Part of the fun of being in a vintage house is discovering the bits and pieces that tell the story of that experience. In my place it is the lincrusta wall coverings for each room that replicate the fine wood paneling found in a more elaborate house. For example, in the dining room the lincrusta includes a band of berries and acorns, suggesting the harvest—very appropriate for a dining room. I learned that at the Victoria Mansion, which carries that theme over the top. The dining room also has a nozzle from a long defunct gas lighting system. How interesting to have turned on the light from a valve next to the wall.

I also like the fact that there is a Craftsman style overlay to a basically Colonial Revival format—it shows a stylistic transition between two eras that I particularly enjoy. Over the years a number of things have changed. There are few additional doors that weren’t there in the beginning, the heating system is different, and some of the woodwork that was originally dark brown is now painted white. I think I must have been a day servant who worked there because of the way the doors are organized, but I haven’t got the documents to prove it. There is no driveway or garage because there used to be a trolley running down the middle of the street. Just being there makes me think of the 100 years of social and architectural history that a vintage house expresses.

While living in a vintage house can be rewarding, it comes with a unique set of challenges. All of us who live in older houses have war stories—a common one is the search for a mysterious water leak. After a year of frustrating discoveries of water dripping down the wall, we finally discovered the source in the masonry, where the header of an upper floor window had been improperly installed. A bad repair had to be corrected with the help of an expert mason who was familiar with older buildings and had seen this many times before. More enjoyable experiences included refinishing the hardwood floors, repairing damaged plaster walls and ceilings, or my favorite, painting the place. The quality of these projects relied on a knowledgeable group of expert tradespeople who are sensitive to the needs of a vintage house. I came to know many of them—painters, plasterers, masons, carpenters, and others—at the Old House Trade Show.

Over my tenure, I have enjoyed repairing and revitalizing the historic features of my vintage house while contributing new layers to its fascinating story.
First address moisture and structural integrity — then seal air leaks to achieve energy efficiency.

Our Maine homes endure a range of temperature and humidity extremes. Although many houses have withstood some 200 years or more of season changes, they still need periodic upkeep. The very idea can be overwhelming, but step one is to inspect the outside of your historic home each year. Is the roof leaking? Does the siding need repair or replacement? Can you see buckled siding, or mildewed clapboards? Are there cracks in the basement walls? Is there efflorescence on brick surfaces, peeling paint, or cracked masonry? Are there cracks in the basement walls?

This kind of scrutiny each year, with a particular focus on signs that moisture is getting in or staying in, is the most important way you can protect your home’s function, performance, and energy efficiency.

Moisture is often the problem

Energy conservation is key to any building’s performance and longevity, and problems often stem from deferred maintenance. Significant areas of heat loss are often clues to moisture-related structural damage. Any structural problems or moisture issues need to be resolved before you embark on energy improvement projects.

Start by looking for moisture — including puddles, buckled siding, or mildewed clapboards. Here are some reasons you may find moisture inside your home:

- High water table in the soil or prolonged periods of high humidity
- No vapor barrier beneath the basement floor
- Inadequate or no exhaust ventilation in the basement, bathroom, or laundry room
- No attic or roof ventilation
- Inadequate air exchange
- Condensation from cold water pipes

And here are some reasons you may find moisture on the outside:

- Leaks in roof, wall, exterior trim, window and doors, or faulty mortar joints
- Blocked gutter systems, downsprouts, or leaders
- Poor drainage of the site, including slopes pitched toward, rather than away from, the foundation
- Poorly designed or blocked foundation perimeter drains, or no drains at all
- Exterior foundation walls that are cracked or lack waterproofing

For more ways to find sources of moisture use this checklist from This Old House, available at: http://img2.timeinc.net/toh/static/pdf/fall-checklist.pdf.

Check your indoor air quality first

Americans spend up to 90% of their time indoors, and much of that indoor air is more polluted than the air outside. The culprit is usually inadequate ventilation. Even houses that have air leaks can have higher than usual amounts of indoor pollutants, including asbestos, biological pollutants (pets and pests), carbon monoxide, dust, mildew, mold, pesticides, radon, and volatile organic compounds.

Assessing your indoor air quality is an important first step before beginning any energy projects, especially before sealing things up. Walk through your home looking for pollutants. Some, like mold, mildew, asbestos, and volatile organic compounds, can linger in the basement or garage. Exhaust ventilation should be working well in areas with high moisture and pollution, like bathrooms and kitchens. And carbon monoxide detectors help detect and warn you of unhealthy air quality.

The EPA has published a guide to assessing indoor air quality, identifying pollutants, and recommending solutions http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/careforyourair. html. If you find mold, asbestos, or other toxins you’re not sure how to deal with, it’s time to call a professional. The Maine Association of Building Energy Professionals has a listing of indoor air quality technicians at https://mabep.memberclicks.net.

Air Sealing

About a third of a home’s energy costs come from air leakage, experts say. The good news is that most air sealing can be done by a do-it-yourselfer with a little study and preparation.

Remember your ABCs: Start in the Attic, move to the Basement, then to the Center of the house. This takes

continued on page 4
Air Sealing
continued from page 3

advantage of the natural physics of heat and air movement. First you’ll stop warm air leaking out; next you’ll reduce air coming in. The goal is to create a continuous air and thermal barrier for your home. Effective air sealing targets such places, where the line between inside and outside is broken, and areas where divisions between floors, stories, or rooms are blurred. Draw a sketch of your house. You’ll find that some spaces (mudrooms, eaves, and attics) could be considered both “inside” and “outside” areas. Consider the aspects of your house that determine which areas are inside or outside. For example, if the attic floor is insulated, it’s a demarcation between the inside and outside. But it may also be penetrated by elements like a chimney, plumbing vents, or recessed lights.

Your own experience of your home will help you find air leaks. Where do you feel drafts? Where do you see moving cobwebs? Look for dirty patches of insulation, which are good indicators of air leaks. Another way to find leakage is to walk around with a burning stick of incense, following common-sense precautions to prevent fire or burns. The smoke will follow typical patterns of air leakage and movement.

Take your incense and pay particular attention to the places indicated on the illustrative diagram created by the Department of Energy on page 3:

Different types of leaks call for different types of air sealing material — weather-stripping, caulk, backer rod, spray foam. The EPA has a good guide on what works best where: http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=diy.diy_index. Another consideration when choosing your materials is how easily it’s installed and whether it’s reversible. Backer rod is easily removed and replaced, as is latex caulk and most types of weather-stripping. Spray foam is permanent, messy, and difficult to remove. Ask yourself, “Will I need to be able to undo this? Will the next homeowner?”

If you don’t want to tackle this yourself, there are many professional air sealing contractors in Maine who can help you. A list can be found at https://mabep.memberclicks.net. Be sure to ask contractors for references and for their experience working on older buildings. When deciding upon an air sealing strategy, keep in mind the preservation axiom of reversibility.

House Island is Portland's newest historic district

The city council unanimously voted Jan. 5 for the designation, which will protect historic resources and bring closer scrutiny to development planned there by new owners.

A little over two years after Greater Portland Landmarks named House Island a "Place in Peril," Portland's city council on Jan. 5 named it the city's newest historic district. The council voted unanimously in favor of the designation for the 26-acre Casco Bay island, which was recently purchased and slated for development.

Fort Scammell sits on the island's southern end. It was first used in the War of 1812 to the Civil War and served a defensive military purpose for the city well into the 20th century. The northern end also has an important history. The three residential-scale buildings there were known as “the Ellis Island of the North,” serving as a federal immigration quarantine station from 1907-1937.

The previous owners had stewarded the property for nearly 60 years and Landmarks didn’t request designation during the time of the sale. But once the new developer-owner envisioned potential demolitions and a local citizen saw a backhoe on the island, it became important to provide protections for such a highly significant place.

In addition to the "Place in Peril" designation, Landmarks began advocating for the city to provide the island with historic district status and commissioned till-architects to research the site's history and significance. The study found that the island's resources meet all six criteria for historic district designation. (A district need only meet one of those six.)

"A local historic district provides a formal means to preserve the existing historic buildings, structures and landscape features," according to executive director Hilary Bassett. "It does not prevent new development. Rather, it provides a formal means to review and manage change, including any new construction, to ensure that it is compatible and sensitive in design, scale and quality of materials to what is already there.”

While the district was under consideration, the former immigration station portion of the island was purchased by new owners. In accordance with the city ordinance, they began the preservation review process for improvements to create a family vacation retreat. They and the owner of the fort side have experience working with historic properties and have expressed appreciation for the island’s fort and immigration buildings and their history.

“Local historic district designation also provides long-term protection for the historic resources on the island, protections that transcend the ownership of the land,” Landmarks wrote in its letter. "This is important, because different owners may have different objectives in owning the island.”

Now, House Island will enjoy historic district protection as an important cultural landscape and connection to American military and social history at the gateway to Portland Harbor.

The Paintings of John Calvin Stevens

April 21 – July 15, 2015

University of New England Art Gallery, 716 Stevens Avenue, Portland

Gallery Hours: Wed., Fri.-Sun. 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., Thurs., 1:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

An exhibition of the landscape paintings of noted architect John Calvin Stevens, many painted en plein air with a group of local artists known as the Brush'uns, who depicted scenes in Cape Elizabeth, Capeasic, Scarborough, Strawdwater and more.

Opening Reception and Lecture by Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. and Paul Stevens

Wednesday, April 29, 6 pm

Ludke Auditorium, followed by viewing in the Art Gallery

Presented with support from the Quimby Family Foundation and the Rines Thompson Fund of the Maine Community Foundation.

Estate planning involves important decisions that reflect your passions and beliefs. When preparing your will, please consider including Greater Portland Landmarks as a beneficiary.

For further information, please contact Patricia Long Greater Portland Landmarks, 207-774-5561 x105
Dave Robinson's experience with real estate management and development in Portland has given him a unique perceptive on the benefits and challenges of preservation. He’s serving his second three-year term on the Landmarks board, where he chairs the governance committee. Robinson is originally from a small town in New Hampshire and has come to love Portland. He and his wife live in the Capisic Pond area of the city in a 1748 house that still has many of its original details. “Anyone who has an old house like this knows it’s love and toil,” he says, “because there’s a lot of work.”

What do you do at Landmarks?
I’m on my second 3-year term with Landmarks and now I’m chair of the governance committee. It’s not one of the exciting positions, but we have important tasks — finding candidates for the board and if necessary making changes to the governance structure. In fact we’ve made some changes, and now the board is ‘leaner and meaner’ — more focused in our work supporting Landmarks mission.

What led to your interest in preservation?
I came from a small town, so I chose to live here. Sometimes it’s hard to say why you fall in love with a community. I know that whenever I’m in Florida I get lost. All the intersections look the same. Here, it’s unique.

I first became involved with what became the Portland Downtown District. That was during the time when all the retail was shifting out to the malls, and that was happening nationwide. When Porteous closed and all the windows were boarded up, that got us all thinking, and there were a lot of people that played a part. We went down to New York and saw great city it is and to keep it that way.

Landmarks has evolved. I think it was necessary to make changes to the governance structure. In fact we’ve made some changes, and now the board is ‘leaner and meaner’ — more focused in our work supporting Landmarks mission.

What about now and the future?
Landmarks has evolved. I think it was necessary to move the board to a new office and to change the governance structure. In fact we’ve made some changes, and now the board is ‘leaner and meaner’ — more focused in our work supporting Landmarks mission.

What has Landmarks learned from that and from other property owners?
From my work I knew the whole real estate community, all the brokers in town, and I’ve been able to talk to them. We were very happy to hear when Landmarks did strategic planning that, while we have what some people perceive as an inherent conflict — preservation vs. development — landlords gave a lot of credit to Landmarks. While they want flexibility and maybe understanding, they appreciate the way the early founders of Landmarks went to the barricades.

What impact has Landmarks had on the Portland development scene?
Landmarks has had a big impact. We were very happy to hear when Landmarks did strategic planning that, while we have what some people perceive as an inherent conflict — preservation vs. development — landlords gave a lot of credit to Landmarks. While they want flexibility and maybe understanding, they appreciate the way the early founders of Landmarks went to the barricades. The great thing about the Old Port is that it’s retained a lot of local business. It’s well-managed, and it’s attractive to people who want to live there.

How does your real estate experience factor in?
I was at Dirigo Management, running the management side. We renovated 45 Exchange Street, which gave me first-hand knowledge of the process. That’s where I gained some appreciation of that process because as a developer there can be some conflict. It’s a layer of regulation, I remember Deb Andrews strongly encouraging us to preserve the windows, so we kept the original windows as best we could. And because of those windows that building stands out from the rest. It’s amazing. It’s also been interesting for Landmarks itself to have purchased a very old building and come face to face with the actual costs of rehabilitating that building. We no longer just preach, we also practice.

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THIS ARTICLEexplores the benefits of retaining traditional plaster and lath construction in older properties, including additional cost and energy savings that can be realized in rehabilitation projects that also benefit the environment.

Three types of lath and plaster assemblies have traditionally been used in North America:

A. Wooden lath was used between the mid-17th century and the 1940s. It required three coats of lime-based plaster;

B. Wire or metal lath, first patented in 1879, became popular in the 1920s. It was introduced with the use of gypsum, a harder plaster material which also dried more quickly;

C. Rock lath (or gypsum lath), the immediate predecessor to the preformed lath currently in use, was first introduced in 1917. Rock lath was easier to lay but could not benefit from the economies of scale that made lath cost-effective.

Advantages of Plaster Repair

With further analysis, the actual costs of retention and repair of plaster walls and ceilings vs. replacement with drywall can be quite comparable. Installation of new lath and plaster can cost $5-$20 per square foot, as much or more than the cost of demolition and removal; while repair by a skilled artisan may start as low as $2-$3 per square foot. When adding the cost of new drywall installation to the cost of demolition, yielding $3.64 - $7.82 per square foot, the economics of retaining or repairing existing plaster appears quite competitive.

This economic argument further improves if the cost of replacing baseboards, crown molding and door and window casings (at $3 - $6 per linear foot un-installed) is added to the overall cost. Often the craftsmanship represented by these finishing details is costly, if not impossible, to replicate.

In conclusion, there are compelling arguments supporting the retention and repair of existing plaster walls:

- Most (98%) of the embodied energy, labor, quality of materials, and skill is retained.
- Hazardous dust, the cost of demolition, and waste disposal is eliminated.
- Cost of replacing still-serviceable baseboards, window casings and ceiling moldings is saved and original materials are retained.
- Improved insulation value is achieved (1” plaster wall has a higher R-value than ½” sheetrock).
- The lateral resistance strength of walls is reinforced and superior sound attenuation is achieved.

A cost-benefit fire resistance ratings are retained, which can be supplemented with use of intumescent paints.

Less destructive methods to complete demolition can be used to install new wiring, ductwork, and flexible piping, including “fishing” or removing baseboards. Insulation can be blown into wall stud cavities.

Overall, retaining and repairing your plaster walls may be financially comparable to new construction, with the added benefit of retaining original architectural features while being more environmentally sustainable.

Historic Preservation is good business. Greater Portland Landmarks is honored to recognize our Business Partners.

Christopher Closs
Landmarks’ Preservation Services Advisor
(207) 809-9103
ccloss@portlandlandmarks.org
Providing historic preservation technical assistance and tax credit pre-assessments.

Please join other businesses in advancing historic preservation by becoming a Landmarks Business Partner today. You will be recognized for your community support with a listing in every issue of the quarterly Landmarks Observer and receive discounts on advertising and many other great benefits. Please call 774-5551 for more information.
**Landmarks Calendar**

Greater Portland Landmarks looks forward to engaging in advocacy and education to preserve the extraordinary historic buildings, neighborhoods, and landscapes that make greater Portland an increasingly popular place to live, work and visit. We invite you to join us!

**PROGRAMS & EVENTS**

**The Preservation of Portland Since 1961**
Fridays, 11 am – 1 pm.
Landmarks will be open to view our new large scale murals depicting the evolution of Preservation in Portland in images and text in the Gregory W. Boulos Gallery of Architecture and Design at Landmarks’ Safford House headquarters, 93 High Street, Portland.

**Old House Trade Show**
Saturday & Sunday March 28, 10 am – 5 pm, & March 29, 2014, 10 am – 4 pm.
Meet the artisans and tradespeople who can help you repair and renovate your old house. Learn from the experts in workshops and Q & A sessions on topics from repairing windows to planning your project. Find out about energy efficient practices and design solutions to update older homes. Bring photos, plans and measurements to better assist your conversations with the experts.

**Holiday Inn by the Bay, 88 Spring Street, Portland.**

**Art Exhibition: The Paintings of John Calvin Stevens**
April 21 – July 15, 2015, Wed., Fri.- Sun.1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m., Thurs., 1:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
An exhibition featuring the landscape paintings of noted architect John Calvin Stevens, many painted en plein air with a group of local artists known as the Brush’uns who depicted scenes in Cape Elizabeth, Capeisic, Scarborough, Stroudwater and more. Presented with support from the Quimby Family Foundation and the Rines Thompson Fund of the Maine Community Foundation.

**University of New England Art Gallery, 716 Stevens Avenue, Portland.**

**Lecture by Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. and Paul Stevens**
Wednesday, April 29, 6 pm
Earle Shettleworth, Director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and Paul Stevens, architect and great grandson of the artist, as co-curators of the exhibition, discuss the paintings of John Calvin Stevens. A reception will follow, at the gallery. Luhtke Auditorium (lecture) and Art Gallery (reception), University of New England Art Gallery, 716 Stevens Avenue, Portland.

**SAVE THE DATES**

**Observatory opens** Saturday, May 23
**Flag Day, Portland Observatory** Sunday, June 14, 10 am – 5 pm
**Historic House Gala** Saturday, June 20
**Plein Air Painting Workshop with Cooper Dragonette, Friday, July 11, Saturday, July 12, and Sunday, July 13**

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April 2: Stephen Kopp and Monica Adair, Acre Architects, St. John, New Brunswick
April 9: Barbara Wilks, W Architecture & Landscape Architecture, New York, NY
April 16: Building Community Social Gathering
April 23: Gary Hilderbrand, Reed Hilderbrand, Cambridge, MA
April 30: Jeff Kovel, Skylab Architecture, Portland, OR

For more information, and to register for events and programs:
www.portlandlandmarks.org or call 774-5561

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**Learn Top Tips From Local Experts**
Visit our booth at The Greater Portland Landmarks Old House Trade Show
March 28-29, 2015

**Greater Portland has some of the oldest housing stock in the country. Find out how we’re helping sellers market and sell these older homes for top price. Can’t attend or wait? Call or email today for a confidential no-cost meeting.**

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