



Fancy Fences Of Yesteryear

by Walter Jowers

More and more these days, when I'm asked to consult on a renovation project, the contractors and homeowners want to know about period landscaping details—fences, trellises, and outbuildings in particular. When it comes to fences for early-twentieth-century buildings, I have some answers. A while back, I ran across some designs in the August 1911 issue of *American Carpenter and Builder*, a magazine that was published by the Radford company in Chicago—the same company that helped popularize mail-order houses.

The plans show everything you need to know to build the fences. With a little explanation, just about anybody with a cutoff saw could put one of these fences together. And it shouldn't be hard to match at least one of the fence designs to a given early-twentieth-century house.

Start Simple

We'll start with the simplest fence, which would work best with a bungalow or cottage (see Illustration 1). It's essentially a lattice, with the vertical 1x2s nailed to the backs of the 2x4 header and the 1x6 skirt. The horizontal 1x2s are nailed to the fronts of the 4x4 posts and tacked to the horizontal 1x2s. If I were building this fence, I'd chamfer the post tops to shed water, and maybe put a little copper "hat" on them besides.

No-Waste Picket Fence

This fence (see Illustration 2) is a simple but handsome picket fence. The short pickets are nailed to the two 2x4s at the top; the long pickets run all the way down to the bottom 2x6 skirt. There's no waste when you cut the pickets; when you cut the points for the long ones, you get the tops of the short ones. The tops of the 4x4 posts are cut to match the profile of the long pickets.

My Favorite

My own favorite is this fence (see Illustration 3). I can't decide if it looks Prairie Style or Japanese. (Which is all right, I guess, since the Prairie Style borrowed heavily from Japanese design.) I like it too much to say it should only be matched with a Prairie-Style house. As long as it's in the backyard, I think it would look good with any pre-1930 house. Some details that are a little fuzzy on the illustration: The top nailer behind the pickets is a 2x4 with its 2-inch face pointing up. All the pickets butt up to the 1x10 skirt; and, the space between wide and narrow pickets is 1½ inches, the same as the width of the narrow pickets.

X Marks the Spot

Finally, this fence (see Illustration 4), looks like every piece of knockoff-Stickley furniture I've ever seen. I like this one, but for some reason I see it built out of willow branches and placed around a small

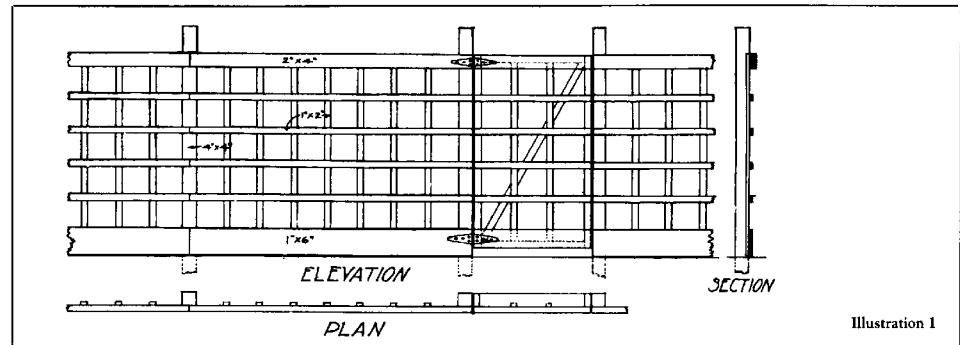


Illustration 1

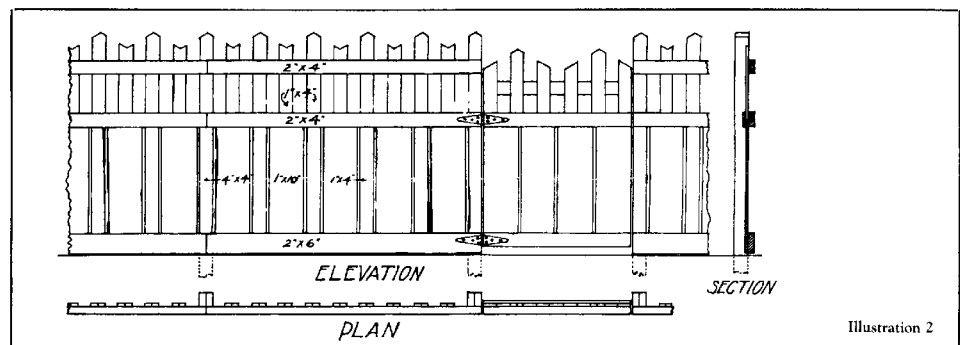


Illustration 2

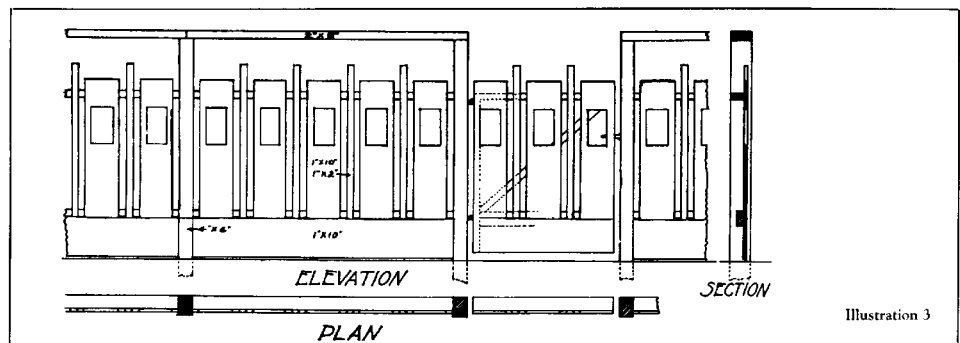


Illustration 3

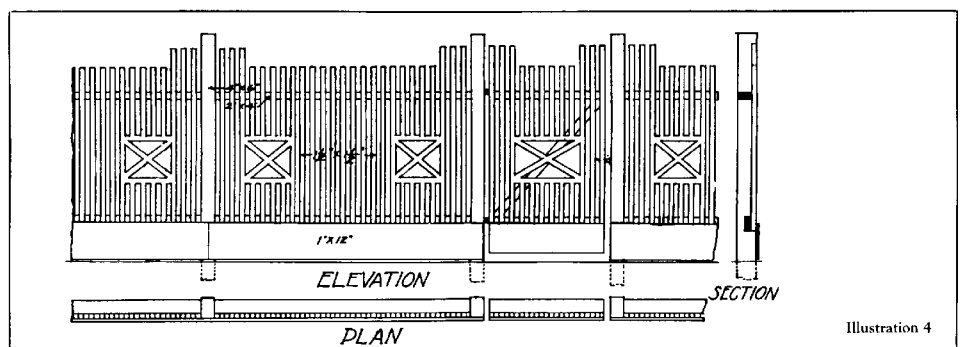


Illustration 4

cottage by a waterfall. Anyway, the plan is pretty straightforward, except that it doesn't tell you that the X-pieces should also be 1½x1½, half-lapped at the center of the X. As with the previous fence, spaces between pickets should be equal to the width of the pickets.

Don't Paint Them White

Of course, the members of these fences should be treated with water repellent wherever there is exposed end grain. (And, in the case of the Prairie/Japanese fence, around the inside edges of the sawn-out "windows.") Any joints where water

could stand should be caulked. And all of these fences should be painted. Popular colors at the time were mossy greens, pine-bark browns, fawn...Just don't paint 'em white! ■

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