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The New Period Home

Recurring Patterns

Federal Style Patterns 1780-1820: Interior Architectural Trim & Fences

by MaryBeth Mudrick & Lawrence D. Smith
 John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, NJ; 2005
 272 pp.; hardcover; 300 detailed line drawings; \$70
 ISBN 0-471-69419-3

Reviewed by Will Holloway

Those seeking guidance or inspiration in creating historically accurate Federal-style architectural elements need look no further than *Federal Style Patterns 1780-1820: Interior Architectural Trim & Fences*. This comprehensively researched and uniquely presented guide, written and illustrated by MaryBeth Mudrick and Lawrence D. Smith, presents 300 detailed drawings that can be used to replicate a variety of Federal-style elements ranging from a cornice at the Samuel Whitehorse House (1811) in Newport, RI, to a balustrade at Gracie Mansion (1799) in New York City.

Mudrick, a designer specializing in historic ornamental detail, and Smith, a cabinetmaker and the founder of Federal Style Orders, a company that specializes in architectural interiors, began researching the book after finding a lack of readily available information on the specific characteristics of the style. In reviving the Federal-style pattern book, they are bridging a 200-year gap, bringing a tried-and-true style to a contemporary audience.

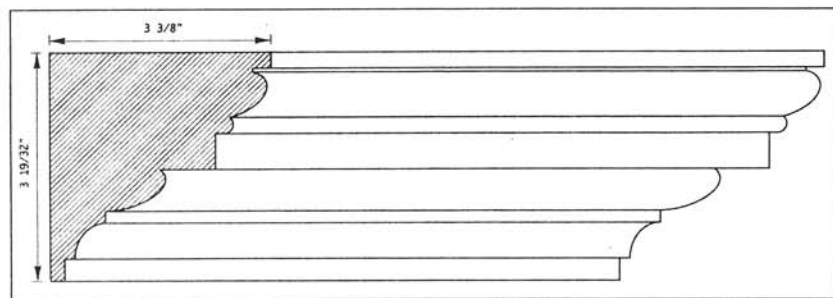
The Federal style originally came to the United States through the pattern books of Robert Adam and through American architects who toured England, notably Samuel McIntire, Charles Bullfinch and Asher Benjamin. "At the end of the 18th century, the new merchant leadership of New England was captivated by the delicacy and grace of the newly imported neoclassic Adam Style," write the authors. "New England architects, carpenters, and carvers modified that sometimes flamboyant style into a simple, elegant, personal, and original form and rejected any subsequent imports of new English styles."

Thanks to *Federal Style Patterns*, many of those same designs that New Englanders appropriated two centuries ago can be easily replicated today. The introductory chapter "About Federal Style Architecture" begins, "The neoclassical American Federal Style achieves its appeal by faithful adherence to classic Roman proportioning, reducing the monumental scale of Roman public architecture and introducing great variety and uniqueness in decoration and molding arrangements not found in ancient Rome's monumental architecture. It is a delicate and decorative interior treatment perfectly matched to the 8-ft. room heights of our era."

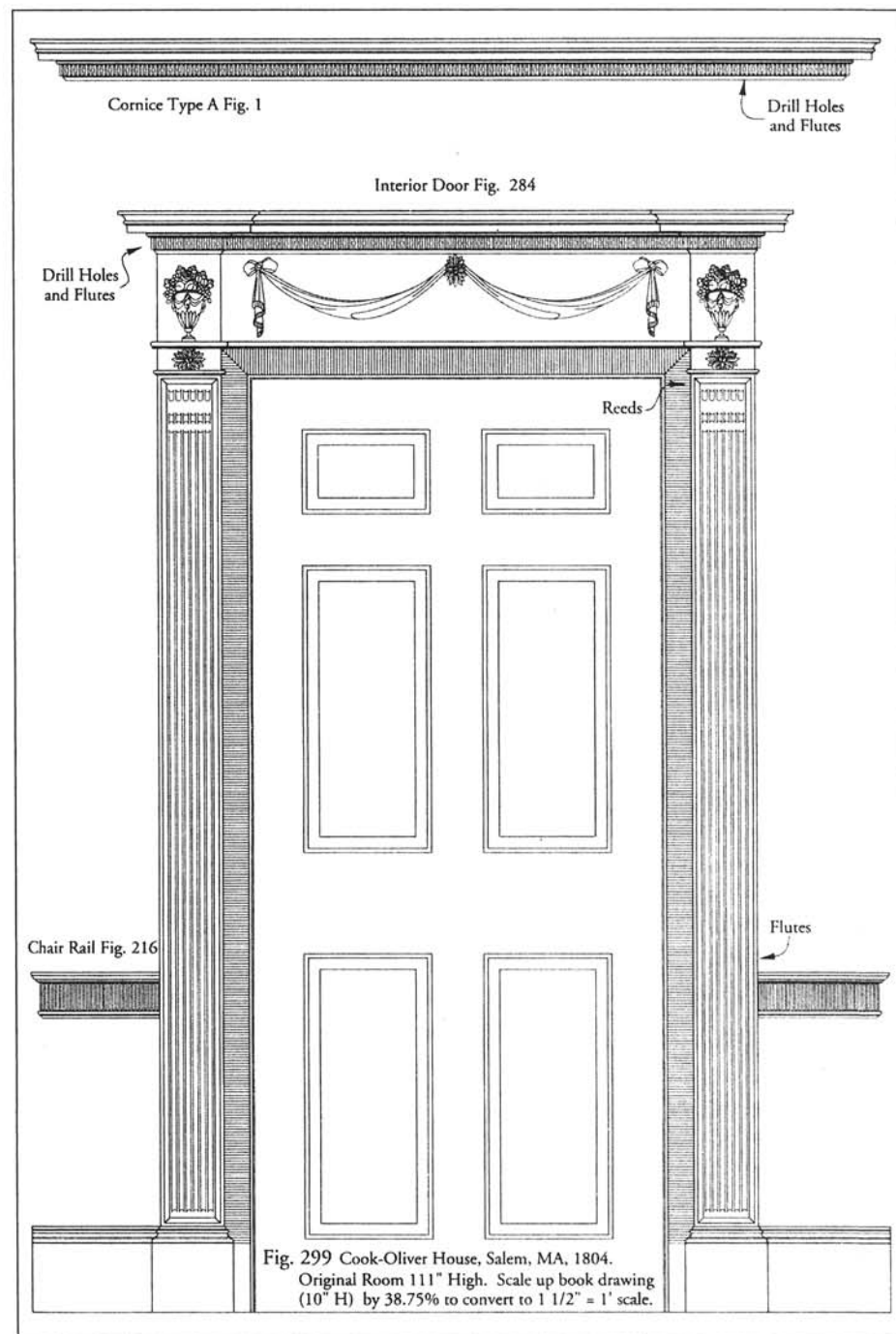
Accordingly, *Federal Style Patterns* presents the drawings, when pertinent, at a scale appropriate for today's room heights. "It was not our intention to draw all of the interior architectural elements at original room height scale," the authors explain. "The drawings in the cornice, door and window casings, chair rail and baseboard sections have been proportionally scaled for an 8-ft. room height and presented at half size with full size dimensions." Simple instructions on how to scale the drawings to fit other room heights are also included.

The body of the book is broken into nine sections: "Cornices," "Window and Door Casings," "Window Sills and Aprons," "Chair Rails," "Baseboards," "Mantels," "Interior Doors, Doorways and Arches," "Designs for Historic and Contemporary Rooms" and "Fences." Each section contains examples, both simple and ornate, from historic houses and pattern books, as well as the authors' own designs based on historical research.

"Cornices" is divided into three sections by type: Type A cornices, of which 36 drawings are included, have equal height and projection



This cornice from the Samuel Whitehorn House (1811) in Newport, RI, is an example of the Type A variety, with fairly equal height and projection dimensions. It is drawn at half size with full-size dimensions appropriate for an 8-ft. room height, but can be easily re-scaled to fit other room heights.



The chapter "Designs for Historic and Contemporary Rooms" includes the cornice, door, chair rail and baseboard from a room in the Cook-Oliver House (1804) in Salem, MA.

dimensions – producing a 45-deg. face angle; Type B cornices, of which 27 drawings are included, have a shortened projection compared to height; and Type C cornices, of which 24 drawings are included, have a shortened height compared to projection. The chapter also contains 21 of the Cornice Plus Type, which include a shortened frieze and architrave to provide a full entablature, and five examples of cornices from the Palace of Diocletian in Spalato, Croatia.

The 43 examples in "Window and Door Casings," drawn at 4-in. widths – appropriate for a 32-in.-wide door or window – include 10 from Benjamin's *Country Builder's Companion*, published in 1797. "Window Sills and Apron" presents 22 examples in their original dimensions at full size. "Chair Rails" offers 41 examples, while "Baseboards" and "Doors, Doorways and Arches" each include 21. "Mantels," containing 36 drawings at full book size with the original dimensions noted, includes a simple design from the Governor Christopher Gore Mansion (1806) in Waltham, MA, and an elaborate design from the Wheeler-Beecher House (1801) in Bethany, CT.

"Designs for Historic and Contemporary Rooms" includes six historic room drawings. For example, Fig. 299 provides a template for the cornice, interior door, chair rail and baseboard of a room in the Cook-Oliver House (1804) in Salem, MA. The section also contains six designs for contemporary rooms with 8-ft. heights.

"Fences" presents 17 drawings, including three balustrades from Gracie Mansion. The section also contains 23 examples of piers, 27 of rails and 11 of finials.

Mudrick and Smith's effort to "reintroduce the beauty of neoclassic proportions and decoration used in the Federal Style to architects, designers, craftspeople and the general public," will undoubtedly find its niche among those who see lasting value in the Federal style. As only a modern pattern book can, *Federal Style Patterns* includes a companion CD containing all of the drawings in PowerCadd version 6, DXF version R13, Adobe PDF and PostScript formats. ■