

THE BROWNSTONER

NEWSLETTER OF THE BROWNSTONE REVIVAL COMMITTEE
200 MADISON AVENUE 3RD FLOOR NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10016



Win One Week Stay In Art Deco Hotel in Miami Beach From BRC

HAVE WE GOT A DEAL FOR YOU? FINALLY, IN return for your support, your membership, your renewals, and your contributions, we have an offer we hope you can't refuse.

A one-week stay for two at the beautiful Hotel Carlyle. The Hotel Carlyle is one of a chain of the finest original Art Deco Hotels and will welcome TWO WINNERS, a double room for each, during season after January 1, 1983.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO WIN?

•Renew early. Even if you have recently renewed your membership with us, extend it for another year and your name goes into the drawing.

•For those who are not yet BRC members, just joining (\$20.00) is enough to get your name in the hat.

•Each \$10.00 contribution from current BRC members will draw one chance in the raffle. Each additional \$10.00 contribution will give you another ticket, and on and on. \$100.00, for example, is not only tax-deductible (as is the \$10) but also puts your name in the hat ten times!

WHEN WILL THE BIG DRAWING OCCUR?

December 31, 1982, at the BRC office with the winners contacted immediately and announced in the following issue of *The Brownstoner*. Once the winners are notified they can stop their renovations and start packing for their week stay in Miami Beach. Sorry, airfare not included. So get your friends and neighbors to join and have a chance in the drawing. Renew early for your chance. Or just send a contribution and indicate what it is for, we'll send your receipt in the mail.

Sorry, Board members and staff not able to participate. Renew now, or send in your contribution. You'll be home in time for the spring house tours.

Points and Counterpoints on Home Contractors

FOR PROSPECTIVE AND NEW HOMEOWNERS ALIKE, one of the most pressing and problematic issues to deal with is how best to find and trust your contractor. While many home contractors are reliable, efficient and trustworthy in both their estimates and their efforts, we have all heard one awful story after another of neophytes left sitting on packed boxes for weeks, waiting for the promised, pre-paid jobs that have yet to be done.

A simple source of help on this matter, aside from word-of-mouth and a will of iron, is the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs. Most people are unaware, for example, that home improvement contractors and salespeople must be licensed by the Department of Consumer Affairs to do business in New York City on contracts of \$200 or more. It appears from a recent Consumer study (released in August) that many small home contractors are even unaware of this fact.

Hiring a contractor that is licensed by the city does not necessarily give you all the protection you might need if things start to go wrong, but it does provide some leverage in your behalf if you have carefully followed what are basic guidelines in looking for and hiring your contractor.

The Department of Consumer Affairs is planning a conference in October; the date has not been set as of this issue's printing but you can call Isabel Butler at 566-6047 or 566-0414 to learn the time and place. The topics they plan to cover include financing, energy conservation, and in particular, Home Contractors. In the meantime, there are specific steps you can take now which have been determined in your behalf:

- 1) Comparison shop. Get competing estimates and review the quality of sales presentations.
- 2) Beware of unbelievable bargains.
- 3) Be sure all promises are put in writing in your contract. Consumers now have the legal right to a written estimate as a result of City Council legislation, effective since January, 1981.

continued on next page

DON'T MISS THE BROOKLYN BROWNSTONE FAIR

195 Montague Street

Saturday, October 2 (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

Sunday, October 3 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

continued from page 1

As a result of an undercover investigation of some 25 home improvement contractors and salespeople, the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs warns of a number of abuses. Some include: estimates given for improvement work; negotiating and signing of contracts; statistics regarding types and ranges of estimates; anticipated completion times; and willingness to give references. A major abuse, the Department reported, was the contractors failure to make disclosures regarding the three-day cancellation rights of the homeowner required by law.

BEFORE YOU SIGN THE CONTRACT...

Be sure the contractor makes a thorough inspection of the area where he or she will be working. It is unlikely that the contractor can make an accurate estimate or discuss alternatives to save you money without knowing the current condition of your home and exactly what changes you are looking to make.

Contractors and salespeople must inform you that a written estimate is available. A reasonable fee may be charged by the contractor for the estimate but the amount must be disclosed in advance.

Your contract should clearly state the date, the contractor's name, address, phone number and his license number. Beginning and completion dates should be noted.

All advertised or verbal representation, guarantees and warranties should be written in the

contract. Your contract should state in plain language exactly what work is to be performed and should describe quantities, quality of materials to be used, brand names and model numbers.

Your contractor must procure all permits required by law, and your contract should say so. Don't let work begin until the contractor provides you with certificates of insurance for Workman's Compensation, Public Liability and property damage. This helps protect you from possible lawsuits.

Don't get pushed or rushed into signing! Everyone knows "a good contractor might be hard to find" but there are plenty of them if you take your time and don't say yes to the first bid to get the job done. Take your time, sleep on it. Show the contract to a friend, consultant, or BRC member who has been through what you are going through.

AFTER YOU SIGN...

You may cancel the contract at any time before midnight of the third business day after the contract is signed. The law requires the contractor to explain this right to you and it must be described in the contract. A separate cancellation form must be attached to the contract which may be mailed to the contractor to tell him or her you wish to cancel. As a wise consumer, make use of this right to think it over. You have a right to change your mind.

PAYMENT...

It may be a good idea to make your payments to the contractor in thirds--one-third upon signing



Your Brownstone A Valuable Asset

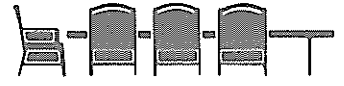
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the contract; one-third during the actual work; and one-third upon completion of the job. Under no circumstances allow yourself to be pressured into signing, or inadvertently signing, a completion certificate until the job is finished. Keep all receipts or proofs-of-payment, such as cancelled checks, with your copy of the signed contract.

KNOW THE TOTAL YOU WILL BE PAYING...

Federal law states that if a contractor arranges financing through a lending institution (called a 'holder in due course'), the lending institution as well as the contractor is responsible to the consumer. Thus, if there are problems with the job (defective materials, workmanship, abandonment, etc.) the consumer may withhold installment payments to the lending institution. The consumer may be sued, but, at least according to the law, it is now a legal defense to say the reason for withholding payments was dissatisfaction with the contracting job. If you feel this describes your situation, call the New York City Consumer Complaint number: 577-0111.

IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED...

Don't despair. Complain! First, go to the contractor. Calmly explain your problem. Still no satisfaction? Complain to the Department of Consumer Affairs, who wrote this book. Because home improvement complaints are complicated (and by the way, the largest number of complaints they receive at the Consumer Department) they must be made either in person or in writing, not over the telephone. Your complaint should

contain both your and the contractor's name, address and phone number, as well as the contractor's license number. Remember--to find out if the contractor is licensed from the beginning, call 566-2370 and ask. For more information on how to make a home improvement complaint, call 577-0111 or check with their Home Improvement Division at 566-0435. Enough phone numbers for you?

Recently, a BRC member bought a brownstone shell at a city auction for about \$50,000 in Boerum Hill. Three estimates from three different contractors brought in bids ranging from \$171,000 to \$360,000 for gut rehabilitation. That averages about \$60 to \$65 per square foot to have it done by someone else from scratch. It also shows the range of estimates going on out there. By saying yes to a contractor when our instincts tell us no, we perpetuate higher and higher rates. We have all read and heard the trouble and time it takes to be our own contractor, but it takes equal time and trouble, and care, to let someone else do it.

Take advantage of BRC's reference list and the Consumer Affairs studies and watch for the date of their October conference. This one's for you.

FOR ADDITION CONSUMER INFORMATION, CALL: Tel-Consumer/Tel-Law at: (212) 732-8400 and ask to hear Tape #202-"How to Select A Contractor" and Tape #203-"What You Should Know About Home Improvement Contracts."

To obtain a pamphlet listing all the topics included in the tape library call 566-6046. ^{MS}

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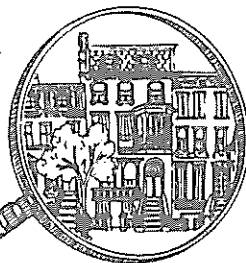


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The Essence of Brownstone: History, Character & Development

(THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE WAS RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY ROSEMARIE DORADO OF WOODSIDE, NEW YORK. SHE USED OUR RESEARCH FILES FOR STUDY AND WAS KIND ENOUGH TO SHARE HER FINAL PAPER WITH US. WE ONLY HAVE SPACE FOR EXCERPTS, SO PLEASE WRITE BRC FOR COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT AND FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY)

THE ARCHITECTURAL STYLES OF NEW YORK CITY HAVE encouraged the use of and have been influenced heavily by the characteristics of certain building materials. Early building materials of the nineteenth century progressed to a widespread use of sandstones. Since these buildings were in an urban environment where the climate is quite different and more extreme than other less developed areas, these materials were being subjected to extreme stresses. City climate significantly increases deterioration and decreases the life span of the early and commonly used building material such as sandstone.

History

During the early part of the nineteenth century the emergence of the Greek Revival Style combined the emotional echoes of ancient Greece with the restrained ornament and symmetrical plan and massing of the Classical tradition.

The Gothic Revival style never reached its fullest in New York because of the need for mass-housing with little land available. Despite its rarity in nineteenth century New York, the Revival introduced the architectural ideals of the Romantic tradition that reached their fullest expression in the city's brownstone-front and Italianate style row houses of the 1850's-1860's.

The Romantic movement encouraged the use of brownstone fronts and Italianate style on New York houses at a time when New York was one of America's most prosperous cities and it was mirrored by the degree to which the Revival took hold.

Builders usually employed local brownstone for the basements, street front walls, the stoops and the door and window details for houses of that era.

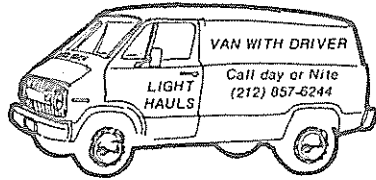
The Italianate style emerged when New York was the leading manufacturing center and the nation's financial and business center. The middle class tried as best they could to imitate the wealthy in their homes. By the 1850's the wealth and social ambitions of the families of New York exceeded the scale and architectural treatment of the row house mansions.

In the following years, the Renaissance palazzo mode began to appear in American cities. Louisa Caroline Tuthill wrote in her History of Architecture (1848) of the Philadelphia Athenaeum, "This building is a beautiful specimen of street archi--



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ecture. Where the space for an edifice in the city is necessarily very limited, the best possible way of rendering it ornamental is to decorate the doors and windows, the cornice and balustrade."

So it seemed no matter what new fashion of style overwhelmed the residents of urban dwellings, brownstone was still favored and commonly used. Advanced technology was partly responsible for the widespread popularity of brownstone for New York rowhouses because the invention of steam channeling or steam-cutting processes lowered the cost of all cut stone and brought the fashionable soft brownstone within the reach of the middle class rowhouse owners.

BROWNSTONE AS A BUILDING MATERIAL

Brownstone is a soft, close-grained Triassic sandstone or freestone. Brown sandstone can be a sturdy long lasting building material when properly cut and laid, which was not always done. If the sandstone grain is facing outward it would not erode as easily as the improperly cut stone would. The stone should not run parallel to the exposed surface. It should be cut across the grain and laid ashlar. But even with the aid of steam channeling equipment, New York builders often ignored these time-consuming quarrying methods. When cut and laid improperly the sandstone crumbles and scales, because water seeps in the porous blocks and upon freezing it expands and splits the stone into large, thin sheets.

Brownstone fronts so popularly used in the nineteenth century were constructed with a wood frame and brick overlain. A four-to-six inch thick brownstone facing or veneer would then be placed over the brick layer. The backyard walls of a brownstone front are ordinarily brick.

DESTRUCTIVE PROCESSES OF AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

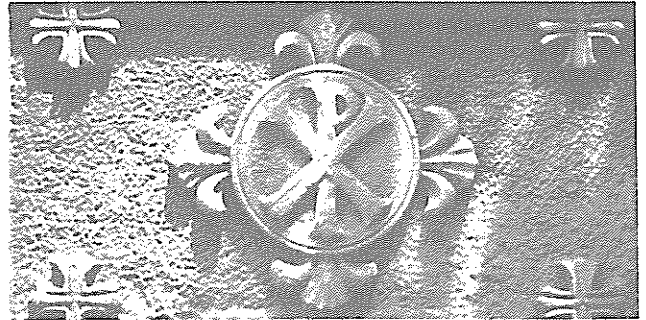
The threat of fire to the homeowners of all 18-19th century townhouses was constant. Brownstone homes were threatened also because of their wooden frames. To lessen the chances of disastrous fires,

the city periodically passed ordinances which encouraged citizen participation in fire fighting, required regular chimney cleaning and repairs and forbade the storage of combustibles within built-up areas. Amid the poor electric wiring and the old plumbing these buildings tend to settle without a proper foundation.

Even so, from a construction viewpoint, a brownstone is a safer dwelling than most other kinds of homes. Four, five and sometimes six layers of brick or brownstone make safer walls than do treated wood and synthetic materials.

A slow process which works into and eats away the integrity of the brownstones is the daily exposure to urban environments. Weather and wear are constant enemies of brownstone exteriors. The resis-

continued on page 10



The deteriorative results on porous building stones.

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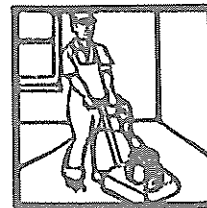
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THE BROWNSTONER

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Marketplace for Brownstoners is free to members of BRC to advertise personal needs, items, or services. No professional ads please. 561-2154.

WANTED: Antique roll top desk and old fashioned children's wooden desk (top lifts up, seat also). Replies to BRC at 200 Madison Avenue, NYC 10016.

WANTED: Brownstoner Editor looking for parlor floor apartment facing street in renovated brownstone in Manhattan. (212) 807-0828.

Classified Ads

House exchange. Professional couple in NYC for preservation project would like to exchange their charming, historic Sag Harbor house (Hamptons) for spacious, comparable NYC loft/apt/townhouse. Several months to 1 year. Time, duration are both flexible. References available & required. Call (516) 725-0376.

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Hunter Mountain Rental. Season/Weekly/Monthly. 2-bedroom apartments, sleeps six on private estate. Open all year. Call (518) 589-6468 or (212) 855-1667.

Bibliography

Conserve Neighborhoods Notebook. Twenty-eight issues from the past two years of the popular Trust newsletter Conserve Neighborhoods have been compiled in a three-ring binder for permanent reference. The notebook provides the practical advice on fundraising, community events, promotion, federal programs, information sources and more. \$12.95 from Natl Trust, 1600 H Street, Washington, DC 20006.

This Old Placid Town: The Aesthetics of the Baltimore Towhouse. Natalie W. Shiver. Maclay & Associates, 1981. 39 pp., b/w photos., illus., notes, biblio. \$3.95 in paper. Baltimore's rowhouses—sturdy, plainish brick structures with white marble stoops form the backbone of the harbor city's renaissance. The well-researched and illustrated book charts their progress and unique styles.

Source of Architectural Ornament: Designers, Craftsmen, Manufacturers, and Distributors of Exterior Architectural Ornament. Brent C. Brolin & Jean Richards, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, Inc., New York, 1982. 287 pp., b/w photos., illus., biblio., index. \$29.95 (Hardcover) This is the reference book that architects and designers have been waiting for. An invaluable list of over 1,300 craftsmen, designers, manufacturers, and distributors of exterior ornaments. Located throughout the United States, they represent 20 wide-ranging categories of ornament from pre-cast concrete to terra cotta, molded polyester resin, stucco, stained glass, ornamental brick, metals, murals, porcelain enamel, awnings, fiber arts and more. Having survived the onslaught of modernism these manufacturers, artisans, and artists affirm that ornament is an essential element of architecture, not an expensive, outdated extra. A must for architects and designers although we don't necessarily recommend it for beginners with no prior experience in home renovation.

ALL VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED AND WELCOME. JUST CALL FRANCES OR MARILYN AT (212) 561-2154.

Many, many thanks

ALL OF BRC WANT TO MAKE A SPECIAL EXTENSION OF gratitude to James Stanforth, husband of BRC President Deirdre Stanforth. As a consultant to non-profits, Mr. Stanforth has given freely, tirelessly and voluntarily of his time and his expertise to help raise funds and spirits and ensure the quality programs we offer our members. From all of us, thank you.

ALSO TO BE THANKED, MS. DOROTHY MCCURRY, a BRC member who worked many, many hours to update and make current our bibliography. Now all stories from The Brownstoner since 1968 are at our fingertips and all you have to do is call. And we owe it all to volunteer member Dorothy McCurry. THANKS!

are \$6.50 per lecture with special rates entire series. Wine and refreshments served. Write to Royal Oak Foundation, 41 E. 72nd, NYC 10021.

October 9

Portobello: A Sidewalk Sale on Flatbush Avenue
From Atlantic Avenue to Grand Army Plaza through the heart of Brownstone Brooklyn. Plants, furniture, housewares, antiques, hardware, etc. All devoted exclusively to lovers of the home. From 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Rain date: October 16th. Vendor space info, call 789-9242. Otherwise, just show up for the fun and fortune.

October 10

Bay Ridge House Tour
From 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. this tour features a variety of styles prominent in the Edwardian Period. A beautiful neighborhood. Tickets are \$3.50 in advance and \$4.00 at the door. More information from 788-0090.

October 13 through 16

Fourth Annual Conference on Historic Preservation and the Minority Community
Held this year at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in its new Freedom Hall complex in Atlanta, Georgia, the conference will provide a national forum on the issues of historic preservation in

minority communities and is intended to increase the capacity of neighborhood groups and community development corporations to participate actively in the revitalization of their communities. For info write above at Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Change, Atlanta, GA 30312.

October 16

Brownstoners of Bedford-Stuyvesant
This walk or drive tour will show all aspects of life in Bedford-Stuyvesant from brownstones in the process of renovation to finished homes done in both historic and modern styles. It begins at noon and goes until five with tours leaving from Our Lady of Victory Church at Throop Avenue and Macon. Tickets are \$5.00 with refreshments served mid-way through the tour at an information exchange. Ten beautifully renovated homes, some finished, some in progress. A tour designed to show a neighborhood in process of bringing brownstoners back to Bed-Stuy. 756-9446.

October 17

Sunset Park House Tour
Spend an autumn afternoon exploring Sunset Park, sandwiched between Park Slope and Bay Ridge, a neighborhood with good housing stock at affordable prices in a stable, multi-ethnic area. Take the BMT RR trains to the 53rd Street Station and begin your tour at St. Jacobi's Lutheran Church.

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Just ask us:

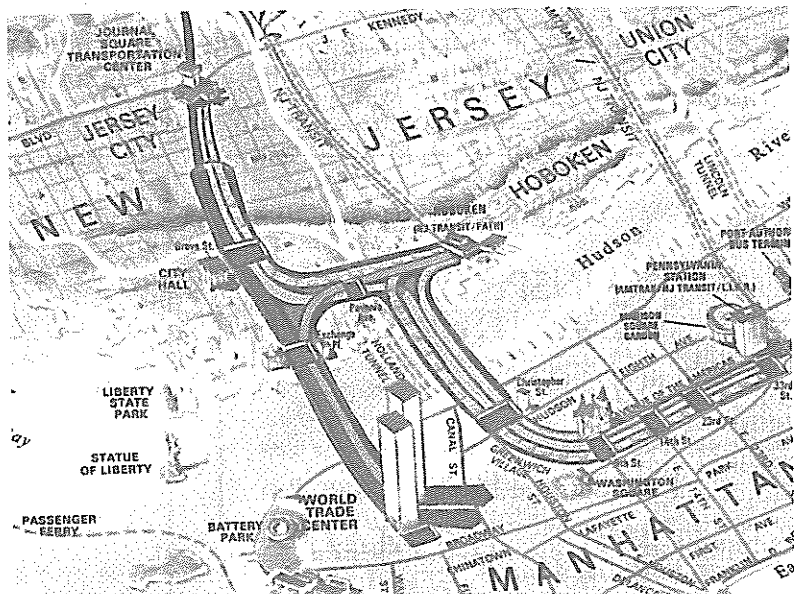
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October 17 & November 7

Walking Tours of Cast-Iron Architecture

Widely praised as informative and enjoyable, the fall tours sponsored by Friends of Cast-Iron Architecture feature small groups and take about two hours. Walk thru old commercial areas each one covering a different era in cast-iron architecture development. \$2.50. Info: 369-6004.

October 22 through 24

Back to Main Street/Back To The City Conference

This year's conference takes place in a town designated by the Natl. Trust a "Main Street" community in an effort to stimulate the revitalization of small towns across America. Visit a small town resplendent with Victorian architectural treasures. Relax in the picturesque village in the Western Poconos known as the "Switzerland of America." The town is Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania 18229. Write Jim Thorpe Civic Assoc., P.O. BOX 11, in Jim Thorpe, for more information and brochure.

COMMERCIAL TOURS AND COURSES

Small Journeys/Walking Tours

BRC members from Murray Hill have set up a group of walks and talks ranging from Forest Hills Gardens, Park Slope, Riverside Drive, and other lesser-known neighborhoods in NYC to guided tours of art centers & museums. Info and dates or brochure write: Small Journeys, 320 Lexington Ave., NYC 10016 or call 689-4076.

New York Walk-About

An adventure in discovery, a trip into the past, a glimpse of the future. Guided tours will help you trace the footsteps of those who made New York New York. Feel a bit of the electricity they did when they helped put it all together. No advance tickets or reservations. For info brochure with descriptions of tours: (212) 582-3460.

Discover New York Walks/Talks

Municipal Art Society explores a different part of the city each month in celebration of the architecture, community and rich history of each area. Call for brochure/descriptions: 935-3960.

Sunday Walking Tours/Museum of the City of NY

Explore neighborhoods at a leisurely pace while guides point out little-known details of history and architecture and life in our city. Call for details and brochure: 534-1672.

New York Real Estate Institute Courses

Beginning October 4th, Austin Haldenstein's well-known courses begin. Manhattan realtor and adjunct professor of NYU's Real Estate Institute, his courses are designed for those interested in the purchase of a brownstone or other small-sized investment property. For registration for either the seven-week or the one-day course, contact NYC office (212) 790-1300 or 362-9600.

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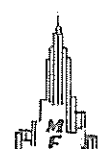
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(continued from page 5)

tance to weathering depends upon the composition, texture and structure of the stone. The durability of sandstone depends largely upon the kind of cementing materials that hold the grains together. Siliceous cement is the strongest and least vulnerable to erosive processes.

Dirt and carbon accumulate on the surfaces and age and destroy the integrity of the stone, although sandblasting can remove and restore the brownstone in most cases. Some brownstone specialists use a combination of chemicals, wetting agents, inhibitors and high-pressure water that penetrates below the surface and lifts the surface and embedded dirt from the stone. Urban environments are also subjected to fluctuations in climate. City areas tend to have microclimates because of the process of convection and daily processes of city life such as artificial cooling and heating. When temperatures are raised the amplitude of molecular contractions increases and causes the molecules to move further apart in the stone. This means the solid as a whole expands. Rainfall exceeds 10% for urban environments and its excess serves to clean the building of the soot silt's that have accumulated but also seeps into porous building materials.

Run-down and abandoned brownstones are being demolished by the city at a rate of 125 a month as menaces to health and safety. Some, however, of the nineteenth century have been converted to rooming houses or bought and are being renovated by brownstoners.

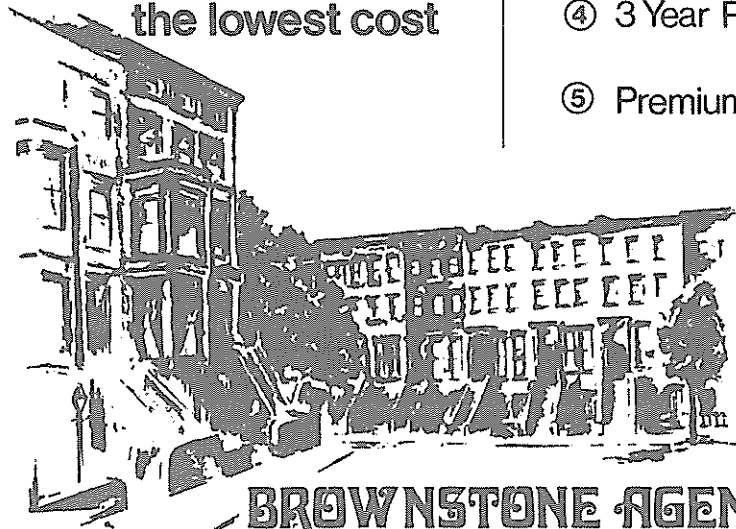
Other than sandblasting, such techniques as steam cleaning, pointing up joints, applying silicone, or painting can be used to cover up the cracks, spalls and scaling so commonly seen on these relic brownstones. Interior problems include old window frames suffering from dry rot, electric problems, cracks in the foundation walls, leaking roofs, rattling glass caused by loose stipping and putty.

Most brownstone houses were built with flat rolled roofs usually sloped toward the rear gutter. New roofs are fabricated using asphalt salts. After eight to twenty years these roofs dry out. Water stains on top floors, ceilings, or brittle surface, fine cracking and dried out seams occur as these roofs deteriorate. These felts are susceptible to moisture and inadequate ventilation will cause buckling and expansion or ridges and blisters will form in the roof surface.

These relics of the 19th century possess much of the charm that modern buildings lack, yet they are allowed to deteriorate. Neighborhoods which represented the wealth of the town have now been transformed to represent the poorer areas of New York. But still they retain the sound building structures and handsome Victorian and Gaslight era which could never be duplicated today.

Rosemarie Dorado
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From Our Readers . . .

For at least 1½ years, my husband and I looked for a house in the Carroll Gardens area of Brooklyn. This is where I grew up and my family lives. However, we were not able to find anything that we could afford that didn't need extensive renovation. Also, no houses ever came up for sale on any of the nicer blocks.

A neighbor of ours told us about a house going up for sale right on the block where we were living (31st Street near the Greenwood Cemetery). We looked at the house and realized that it was in pretty good shape and the price was right—\$50,000.

Although the house was 60 years old, it didn't have much detail work, no fireplaces, etc. We bought the house in June of 1981 and renovated it for 4 months. Working night and day with help from family and friends, we put everything in, new baths, floors, kitchens, etc. Although we worked hard, and spent twice as much money as we had intended, we have a lovely home with a rental.

Our concern is that we don't get many young people in our area. I don't think people are aware of the nice two family homes available. Although Sunset Park is always talked and written about, many people don't know of our area which is actually Sunset Park but at least 15-20 blocks before the main area of Sunset Park streets.

We have many older people on our block who

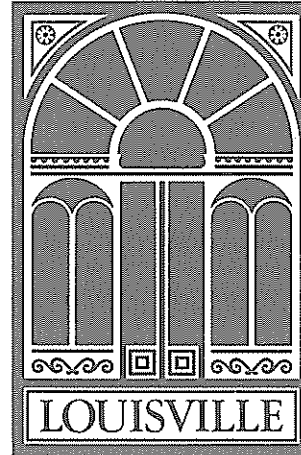
have lived in their homes since they were built sixty to eighty years ago.

We would also like to get young people interested in our area. Do you have any ideas?

Dolores & Charles Costa

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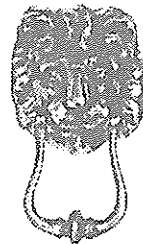


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