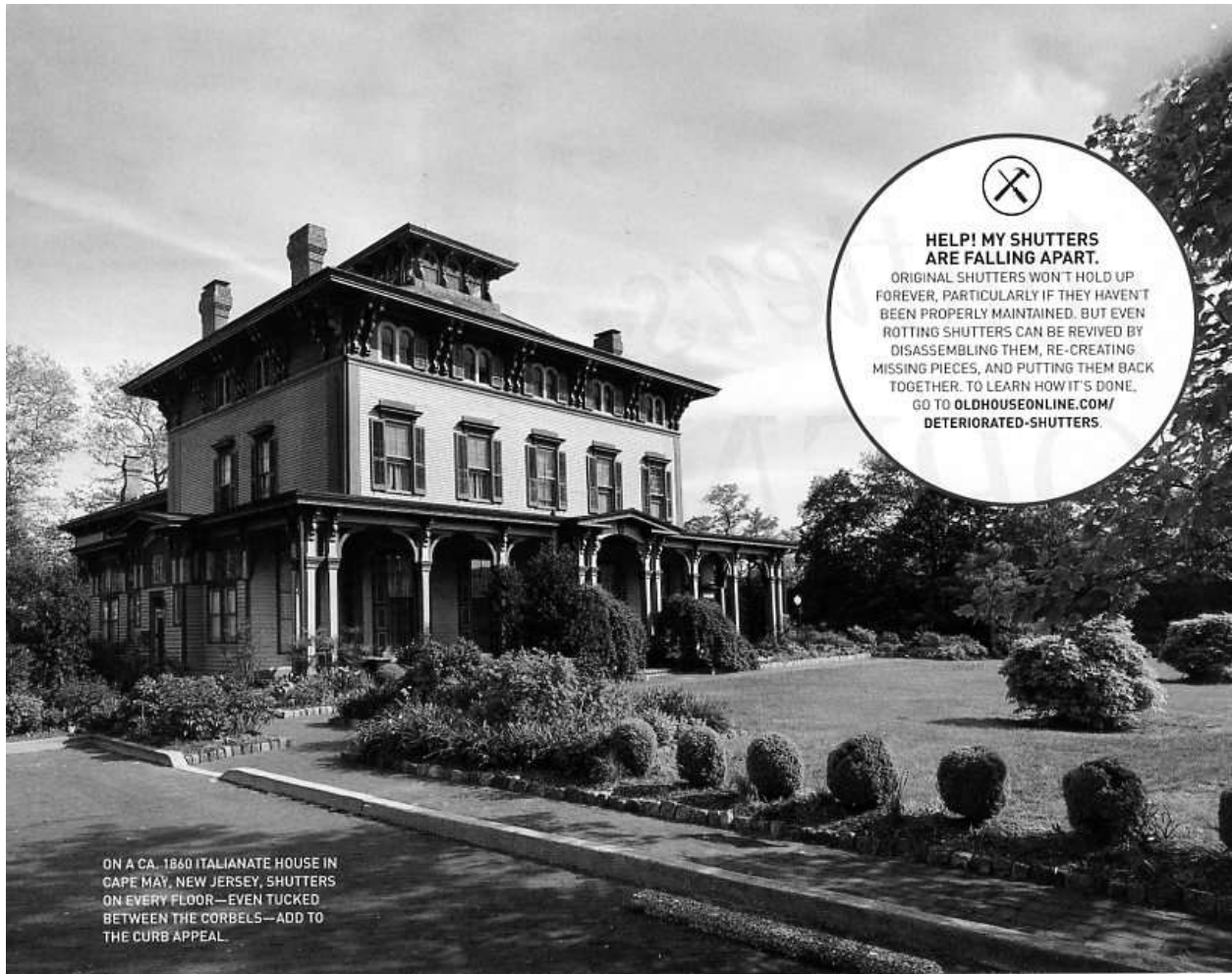


shutters,
OPEN
— AND —
SHUT

Not every historic house had shutters, but many need them to look their best.

BY MARY ELLEN POLSON





ON A CA. 1860 ITALIANATE HOUSE IN CAPE MAY, NEW JERSEY, SHUTTERS ON EVERY FLOOR—EVEN TUCKED BETWEEN THE CORBELS—ADD TO THE CURB APPEAL.



HELP! MY SHUTTERS ARE FALLING APART.
 ORIGINAL SHUTTERS WON'T HOLD UP FOREVER, PARTICULARLY IF THEY HAVEN'T BEEN PROPERLY MAINTAINED. BUT EVEN ROTTING SHUTTERS CAN BE REVIVED BY DISASSEMBLING THEM, RE-CREATING MISSING PIECES, AND PUTTING THEM BACK TOGETHER. TO LEARN HOW IT'S DONE, GO TO OLDHOUSEONLINE.COM/DETERIORATED-SHUTTERS.



The exterior shutter is a mainstay of houses built in America over the last three centuries, so the thinking goes. Versatile, architectural, and often a welcome color contrast to the façade, shutters can let in light and air, or be secured to protect the house in bad weather. It might come as a surprise, though, to hear that many homes from the colonial period forward were not only built without shutters, they were never meant to have them.

The reason? Prior to 1890 or so, most homes had interior shutters. Before the invention of screens and air conditioning, interior shutters served much the same purpose as screens and storm windows do today. While it's possible to replace historical interior shutters with accurate period designs, another option for many house styles is to add fixed or operable exterior shutters.

So what's right for a given house? Very early houses (before 1750) rarely had outside shutters. Any that appear on the house may be later additions; truly old ones have obviously become part of the house's history, while those that are the wrong size or style should be replaced. Exterior shutters are often absent on Georgian style houses such as Drayton Hall (1738) near Charleston, South

Carolina, a house famous for its intact interior shutters. Georgian-era shutters are usually in the raised-panel style (see "Are You My Type?", page 52). While two vertical panels per shutter is typical, some may have three or even four, like the shutters on the 1765 Powel House in Philadelphia, which display four panels per shutter on the lower floors and three panels for the smaller windows on the third floor.

Shutters for Federal style houses (built ca. 1780–1820) continued in the same vein—present in some cases, absent in others. Raised-panel shutters are probably most common, although the more versatile louvered style appeared, too, usually on upper stories where privacy was less of a concern. In some instances, houses built without shutters got them later on in life. Boston's 1797 Otis House initially was devoid of shutters, but early 19th-century owners added louvered ones, which remained on the house until 1916. (As the headquarters of Historic New England, the house has since been restored to its original, shutter-free appearance.)

As house styles changed more frequently in the 19th century, the presence or absence of shutters depended in large part on geo-

TOP 10 SHUTTER MISTAKES



More Online

See a photo gallery of what not to do with your shutters at oldhouseonline.com.

1. **TOO SMALL.** Whether operable or not, shutters must always be wide enough to cover the entire window when closed.

2. **TOO LARGE.** Shutters that overshoot the top and bottom of the window look silly.

3. **MISPOSITIONED HARDWARE.** Shutter dogs belong on the sides or at the bottom of the window, not directly in the center.



4. **Attached to the wall.** Historically, shutters were always fastened to the window casing—never to the wall of the house.

5. **A "FLAT" APPEARANCE.** Improperly mounted shutters lack depth and shadows.

6. **MISMATCHED SHAPES.** If you have an arched window, your shutters must arch to match it.

7. **ACCESSORIZED IMPROPERLY.** Adding balconies or railings around shutters impedes their ability to operate—and screams "McMansion."

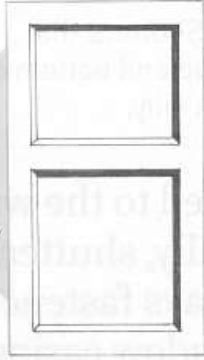


8. **Arches installed backwards.** The low end of the curve should touch the frame so that when shutters are closed, the arch matches that of the window.

9. **NO LOUVER RODS.** Even if louvers are fixed, rods are necessary for historical accuracy and to make louvers appear functional.

10. **LOUVERS ARE COMPLETELY CLOSED.** Fixed louvers should remain approximately 25 degrees open; these would have allowed a bit of light and air to fill the house when shutters were closed.

ARE YOU MY TYPE?



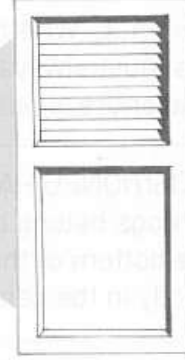
PANEL

Found on early American and Colonial Revival homes, these have solid beveled ("raised") or flat planks between the stiles and rails. Historical panels followed the molding profiles for the style of house. While two vertical panels per sash is most common, fancier early homes might have three, or even four, panels in a long/short/long configuration.



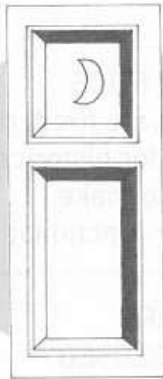
LOUVER

The most common exterior shutter is composed of slanted slats held in place by stiles and rails. Forms include the moveable louver (slats move up and down in the frame to allow more or less light, ventilation, and privacy) or the fixed louver (slats fixed in place).



COMBINATION

Combination shutters feature a paneled lower section (or sections) with a louvered top. Best suited for 20th-century house styles, they afford more privacy at the lower half of the window and greater ventilation up top.



PANEL WITH CUTOUTS

Paneled shutters on early 20th-century houses often were embellished with cutouts in simple designs like sailboats, acorns, quarter moons, or fir trees. The designs were personalized by house, and often had hidden meaning for the homeowner. They were very popular on 1920s Colonial Revivals.



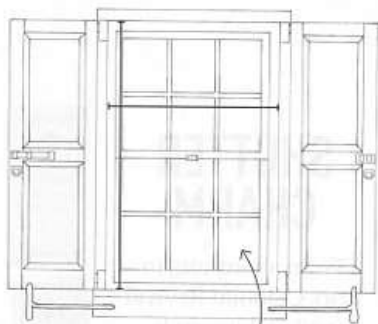
BOARD-AND-BATTEN

This rustic style is composed of long vertical strips secured with cross members. It comes in several variations, including tongue-and-groove (interlocking planks). You'll often find these shutters on cottage-style houses, or more primitive or vernacular buildings.



BERMUDA

Also called Bahama shutters, these single, full-width louvered panels originated in coastal areas from the Caribbean to the Carolinas. Hinged at the top to swing out from the bottom, they can be propped open for ventilation and shade like an awning.



MEASURE EVERY WINDOW

First things first: Shutters are hung on the inside of the window casing. Since it's a given that the window frames on both old and new houses are likely to vary, it's important to measure each one.

Measure the width and height of the windows as though the shutters would swing inward like a door and completely cover the window. Also take into account the reveal—the thickness of the channel allowed for the shutter. Check measurements for both height and width at different points along the frame, and use the smallest height and width as your dimensions. When ordering new shutters, ask the manufacturer if they calculate clearance for you or build to exact specs. Shutters should be built $\frac{1}{4}$ " smaller than the window opening for proper clearance.



HELP! MY SHUTTERS ARE SAGGING.

THE CULPRIT IS PROBABLY A LOOSE PINTLE, WHICH YOU CAN FIX BY CUTTING OUT DAMAGED WOOD AROUND THE PINTLE AND REPLACING IT WITH A DUTCHMAN PATCH OF NEW WOOD. FOR STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS, GO TO OLDHOUSEONLINE.COM/SAGGING-SHUTTERS.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL DUNN/ELIZABETH WHITING & ASSOCIATES. ILLUSTRATIONS BY MEGAN HILLMAN

graphic location and the architectural embellishments on the front façade. In general, shutters tend to be more common in the hotter, wetter South, especially on floor-to-ceiling ground-floor windows on Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne style homes. Board-and-batten styles were favored in formerly French locales like New Orleans.

Shutters went missing altogether on houses with ornate architectural window details (Second Empire, for example), or where windows are grouped in twos or threes, as in the double bay windows of San Francisco Stick Style houses. That said, there are examples of historic shutters that fit the arched or round-top windows of Gothic Revival and Second Empire styles.

Certain 20th-century styles also seem to be shutter shy. They are rare on Prairie and Arts & Crafts houses, possibly because windows tend to be ganged together in rows under an architectural header, which tends to "finish" the windows as shutters do for other styles. They're also seldom seen on Tudor Revival houses

with elements like half-timbering or groups of arched windows.

Colonial Revival houses (1895–1940), one of the most prevalent 20th-century styles, single-handedly revived raised-panel shutters. Colonial Revival spin-offs include the cutout shutter craze of the 1920s and beyond, as well as combination shutters that incorporate both louvers and panels into the design. (Plain louvered shutters are also popular on Colonial Revival styles from Georgian Revival to modest Capes and cottages.)

Whether or not shutters are right for your house depends on a combination of its architectural style and date, historic evidence found on the house, and personal taste. Some houses look equally good with or without shutters—and others look dramatically better when shutters are added. Once you've considered options that best suit the age and style of your house, take a good, hard look: Does the house appear finished as is, or could it benefit from the architectural relief and contrast shutters offer? That should help make your decision easier.



SHUTTER CHARM

From about 1915 to 1930, Colonial Revival and cottage-style houses featured paneled shutters with an array of cutout designs in the top panel. Traditional designs ranged far and wide—pine trees and roosters, fleurons and chevrons, bunnies and acorns, and the ever-popular quarter moon. The selections were often sentimentally motivated, and only one design appeared per house (no mixing and matching!).



4 TIPS FOR BUYING SHUTTERS



1. Choose operable shutters.

No matter what type, they should open, close, and be capable of covering the entire window (including arches!).

2. Select quality materials.

It's hard to go wrong with rot-resistant cedar or mahogany, but good-quality composites (usually PVC, or a mix of wood and PVC) can reproduce the look of historic shutters in a maintenance-free material that works especially well under harsh conditions like salty air.

3. Choose period-appropriate hardware.

Strong hinges and flexible pintles (or hinge pins) allow shutters to function properly and in a historically correct manner. Shutter dogs (or holdbacks) are more than decorative: They keep the shutters from banging against the house.

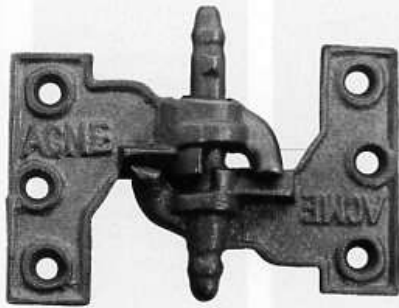


4. When matching period shutters, follow existing details carefully.

Stile, rail, and slat dimensions and thicknesses should match as closely as possible. Even the size and placement of a cutout design should be carefully copied.

HARDWARE GUIDE

In order to open and close, shutters need hardware—which ranges from the practical to the whimsical.



MORTISE HINGE

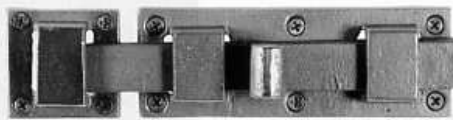
The design of these cast iron Acme hinges dates to the mid-19th century. **Get It:** Acme shutter hinges, from \$16.79, hoah.biz

PINTLE >
Mounted on the window casing, a pintle allows the shutter to swing open and closed. **Get It:** Suffolk plate-mount pintle, \$38-\$40/set of four, shuttercraft.com



STRAP HINGE ^

As decorative as they are functional, black-smith-forged strap hinges were used on early American houses. **Get It:** Forged strap hinge with pintle, \$110/pair, millhamhardware.com



SLIDE BOLT

Keeping shutters closed (and securing them against the elements) requires heavy-duty bolts. **Get It:** Shutter slide bolt, from \$28.25, historichousefitters.com

SHUTTER DOG >

Mounted to the wall below the shutter, this piece of hardware holds shutters open. **Get It:** Forged S shutter dog, from \$22, vixenhill.com



SHUTTER DOG

Shutter holdbacks also can be used to express personality; common motifs include shells, stars, flowers, and grapes. **Get It:** Grape shutter dog, \$33, timberlane.com

