

Turn-of-the-Century Houses

The Neoclassical Revival 1895-1915

◆Nashville Old House Series◆ Architectural Style and Sensitive Rehabilitation

Historical Background

Eclectic Victorian styles had replaced the favored classical designs based on the architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, but by 1900 domestic architectural design returned to the relative restraint of the classical orders for inspiration. As a result, many of Nashville's turn-of-the-century houses feature Neoclassical Revival elements. Neoclassical, meaning a revival or adaptation of classical forms, describes not a single architectural style but rather a somewhat pervasive taste, which produced houses and buildings in a variety of different forms.

There is no single event or date marking the departure of Victorian eclecticism and the arrival of the Neoclassical fashion. The much-publicized World's Columbian Exposition, a world's fair held in Chicago in 1893 at which most of the buildings featured rows of gleaming white columns, influenced this shift in popular taste. Here in Nashville, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition of 1897 looked much like the Chicago fair on a smaller scale. One of these buildings, the Parthenon, was eventually rebuilt of permanent materials and still graces Centennial Park. This swing in taste had begun by the early 1890s and was complete by 1910.

Identifying the Styles

Transitional Victorian

In residential buildings for the middle class, the gradual arrival of the new fashion produced many houses which combined Victorian planning with Neoclassical ornament. There are quite a few such houses in Nashville, which are clearly Victorian in overall arrangement and in certain details, but which lack most or all of the expected fancy woodwork. Rather than an ornate Eastlake-style porch, these houses have a porch with white columns, Greek or Roman in form. Most of these houses are modest in size, though a few larger ones exist.



Transitional Victorian

Four-Square

In the first decade of the twentieth century a new house type, no longer obviously Victorian, came to popularity. Called by different names in different areas, this boxy, two-story house is called a foursquare in Nashville. Square in shape and plan, the foursquare could range in size from a modest



Four-Square

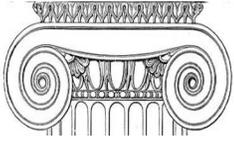
three-bedroom, middle-class house to a large, very comfortable house of the type built by well-to-do business and professional people. It had a hip roof that rose to a single peak at the center. Decorative detail was Neoclassical. This usually centered on the front porch but on larger, more elaborate examples could include door and window details and ornamental brick and stone work as well. There are also a number of houses in Nashville that have only one story, but are virtually identical to the foursquare in every other way.

Colonial Revival

Revivals of American houses of the Colonial and early Federal periods were especially popular among the more comfortable members of the middle class. Though often accurate in detail, these revival houses could be quite a bit larger in scale than the originals from which they were derived. The term "Colonial Revival" can be confusing, however, because it also describes houses that could hardly be considered revivals of American Colonial architecture except in decorative detail. Some designers and owners considered many of the larger, more elaborate foursquare type houses to be Colonial Revival.



Colonial Revival



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Sensitive Rehabilitation

The general idea when renovating a turn-of-the-century house, or any old house, is to create a comfortable, livable environment, compatible with the lifestyle of the present, while retaining its architectural character--that which makes it and its neighbors an important document of our past. The National Park Service defines rehabilitation as a "process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values." While the terms "restoration" and "reconstruction" imply a somewhat rigid depiction of a specific period, as with a historic house museum, rehabilitation simply suggests sensitivity to the

historic integrity of the property.

For most people a period restoration is neither financially feasible nor practical. What makes sense in most cases is a careful rehabilitation. Homeowners within historic and conservation zoning districts must apply for permits through the Metro Historical Commission and follow specified design guidelines.

In planning a rehabilitation, one must determine the architectural character of the house. This is largely a matter of architectural style, but goes beyond style alone. Character also involves the relationship of the house to the street, its yard, and to surrounding structures. These relationships combine with architectural style to create the character of the house. Together houses create the character of the street, and streets form the character of the entire neighborhood.

Architectural Character

In determining architectural character, it is helpful to look at a house as two layers. The first is the structure itself: the walls, openings for windows and doors, and the configuration of the roof and chimneys. These constitute the basic form of the house. They form the core to which finish materials are applied. The final appearance of the house depends heavily on its basic form. In planning a rehabilitation, priority should be given to maintaining the basic form or returning to the original form if alterations have been made.

The second layer consists of finish materials, both functional and decorative. This includes visible masonry, siding, roof materials, doors and win-

dow sashes, and all sorts of decorative trim. The porch, both functional and decorative, is also of paramount importance to the character of the house.

Finish materials are of secondary importance only in that they are applied to the basic form and are in that sense dependent upon it. If lost or altered, finish treatments can usually be returned to original configuration with a great deal less trouble and expense than can the basic form, yet their importance to the character of the house should not be underestimated.

Siding, Finish Materials

Wood

Simple or lap siding, often of relatively narrow width boards, was commonly used. Generally porches and

TWO VIEWS OF THE SAME HOUSE

BASIC FORM



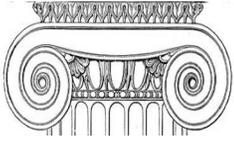
FINISH MATERIALS IN PLACE



decorative trim were wood, often quite elaborately carved, always painted. Wood shakes or shingles were often seen on the second story of the foursquare above a brick or stone first story. Such shingles were almost invariably stained dark green.

Masonry

The brick was usually smooth-finished and dark red, laid with very narrow mortar joints. The mortar could be



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Character, Continued

tinted red or left white. Buff brick also appeared during this period, usually with black mortar.

Frequently seen in Nashville, stone is most often rock-faced (meaning left rough and random on the visible side) with narrow, beaded mortar joints. Details--porch columns, window and door lintels, and water tables--were usually cut and smooth-finished.

Concrete was coming to the fore as a building material. A brief vogue for concrete building blocks cast to imitate rock-faced stone can be seen represented in Nashville.

Non-original surface finishes

Composition shingles and roll siding, aluminum and vinyl siding are not original on turn-of-the-century houses and should be removed. Paint on masonry is generally not original, but removal is not always the best action.

Roof Materials

Three types of roofing were in common use in

Nashville's turn-of-the-century neighborhoods. Earlier houses most often used wood shingles, as did the more modest houses later. Some roofs were of metal--especially standing seam tin. Others featured slate often with metal ridges and flashing used as part of a decorative scheme. Transitional and four-square houses with metal or slate roofs often had decorative iron finials at the roof peaks; few survive today. These were not typical of Colonial Revival houses.

Paint Colors

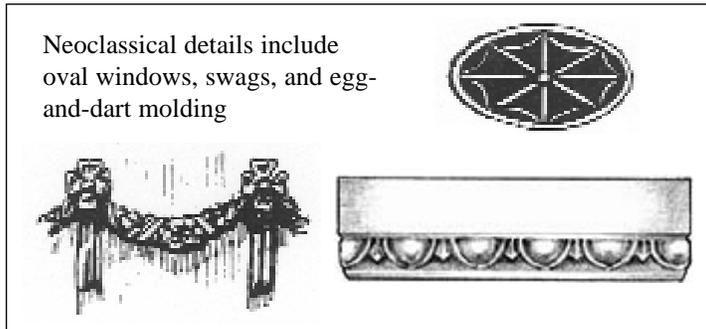
A very limited range of colors was used during this architectural era. White (in imitation of the white marble of classical ruins and Neoclassical buildings of earlier eras) was the dominant color and was almost always used for trim and detail work on both wood

and masonry houses. Body colors of wooden houses were painted white or pale colors--creams, pale yellow, light gray, beige. The only exceptions common in Nashville are the dark green stain on wood shakes and the black often used on window sashes (only on sash, never on facings). Shutters, if used, were usually painted dark green.

Setting

With only a few exceptions, the turn-of-the-century houses remaining in Nashville were designed for narrow, deep lots in early streetcar suburbs. The houses are meant to be seen primarily from the street, and thus the street facade is the most important. The side of the house was meant to be seen in detail only if the house was on a corner. Front yards were small, rear yards were somewhat larger, and side yards were virtually non-existent. Houses built in this way tend to create a visual rhythm along the street. The rhythm is disturbed by vacant lots and buildings that stray too far from the norm in size or placement on the lot.

Neoclassical details include oval windows, swags, and egg-and-dart molding



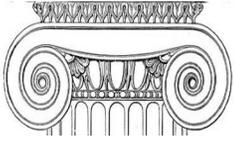
Removal of Materials

Removing features of a house that are not original is usually an appropriate treatment and often, but not always, a desirable course of action. Careful thought should be exercised before removing anything. Anything actively detrimental to the structure

of the house, like aluminum or vinyl siding, should be removed. Other additions to the house such as wrought iron porch columns or inappropriate window sash are generally replaced with something more appropriate during the course of the rehabilitation.

Other considerations, however, may enter into the decision.

Consider, for example, rooms that have been added to the rear of a house in recent years. The addition is not especially compatible with the style of the original house, but it is not visible from the street and does little to compromise the character of the house. If the space is needed inside and the addition is structurally sound, it would be foolish to remove it.



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Replacing What's Missing

Over the years, most old houses have lost something--bits and pieces of decorative trim, a mantel or light fixture, an entire front porch. It is always appropriate to restore missing parts of a house if two things are known: first, that the feature being restored was indeed there originally, and second, what the feature looked like. Ideally, everyone could have an old photograph or original architectural plans as a guide in replacing missing parts of the house. This is rarely the case,

however, and some degree of educated guesswork is often necessary in replacing what is missing. This is fine if carefully done, but regrets can arise if additional evidence proves the reconstruction of a missing feature to be inept or, worse, if the "restored" feature turns out never to have existed at all. Avoid expensive mistakes! Know what you are doing when replacing missing parts.

Any rehabilitation, no matter how careful, will involve not only changing the present appearance of the house but also making some changes from what is known or believed to be its

original appearance. This is fine if changes are made in a way that is sensitive to the architectural character of the house. Change is not inherently bad, but avoid insensitive change.

Remember • Remember

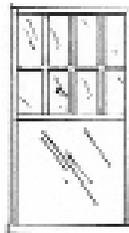
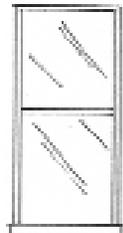
Replace a feature if:

- ♦ it originally existed within the structure.
- ♦ it is known what the feature looked like.

Rehab Advice • Rehab Advice • Rehab Advice • Rehab Advice • Rehab Advice

Windows

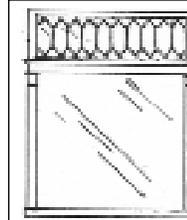
The typical window in a turn-of-the-century house is a rectangle considerably taller than it is wide. Though there were variations, the window sash is usually double-hung (the type that slides up and down to open and shut) with one light over one (meaning a single pane of glass in the top half and a single pane in the bottom). Windows at the front of the house frequently had sidelights and/or transoms with small panes set on the diagonal.



Typical double hung windows

even worse effect on the appearance of the house and is more difficult to correct because part of the original wall has been removed in the widening process.

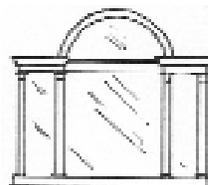
The use of stained glass in turn-of-the-century houses was limited. Occasionally in large, fancy houses, stained glass was used in stairwell windows and, rarely, in transoms. Doors and transoms with leaded clear panes with beveled edges were newly fashionable at the turn of the century. This type of work also was confined to fancier houses, and it largely replaced stained glass in popularity.



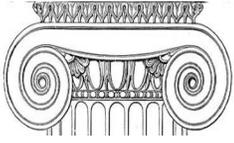
Many turn-of-the-century houses had a large, square window on the front of the house. These windows often had a transom filled with leaded glass.

Sometimes, usually because interior ceilings have been lowered, windows are shortened. This has a serious effect on the basic form of the house and should be corrected. Occasionally windows have been shortened and widened with picture window-type sash installed in the new, wider opening. This has an

The Palladian window, an arched window with flanking sidelights, was a frequently seen decorative motif.



As energy conservation becomes more important, many people feel the need to install storm windows. This addition can be handled so that it does little damage to the integrity of an older house. Two general rules to follow: First, the storm window should be made to fit in the original window opening exactly. It should not overlap onto the wall surface or be patched in to a larger opening. Second, the storm window should be an appropriate color matching that of the sash behind it, and should never be left raw aluminum. Aluminum storm windows can be ordered in white or black from the factory, with either color appropriate to most turn-of-the-century houses.

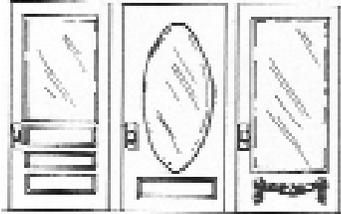


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Doors

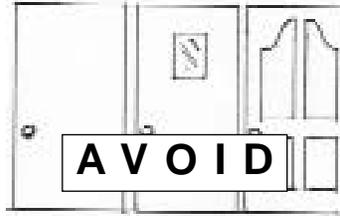
Doors in turn-of-the-century houses were usually comprised largely of glass--most often a single clear pane with a beveled edge. Decorative treatment of the woodwork



Typical turn-of-the-century doors

involved typical Neoclassical motifs. Larger houses sometimes had leaded glass in the front doors. The panes were clear and had beveled edges. If an original door is missing, an effort should be made to find an appropriate replacement. Sometimes a new door must be used, but flush doors and inappropriate paneled doors should be avoided.

An unfortunately frequent addition



to the front door of many old houses is a storm door. While storm doors do have their functional merits, they obscure the details of the door behind--details that were meant to be seen. If a storm door must be used, it should be a single pane of glass from top to bottom in a frame of unobtrusive color, though the reflection on the glass still obscures a clear view of the door behind it.

Porches

No turn-of-the-century house was built without a porch. The porch was an important functional element of the house and, in most cases, an essential decorative feature as well. Today, though not as important functionally, the porch is still visually essential. Often, on smaller houses especially, the porch is the major decorative feature of the entire exterior, and the architectural style of the house is determined by its design.

Though they were roofed in different ways, most turn-of-the-century porches were constructed entirely of wood and set on a masonry foundation or piers. Wooden lattice-work usually filled the spaces between the brick or stone piers. On larger masonry houses, the porch was sometimes built of stone and/or brick and had a floor paved with ceramic tile; but, on the whole, wooden porches were much more commonplace in Nashville.



Neoclassical Revival houses typically feature a Greek-or Roman-influenced entryway.

The disadvantage of wooden porches was their tendency to rot. At the outside edge especially, blowing rain wet the floor and column bases. If aggravated by poor maintenance--allowing gutters to clog, failing to keep the wood surfaces painted--rot was the inevitable result. Some deteriorated porches have been

removed altogether. Some have been enclosed. Many more have been "improved" with poured concrete floors and altered columns.

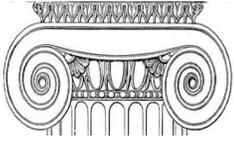
removed altogether. Some have been enclosed. Many more have been "improved" with poured concrete floors and altered columns.

Porch Repair

Relatively few turn-of-the-century porches have survived intact. Almost all require some repair, but the situation varies so much from house to house that it is difficult to make generalizations about what should be done. Difficult questions can arise if the work required goes beyond the repair or replacement of a few places here and there. Generally speaking, repairs that conserve as much as possible of the original fabric of the porch are most desirable. Sections that are missing or are deteriorated beyond repair should be replaced, matching the original if possible. If the porch is completely missing or altered beyond recognition, some form of reconstruction is in order.

Decisions on a course of action for treating a porch must hinge on two points: first, how much is known about the original appearance of the porch, and second, how much is the owner willing to pay.

Determining the original appearance of a porch or of individual pieces is not difficult if only a few pieces are missing. A porch that is substantially or completely missing presents a more difficult question. Clues can be found. Remnants of the foundation or piers are often left in the ground suggesting the plan of the original porch. Even if such clues are meager or nonexistent, a correct Neoclassical porch can be reconstructed because, unlike the "anything



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Porches, Continued

goes" variety of Victorian gingerbread woodwork, turn-of-the-century Neoclassical designs worked within a system of proportional relationships laid down by the ancient Greeks and Romans. While liberties were taken with classical proportions, an appropriate Neoclassical porch can be designed for almost any house using classical proportions and evidence taken from similar houses.

It is important to remember that very often late Victorian houses were all but identical to turn-of-the-century houses except for the decorative trim work. An Eastlake-style gingerbread porch and a Neoclassical porch are often the only obvious features separating two houses in style and time. Before reconstructing a Neoclassical porch, be sure that the house originally had such a porch. If no solid clues to the porch style can be found in the vicinity of the porch, look at doors and mantels.

Sometimes expense will dictate compromises in porch rehabilitation. Authentic Neoclassical porch columns are still being manufactured, but the more elaborate their detail, the more expensive they are. Also, demolition and replacement of inappropriate additions can become rather expensive.

Typical turn-of-the-century lights



The foregoing is intended not to discourage the prospective renovator but to paint a realistic view of the situation. Some sort of properly scaled wooden reconstruction is always an improvement over a porch with a concrete floor and wrought iron columns and can usually be undertaken

without pushing costs out of line. Beyond this, renovators should go as far toward authentic restoration as their knowledge of the house and their financial situations will let them.

Enclosing Porches

With the advent of air conditioning, the idea of sitting outside on the porch on a muggy 95-degree day ceased to be attractive to most people, and one of the porch's most important original functions became less significant. Many people are tempted to enclose porches, but this is a temptation to resist. Enclosing a porch, even with single, wall-sized panes of glass does major visual damage to the porch and thus to the house itself. Besides, open porches are still quite pleasant in the spring and fall. The foregoing does not apply as strongly to side porches that are not highly visible from the street. These can sometimes be enclosed without doing serious harm to the principal façade of the house.

Porch Lights

Nashville houses did not commonly have electric porch lights until after 1900. Before this, few houses had a porch light of any kind. Most early porch lights were circular ceiling-mounted fixtures or, less frequently, a simple wall bracket with a single glass globe. Original fixtures should be reused, if possible, or replaced with similar fixtures. If a house had no light, a ceiling-mounted fixture not visible from the street is best.

Porch Steps

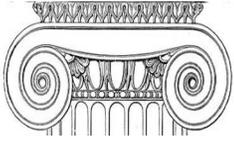
Turn-of-the-century porches with wooden floors usually had wooden steps. Stone or brick porches and an occasional wooden porch had stone steps. Turn-of-the-century porches never had brick steps; do not add brick steps to this house style.

Roofs

Functionally the roof is one of the most important elements of the house and often the first to need rehab attention. Nothing much can be done to the rest of the house if the roof is not sound. Visually the roof is also of great significance. Its design is one of the basic visual elements that make up the style and architectural character of a house. Roof design involves roof pitch and contours, roofing materials, and decorative trim. All these things need careful con-

sideration in rehab planning.

The plan, outline, pitch, and height of the roof make the framework to which roofing material is applied and are basic to the visual character of the entire house. In most cases, the roof configuration is original and should be retained. Any additions to the house or changes made in the roof itself should not seriously interfere with the roof configuration as seen from the street.



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Roofs, Continued

Roof Materials

Three materials were commonplace on Nashville's turn-of-the-century roofs: wood shingles, slate, and tin-shingles with standing seam tin. In almost every case, wood shingles have been covered over or replaced with another material. This is all too often the case with slate and tin as well. Ideally every house could have its original roof material. Replacing wood or tin shingles is affordable for some; but, unfortunately, slate and standing seam tin are so expensive that they are generally out of reach. Slate and tin are both durable materials and should last several lifetimes if properly maintained. They can be repaired, and every effort should be made to save such roofs before the decision is made to replace one.

Because of the expense of replacing original roofing, a

compromise roof is often the only choice. Sheet tin barn roofing crimped at regularly spaced intervals makes a fair visual imitation of standing seam tin and is much more affordable. There is not a good imitation of wood or tin shingles or slate, and, unless the real thing is being used, a visually low-key material that does not attract attention is the best choice.

Decorative Trim



Unfortunately this is more rare than original roofing. Many turn-of-the-century houses--especially the larger ones--had finials at roof peaks and decorative capping of metal or terra cotta along the ridges. Every attempt should be made to save such trim where it still exists.

Wood

Exterior wood, whether used as sheathing for the entire house or as a porch and trim work on a masonry house, has both functional and decorative importance.

Functionally, wood serves either wholly or in part as the exterior shell of the house and must withstand the often-harsh assaults of wind, rain, sun, and changing temperature. To this end, wood is painted. Eventually weather will deteriorate paint, and seeing that this protective coating is renewed peri-

odically is vital. Unpainted wood deteriorates very rapidly. Occasionally stain was used rather than paint. Stain alone was often used on wooden shingles used as siding. Stain with a coating of varnish was often used on front doors.

Wood was used as decoration in a variety of ways on turn-of-the-century houses. Rehabilitation should preserve as much of the original fabric of the house as possible. If deterioration necessitates replacing wood, the form of the original should be duplicated.

This might prove difficult in some cases but it is worth the effort.

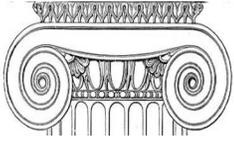
Proper paint and stain colors also play a vital role in the architectural character of the turn-of-the-century houses. A radical swing of taste away from the dark colors and earth tones of the late Victorian era occurred at the turn of the century. White became fashionable again. The Metropolitan Historical Commission has at its office several excellent publications on proper paint colors, which are available for consultation.

Add-On Siding

Many people who are distressed by the idea of having to keep wood painted--an ongoing maintenance necessity--have had their wooden houses, or wooden portions of masonry houses, covered with "low maintenance" siding. These sidings range from the asbestos shingles and roll siding of some years ago to the aluminum or vinyl siding most often

installed today. All such sidings damage the house. At the very least, even the most careful installation will damage the visual integrity of the house, and few installations are careful. Further, such sidings are prone to trap moisture behind them, which rots the wood underneath. Because the siding remains new looking for a time, moisture-related problems often go undetected and cause serious structural damage.

If such siding is already on a house, it should be removed now! Often the excuse is heard, "I don't want to take the siding off because I'm afraid of what I might find underneath." This excuse is the very reason to take the siding off. Any deterioration present under the siding is not getting better and is probably getting worse. Remove the siding and make necessary repairs as soon as possible.



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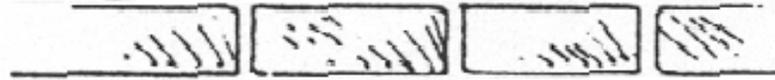
Brick

Brick is designed to withstand weather without paint or any other protective coating and to look good while doing it. As such, brick is a relatively maintenance-free material. Unless it has been the victim of serious neglect or outright abuse, brick usually requires little attention in the rehab process.

In this brief publication, it is not possible to get into a detailed discussion of the causes of brick and mortar deterioration. Often it stems from excess water, either leaking from faulty gutters and downspouts or seeping upward from the ground. There are other possible causes as well, and the cause of the deterioration should be found and corrected before any time or money is spent on repairs. When repairs are made, three important properties of the masonry should be carefully considered: softness/hardness, dimension, and color.

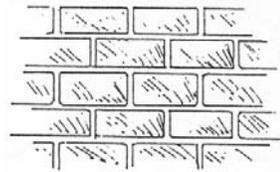
Old brick and old mortar are considerably softer than brick and mortar in general use today. Modern firing produces brick that is very hard, and modern mortar contains portland cement, also very hard. Old, softer brick can be seriously damaged in the normal cycle of expansion and contraction caused by extremes of temperature if hard, inflexible, new masonry materials are placed against it. When a hole is patched or missing mortar replaced, the materials added to the wall should match the softness of those original to the wall.

Brick used in turn-of-the-century houses usually had sharp edges and corners and was laid with narrow mortar joints. Care should be taken to match the size and shape of original bricks and mortar joints when repairs are made. This problem is most frequently seen in the replacement of missing mortar, called repointing or tuckpointing. Too often, repointed mortar joints are much wider than the original joints, drastically altering the appearance of the wall. Careful repointing is hard to do but is worth the effort.



Replacement bricks should match the original brick, whether sharp and square or rounded.

Difficulties in color matching arise in part from the vast variation in brick and mortar composition and manufacture over the years and in part from natural aging and the accumulation of grime that occurs over time. Bricks can often be found to approximate the color of original bricks. Mortar tinting can be more difficult and requires a good and willing mason. An exact color match on brick and mortar is hard to achieve, but not impossible.



Normal Mortar

Paint and Brick

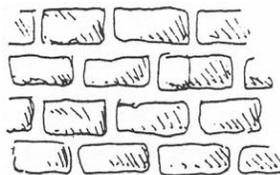
As stated above, brick does not require a coating of paint to be functional or attractive. Few historic houses were painted originally. Most turn-of-the-century builders liked the way brick looked, often laying it in fancy patterns or combining it with stone for decorative effect. Over the years, some old houses were painted to disguise additions or to hide dirt or sloppy repair work. In few cases, virtually none here in Nashville, was a brick turn-of-the-century building of any type painted to begin with. To paint such a building now, for the first time, is to detrimentally alter the architectural character of the house.

Aside from aesthetics, painting brick raises practical questions. Paint is an ongoing maintenance responsibility--expensive and a bother. Painting brick introduces a maintenance problem to a material that should be largely maintenance free. It rarely helps with moisture problems as many people have hoped it would. So why paint?

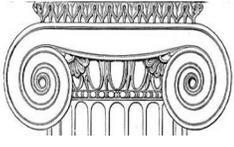
A painted house usually can be effectively and safely cleaned, but careful thought is in order before this is undertaken. It would be helpful to know why the house was painted in the first place. Was it to hide alterations and repairs? Was it to keep deteriorating mortar in place? If this is the case, cleaning could be disappointing or could necessitate further maintenance. Cleaning is usually a good idea and a positive step. But the process should not be undertaken lightly.

Brick Cleaning

Brick can be cleaned of dirt and paint effectively with safe chemical methods in most cases. Under no circum-



Improper Repointing



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The Neoclassical Revival

Brick, Continued

stances should sandblasting or any other kind of abrasive cleaning be used. This kind of process does not really clean the brick. It removes the outer layer, exposing the rough, softer, more porous inner core of the brick. It also wreaks havoc on mortar. The appearance of the brick suffers as a result; but even more important, exposing the inner brick makes it much more vulnerable to the extremes of the weather and, because it is very rough, likely to accumulate grime much more quickly than before. Clear sealers often recommended for sandblasted brick are rarely very effective and require frequent renewal. Sandblasting salesmen can be very persuasive, in spite of growing public skepticism of abrasive cleaning. Thus sandblasting sometimes masquerades under gentle-sounding names like dusting or feather blasting. It is all the same, and it should be steadfastly avoided. Sandblasting can cause serious damage, and the process is absolutely irreversible.

Stone

While stone and brick are quite different physically, similar rehab recommendations apply. Like brick and mortar, stone and mortar should be compatible. New mortar joints and replacement stone should match the old. Cleaning with gentle chemical methods is recommended. Abrasive cleaning should be avoided. Painted stone looks even worse than painted brick. Stone should not be painted and should be cleaned of paint unless special problems exist that would make cleaning inadvisable. Vines damage stone masonry as they do brick. Keep vines off stone walls and foundations.

Most vines that grow on brick and stone, especially ivy, are harmful and should be removed. They may look romantic and lovely, but they cause two problems. First, they hold moisture that can damage the wall and seep through to the interior of the house. Second, the shoots they send out actually penetrate brick and mortar joints, wedging the wall apart. If allowed to continue long enough, this process can cause the wall to collapse.



Adding On

It is at times necessary to add on to an old house to create more space or to make existing space more usable. All through history, houses have grown in successive stages as changing needs demanded. There is nothing wrong with adding on if it is done with care and sensitivity to the architectural character of the original design.

There are two general rules to follow. First, the addition should not compromise the integrity of the principal façade of the house. The principal façade of the house is architecturally the most important and is a vital component of the character of the entire street. It should be preserved if possi-

ble. In most cases, this means an addition should be at the rear of the house, not visible from the front. In the case of a corner house, an addition to the

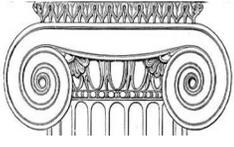
Remember • Remember

- ♦ The architectural character of a single house is a vital component of the character of the entire neighborhood.
- ♦ Additions should be a contemporary design distinguishable from the original structure.

rear would of course be visible, but the principal façade need not be affected.

Second, the addition should be a contemporary design distinguishable

from the original structure. Old buildings are expensive and very difficult to imitate successfully, and imitations of old architecture create problems with perception. Additions that imitate the design of the original house blur the line between old and new. Perceiving its successive stages can then be difficult. Being able to readily see the different stages of the house is important today and will become more so as those who come after us will study our ways of life by looking at our buildings. The historic value of an old house is best protected when the addition is readily distinguishable from the original. With the careful use of materials, scale, and color, such an addition can be a harmonious partner of the older parts of the house.



Turn-of-the-Century Houses

The Neoclassical Revival

Interior

The focus of this pamphlet has been on the exterior of turn-of-the-century houses. The exterior, especially the street façade, is the part that is seen by the public and that the owner, in a sense, shares with the public. It is generally held, therefore, that maintaining historical accuracy is much more important on the exterior of a house than on the interior, the private preserve of its occupants.

The interior of a house is where adaptations to modern living usually become a serious issue. Everyone wants to be warm in the winter and cool in the summer. No one wants to read at night by gaslight or heat a bathtub-full of water on a wood stove. Adapting an old house for modern convenience is perfectly acceptable and, if done with care, will do little harm to the architectural character of the house.

As a general rule, do not do anything to a room that would seriously hamper a period restoration in that room should an owner desire one. This means retaining, or repairing if necessary, original wall surfaces, doors, woodwork, mantels, floor surfaces and hardware. All this may not be possible in a given room, but it should be the goal. This approach allows for any style of decorating, from sleek contemporary to Grandma's attic, but retains the basic features of the room necessary for an accurate period restoration, should that be desired in the future.

This approach discourages inappropriate treatments that are difficult to reverse, such as lowered ceilings, obtrusive installation of climate control systems, inappropriate wall and ceiling treatments like sheet paneling and spray-on textures, and indiscriminate alteration of the floor plan.

Exceptions will sometimes need to be made. Each house must be considered as a separate case, and the needs of individual owners vary widely. Kitchens and bathrooms usually require a complete overhaul. Closet space often must be created where none exists.

Traffic patterns sometimes need adjusting, requiring the moving of a wall or door. All of this is perfectly acceptable if the goal of preserving the essential architecture character of the house is kept firmly in mind, and the new is made to fit unobtrusively with the old.

Saving Plaster

Often when rehabilitation of an old house begins, the owners find cracked and crumbling plaster; but cracks and holes do not necessarily mandate removal of the plaster. Plaster can be patched and repaired successfully, usually saving time, effort, and money in the process. Seriously deteriorated plaster should be removed; but all too often, renovators rush into plaster removal when it is not really necessary.

Because of its low cost and ease of installation, dry wall is usually the choice for plaster replacement. However, dimensional problems can arise when fitting dry wall to original baseboards and other moldings because it is usually not as thick as the original plaster layer. Original plaster should be saved if possible.

Crown Moldings and Ceiling Medallions

Only a few Nashville turn-of-the-century houses had any kind of crown molding or ceiling medallions.



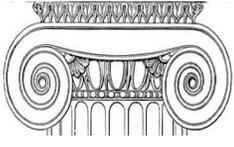
Crown moldings, such as this egg-and-dart design, were common in classically-influenced houses.

There has been an unfortunate trend among those renovating old houses to add elaborate crown moldings and medallions where none existed. This can be

an expensive addition and difficult to reverse once finished. The result usually looks exactly like what it is—a phony addition, especially the medallions, which hang below the original ceiling plaster. This is a fad to avoid.

Mantels

The mantel is a dominant visual feature of a room. Styles of mantels varied widely over the years; if a mantel is missing, care should be taken to replace it with one of an appropriate style. The configuration of turn-of-the-century mantels varied, but usually they reflect the Neoclassical fashion of the day, using classical columns and other Neoclassical decoration.



Turn-of-the-Century Houses

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Landscaping

Though the average old house owner cannot logically be expected to maintain a period restoration of the grounds of his or her house, a few tips are in order.

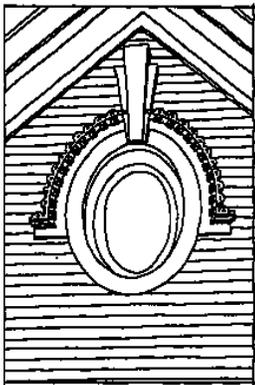
The period during which turn-of-the-century styles flourished represents the growing demand for housing in early twentieth century Nashville. These houses were typically designed for and built on narrow urban lots, making side yards minimal or non-existent. Large side lots are generally not in keeping with the rhythm of the street,

which calls for a house every fifty feet or so.

Shrubbery was generally left in a somewhat natural shape rather than being formally manicured. Foundation planting was not in style in the Victorian era but became more common in the twentieth century.

A yard generally reflects the homeowner's tastes. Fencing in front yards was rarely, if ever used. A low hedge or picket fence might be appropriate for a turn-of-the-century front yard. Privacy is often desired in the backyard today; high, solid fencing is perfectly acceptable at the back if it is not obvious or obtrusive from the street.

Additional Info



This pamphlet is designed to acquaint the owner of an old Nashville house with the basic considerations involved in a careful rehabilitation, rather than to provide detailed technical information

on the rehabilitation process itself. The Metropolitan Historical Commission has in its library more detailed information on a long list of rehabilitation-related topics. The staff is willing to make site visits and offer additional advice. For further assistance, call (615) 862-7970.

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"Technical Preservation Services for Historic Buildings." <<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm>> (Covers topics ranging from reroofing to exterior painting. Hard copy available at the MHC office.)

Text, Illustrations, Design: Sarah Jackson and David Paine, 2003

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