**RICKS CAN ABSORB all of the water out of a stucco mixture, causing cracking and stucco failure. Thus, when applying stucco over brickwork, the bricks should be thoroughly wet down with a hose so that no water will be drawn out of the stucco. In addition, the mortar joints should be raked out to a ½" depth.

IN MIXING STUCCO, care should be taken not to add too much water; this will lead to cracking. In general, the dryer the mix the better. Adding too much cement or lime in an attempt to make the stucco "stronger" may also lead to cracking. Any mixture that has a richer cement content than the 1:3 cement/sand ratio called for in most formulas may cause trouble. Also, any mixture that is leaner than 1:4 should not be used.

**P**ROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT factor for stucco success is avoiding too fast drying out of the coats. Thus the weather is critical. An overcast day is best for stuccoing. If the sun is out, try to work in the shade, following the sun around the house. Keeping the stucco moist by misting it with a hose will mitigate the impact of direct sun. Professionals sometimes hang canvas on their scaffolding to keep the direct sun off freshly applied stucco.

TRY TO HAVE enough help on hand so that you can complete the coating of each patch in a single session. You should avoid seams in the stucco coating caused by stopping and starting at different times. 

# A Cake Decorator Method To Replace Plaster Mouldings

By Barbara Schiller

FOR SEVEN YEARS the brick Queen Anne house stood vacant--prey to squatters, vandals, fire, wind and water. Victim of a family feud, the four-storey rooming house had become a dangerous eyesore on an attractive street in Brooklyn's Park Slope Historic District.

IN THE SPRING of 1976 the street association and five individual homeowners brought suit against the owner for depreciation of real estate values on the block. The judge adjourned the case until fall on condition that the street association be allowed to take measures necessary to preserve the building until a buyer was found. That summer when Janice and Greg Etchison offered to buy the house, the street association helped to promote the sale.

GREG AND JANICE were exactly the sort of owner-occupiers the street association wanted as neighbors. Greg designs theater sets and costumes and manages a summer theater. Janice is a high school chemistry teacher.

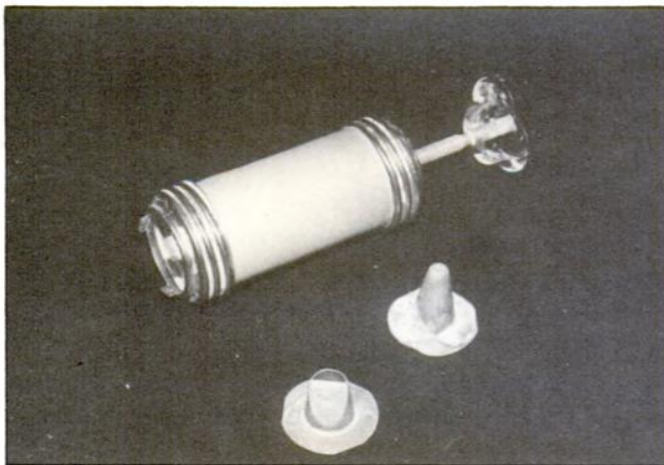
WHEN THE ETCHISONS moved into their house in January 1977, restoring its turn-of-the-century details had to be low on their list of priorities. There was not one surface in the entire house--ceilings, walls, floors, stairs--that did not have to be redone.

TO ACCOMODATE 18 to 20 people, the well-proportioned rooms had been divided up with partitions. Each room had a sink and a stove. The old plumbing, the debris, the partitions, all had to be removed by Greg and Janice. The back yard had been a dump for the former occupants and for some neighboring renovators who had deposited bathtubs, sinks, rotted lumber and even an uprooted tree.

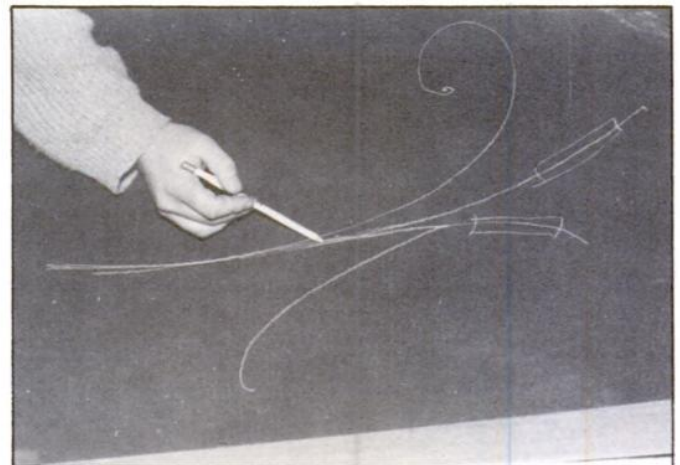
## A Long, Cold Winter

PLUMBERS, ELECTRICIANS AND GLAZIERS were called in, but no one seemed to want to start work during that exceptionally cold winter. Greg, Janice and their baby were living on the first floor of what would eventually be their six-room duplex apartment, with only an old kerosene heater found in the cellar to keep them warm. Ironically, when they finally got someone to service the eight-year old furnace, it needed only a professional cleaning to be returned to working order.

THE ETCHISONS had to renovate from the top down since they needed the income that a rental unit would provide. So they camped out in makeshift quarters without a real kitchen or formal bathroom while Greg designed and constructed an attractive one and a half



The cake decorating kit is a standard item purchased at the local hardware store. Greg uses two different nozzles to create thick and thin lines.



For demonstration purposes, Greg has drawn the bulrush design with white chalk on black cardboard. On an actual surface use colored chalk or pastel crayon.

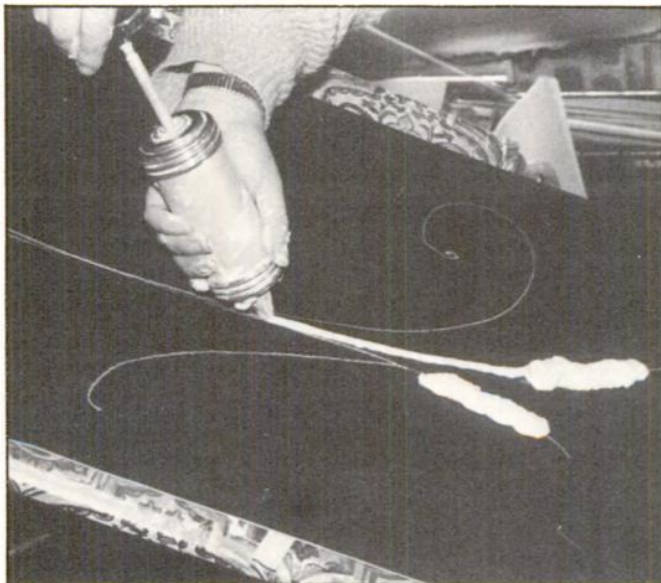




Before loading the compound in the cylinder mix it well to avoid lumps. When the cylinder is full thump it on a hard surface to get out all the air.

floor duplex. A studio apartment and terrace are still in the planning stage. Although his theater work equipped him with the know-how to do design, construction and decoration, Greg called in professionals for plumbing and electrical work.

ONCE THE DUPLEX WAS RENTED, the Etchisons concentrated on their own quarters. Water had



After using the wide-mouthed nozzle for high relief, Greg switches to the smaller nozzle for the thin lines of the stems. Mistakes can be removed with a putty knife.

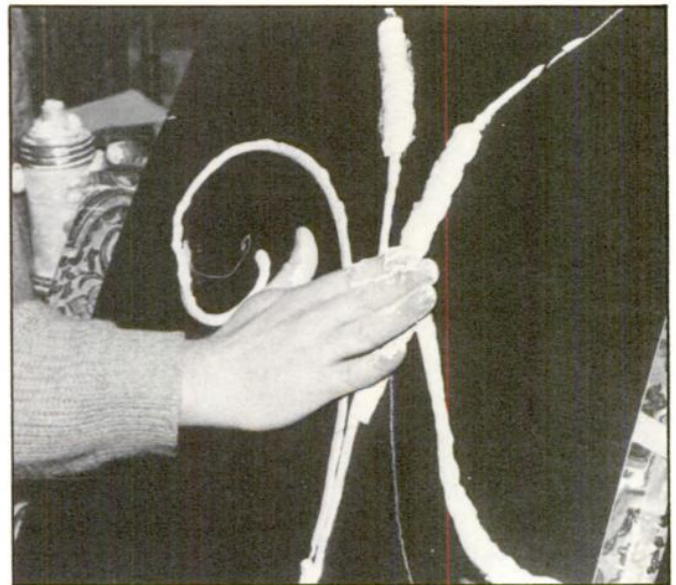
rotted beams and floors and destroyed plaster, so before they could think in terms of a kitchen and bathroom, heavy construction work had to be done. A flight of stairs was shored up, plaster was removed to the lath, floors were laid. For two summers work stopped when Greg and Janice went to Pennsylvania where he is executive producer for the Millbrook Playhouse.

## The Decorative Elements

BY SEPTEMBER 1978 the Etchisons were far enough along in the renovation to start work on the decorative elements of their 1898 house. They set about stripping the massive oak front door, the panelling in the vestibule, the wood screen in the entrance hall. They needed a pair of doors for the living room--the original ones had been sawed in half. A neighbor told them about a 16-panel set that had belonged to Mark Twain's daughter and was now in a gatehouse in Tarrytown, New York. The Etchisons bought the doors which fit the style of their house as if made for it

ANOTHER NEIGHBOR GAVE GREG the inspiration an ingenious method of restoring plaster ornament--a project he had been giving considerable thought to.

WHILE VISITING ACROSS the street, Greg examined the plaster floral motifs on the walls. "They looked like the decorations on a wedding cake. And that gave me an idea. Why not use a pastry tube to decorate the walls?"

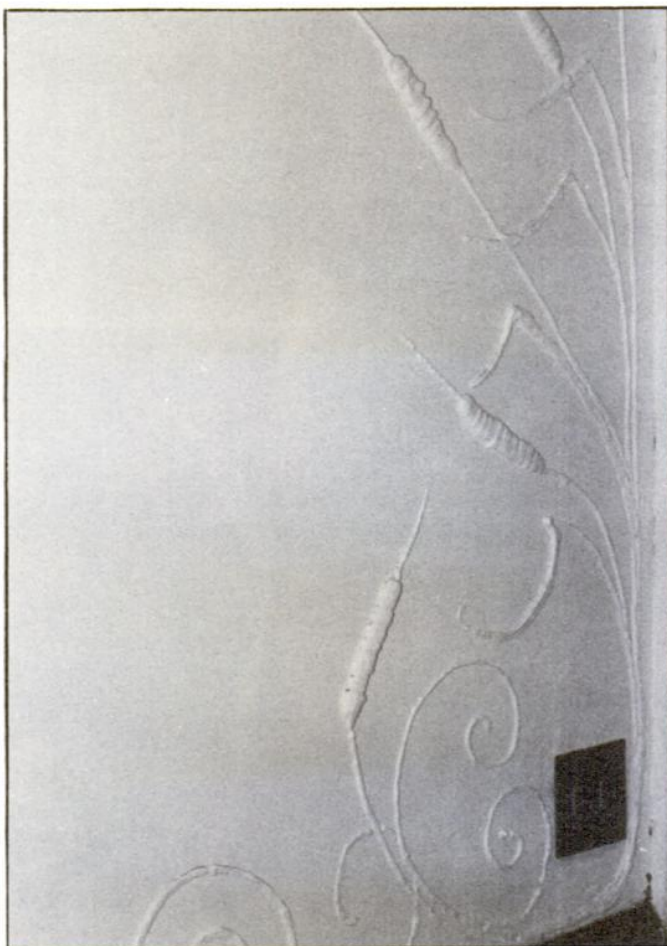


Pressing the motif gently with the fingertips helps it adhere to the surface. In doing the actual work, this should be done about four hours after making the motif.

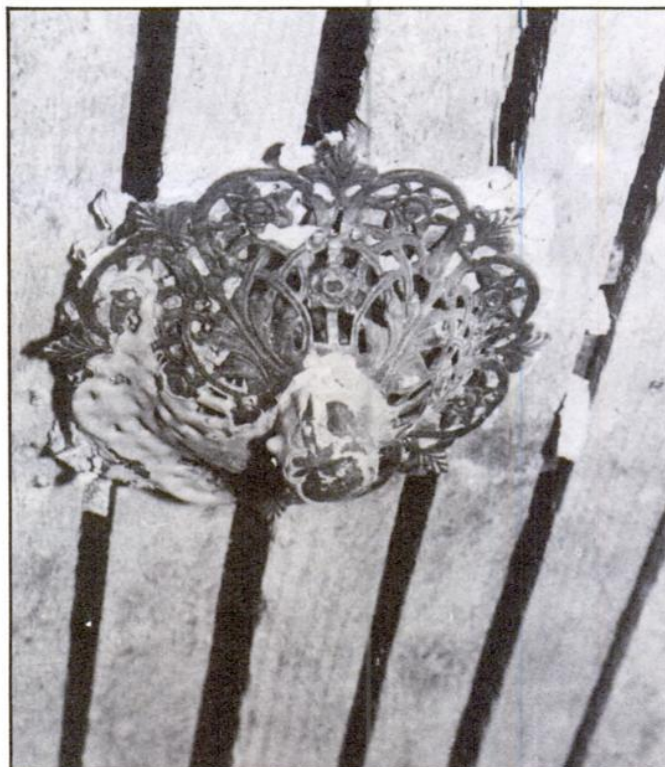


Two plaster bow ribbons on the second floor wall were all that remained of the original decorations.

AFTER EXPERIMENTING with a cake decorating tube at a local hardware store, Greg came up with what he calls "a new and exciting use of joint compound for the amateur plasterer."



Restored bulrush motif on the vestibule wall--it also appears in the entrance hall.



Walls and ceilings taken down to lath are typical of the work that had to be done throughout the house. In the process this unusual brass gas jet was uncovered. It had been hidden with layers of paint and plaster.


(Photos by Alan Pearlman)

### Using the Decorating Kit

TO MAKE AN EXACT REPLICA of a decorative motif, do a drawing, photo or rubbing of the original for reference. Then with a sponge roller and a slightly watered down joint compound, roll out a textured stucco surface to match the existing wall or to create a new surface. The textured stucco is important since it holds the plaster motifs to the wall.

WHEN THE SURFACE IS DRY, draw or trace the design with colored chalk or pastel crayon. For a ceiling molding or a repeat design, make a stencil and tape it in place. Then lightly spray it with floral spray, a water-based paint available from garden supply stores. Moisten the area to be worked on and keep it moist.

USING A CAKE DECORATING KIT filled with joint compound, begin tracing the lines of the motif, working from the top down. Squeeze it out slowly for high relief, faster for low relief. If something goes wrong, remove the mistake with a spatula or putty knife.

WHILE THE ORNAMENT is still moist, gently press it to insure proper adherence to the wall. Allow it to dry. During the process, cracks will appear. They may be pressed closed while still moist or filled in when dry with additional compound. 

# Restorer's Notebook

## Liquid Solder

**M**Y 80-YEAR-OLD STAINED GLASS WINDOW was accidentally damaged leaving an 8-inch hole in the center and many small pieces broken. However, the original leading was intact. After matching the colors and cutting the pieces of glass using the tracing-paper method, I wanted to replace the pieces without removing the entire window from its frame. (This would have meant a major carpentry job.)

WE BEGAN TO SOLDER, using the conventional method of holding the solder-wire up to the edge of a piece of glass while heating it with a soldering iron. We realized that the solder wouldn't fall into the crevices of the leading already there. Instead it fell to the floor.

WE FOUND THE SOLUTION at the local hardware store: A tube of non-metallic liquid solder. The solder has the consistency of toothpaste and can be squeezed into the existing leading. We used a Q-tip to spread it. After the solder hardened we scraped the excess from the glass with a razor blade.

Valarie Stewart  
Richmond Hill, N.Y.

## More Ideas

### On Removing Wallpaper . . .

**W**E TRIED USING CHEMICALS and scrapers to remove painted wallpaper, but found that the quickest method was to use a rented wallpaper steamer. Propane-powered steamers are possibly faster, but electric ones work just as well.

FIRST WE "SCRATCHED" THE WALLPAPER with very coarse sandpaper. If you have to remove a number of layers, it's best to scratch the surface again between steamings.

ONE CAUTION: steam condenses in the pan and drips down the wall. Wear long sleeves and gloves to avoid being burned. Never work under the pan (as in ceiling stripping)-- use a ladder so you can work in front of you rather than over your head.

THESE STEAM MACHINES can be rented from paint stores and large hardware stores.

Tom and Rica Vogel  
Michigan City, Ind.  
-and-  
Marlene Cullen  
Petaluma, Cal.

**M**Y WIFE AND I HAVE FOUND that a common 2-inch wood chisel is a handy tool for removing layers of painted wallpaper. It is heavy enough to cut through to the plaster, and easy to use in long broad strokes for quick removal. This way water is not necessary for loosening the paper. Afterwards paste residue and scraps should be wiped away with a damp sponge.

THIS METHOD WORKS for those of us who are restoring on a tight budget and cannot afford the cost of renting steamers for days at a time-- and we can work at our own pace.

BE CAREFUL not to gouge the plaster underneath -- keep the chisel sharp!

David McConkey  
Terre Haute, Ind.

## Sealing Fence Posts

**I**N THE ARTICLE "Building A Picket Fence" (April 1979), it was recommended that treated posts be set in concrete. There are also other less expensive ways to seal wood posts. And of course if you have a big country yard to fence, setting each post in concrete would be too time-consuming.

I COAT EACH POST with roof cement to above ground level and let it set. For square posts I even add roofing paper. Roof cement is what saves your house; it will do the same for your post. Be sure the bottom surface is coated too.

AFTER SETTING THE POST in the hole, fill the space gradually with dirt, always tamping the ground firmly. Fill to slightly above ground level. This careful tamping will get rid of all voids that could hold water.

PRESERVATIVES ALONE won't keep water out of wood indefinitely. That's why I like to use roofing cement and roofing paper to create a waterproof membrane. Also, when concrete is used, the wood can shrink from the concrete, creating a pocket for water to enter.

ANOTHER NOTE: Don't just use a spacer gauge for pickets and call them plumb. Posts and pickets must be at a true plumb--especially at corners and gates. Use a level to check for vertical at least every six pickets. And use heavy nails (#8d on one-inch stock), not box nails.

Albert Henry  
Boone, N.C.

### Got Any Tips?

Do you have any hints or short cuts that might help other old-house owners? We'll pay \$15 for any short how-to items that are used in this "Restorer's Notebook" column. Send your hints to: Notebook Editor, The Old-House Journal, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

# Products For The Old House

## A Good Clamp

THE UNIVERSAL CLAMP Corporation manufactures a variety of clamps for repairing and restoring cabinetwork and fine woodwork. Their popular 805 Porta-Press jig is particularly good for the assembly of mitered frames and doors. It is a lightweight, self-contained jig that, when assembled, requires no tools to adjust from a 8 in. square to 36 in. x 48 in. frames. It can also be equipped with optional legs for complete support.

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## 18th Century Building Materials

A LARGE ASSORTMENT of 18th century building materials is inventoried by the Kensington Historical Company in New Hampshire. They regularly stock: Hand hewn beams, spruce, eastern white pine, white oak and chestnut as well as granite (step and sill) and red sandstone (step). Also antique millwork, doors, random width floorboards, chimney breasts, staircases and many other architectural elements from 18th century New England homes.

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## Helpful Publications

## A Stanford White House?

By Christopher Gray  
Director, Office for  
Metropolitan History, N.Y.C.

IF YOU HAVE HERETOFORE silently suffered through your neighbor's claims to a Stanford White designed house, there is a book for you. Leland Roth, the ranking McKim, Mead & White scholar, went through the firm's bill books to compile The Architecture of McKim, Mead & White, 1870-1920: A Building List (1978, Garland Publishing, 545 Madison Avenue, New York, New York; \$45.00.)

VERY LITTLE (only projects under \$1,000) slips through the net, and 945 buildings and 50-odd bookcovers, yachting cups, frames and other miscellany make up what is the most complete catalog of any large architectural firm ever published (XLVIII + 213 pp. + about 240 pages of plates.)

HALF OF THE BOOK is a section of photographs: A tenement house (!), the firm's only set of rowhouses (brownstoners take

note) and two identical office buildings in Omaha and Kansas City built for an insurance company are the lesser known works sprinkled in among the masterpieces.

MAKE NO MISTAKE: This is a reference work. Roth provides a spellbinding account of the workings of the firm's personalities and operations, but the meat is in the illustrated list. McKim, Mead & White: A Building List is an exceptional piece of research, providing extraordinary documentation of the work of the firm which is both famous and yet fundamentally unfamiliar to us all.



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