

Two Classic Trim Styles

by Lars Larsen

Use the right combination of stock and special-order moldings to give your interiors traditional appeal

moldings are the finishing touches that let your project show its best face. Yet often a superior carpentry effort is undermined when molding styles clash or are ill-proportioned.

Choosing a trim style. The "period" look is coming back into popularity. Many owners and builders are choosing to trim the interior in a classic style that gives the house the flavor of an older home. The concern is not so much to exactly duplicate historical moldings as to capture the feeling and proportions of a style. Here are two interior trim packages, which I'll loosely categorize as "Classical" and "Victorian." Many styles exist within these broad categories, so I emphasize that my description of each is not absolute, but just one variation.

You should be able to create each of these packages largely with stock lumber and moldings. Even if your lumberyard stocks only a few molding profiles, they can probably obtain many others through their millwork distributor.

The Classical Approach

The basic themes of the classical style are proportion and restraint. There's an established order to a typical interior elevation, and it's anchored by a generous baseboard. Use stock 1x6 or wider, with a base cap and a carpet strip, for a solid base. Resolve the base into 5/4 plinth blocks, or a built-up casing. When I use blocks, I prefer a casing 3 1/2 to 4 inches wide, thinner in section at the inside edge, with a broad "S" curve on the face and a quirk-and-bead or an ogee on the inside edge. Another variation is to use a 3 1/2-inch base with an ogee as a casing, then apply a band or panel mold along the outside edge.

For a more formal classical look you can use thicker stock for the head casing, with a small crown, cove, or cornice mitered around the top. If you do this, be sure to use a wide enough head casing so that the cornice does not seem to pinch the door.

I use a bullnose stool, with the profile returned around the ends of the window sill. (A router with the correct size roundover bit works great for this, or you can shape it with a rasp.) The window apron should have a profile similar to, but narrower than, the casing. Cove back the molding profile at the ends.

Though rooms with an 8-foot ceiling height may look fine without a ceiling molding, in a living or dining room with high ceilings a crown can add the right finishing touch. This is a judgment call. Again you want to make sure that the crown doesn't pinch the top of the windows. If the room isn't high enough for a crown, a 2 1/4-inch cove molding might look nice.

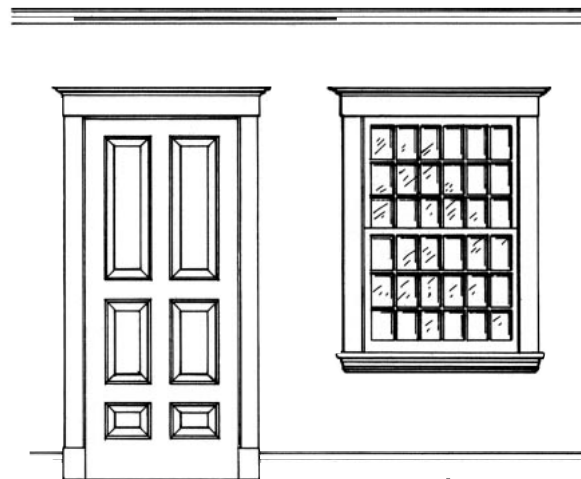
Victoria Reigns

The current Victorian revival recalls an era of more ornate and fanciful decoration. Partly in reaction to the restrained classical styles, the Victorian period relied more on embellishment and exaggeration. Moldings became plumper, and more detailed and layered.

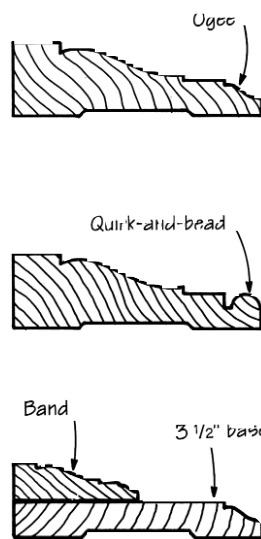
In the Victorian style, the plinth block is right at home. Casings are generally molded in the pilaster style (that is, they are symmetrical from the center out to each edge) and terminate at the top into a rosette — a square block with a circular pattern shaped into it. Rosettes and pilaster casings are not always available off-the-shelf, though more lumberyards seem to be stocking them.

Use a wide base board — 1x8 if

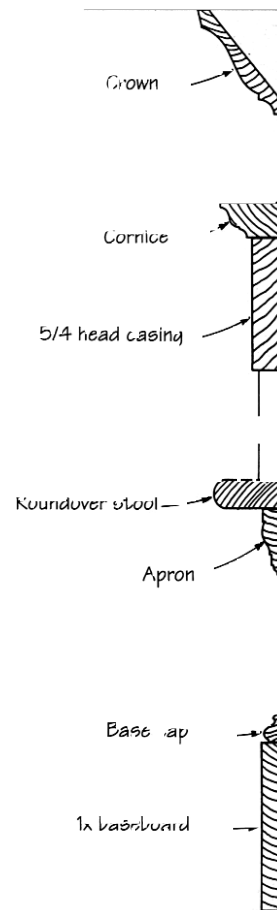
Classical Interior



Classical Casings



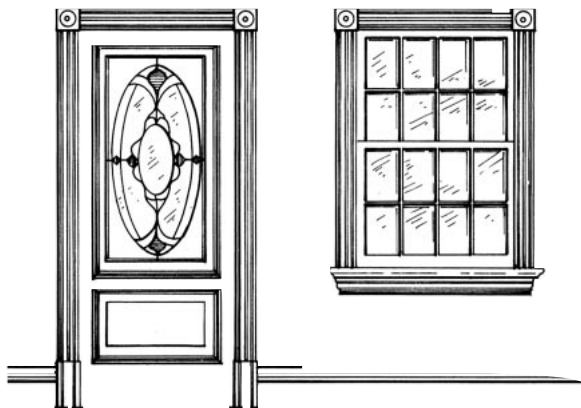
Classical Section



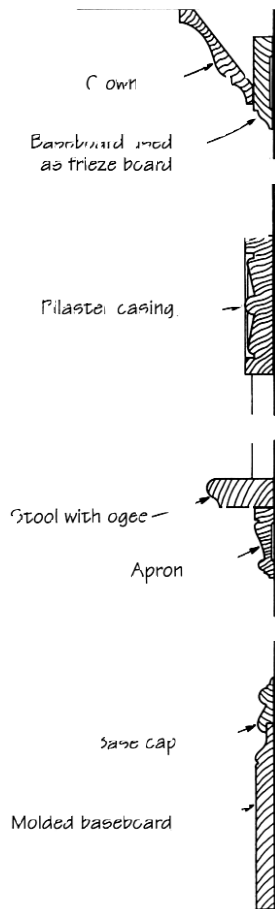
A classical trim style should be well proportioned and restrained. In the classical style a cornice molding around the head casing gives a stately appearance to the doorway (top).

the budget allows. Victorian bases are sometimes molded along the face, but should always be molded on the top edge or have a base cap. Victorian-style base caps typically

Victorian Interior



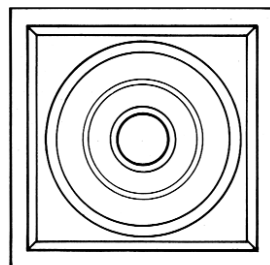
Victorian Section



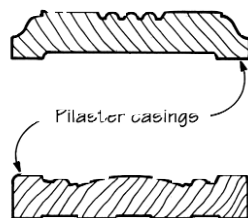
have two or more curved elements, and often overhang the base board.

Where the classical style uses a simple roundover, the Victorian window stool is molded with a generous ogee. The supporting apron is usually wide, ornately molded, and

Victorian Casings



Rosette



Pilaster casings

The Victorian style tends more to embellishment and exaggeration in its molding profiles. Rosettes (above) are characteristic of the Victorian period.

coped back at the ends.

Beaded wainscot was popular in the Victorian era, particularly in dining rooms, entry ways, and baths. Use a wainscot cap, or combine a cap with a band for a built-up look.

The crown molding might be set on a frieze board, molded along its bottom edge. Again, a ceiling molding can get seriously massive, so be sure you have the wall height to support it. ■

Lars Larsen is a carpenter and cabinetmaker in Burlington, Vt.