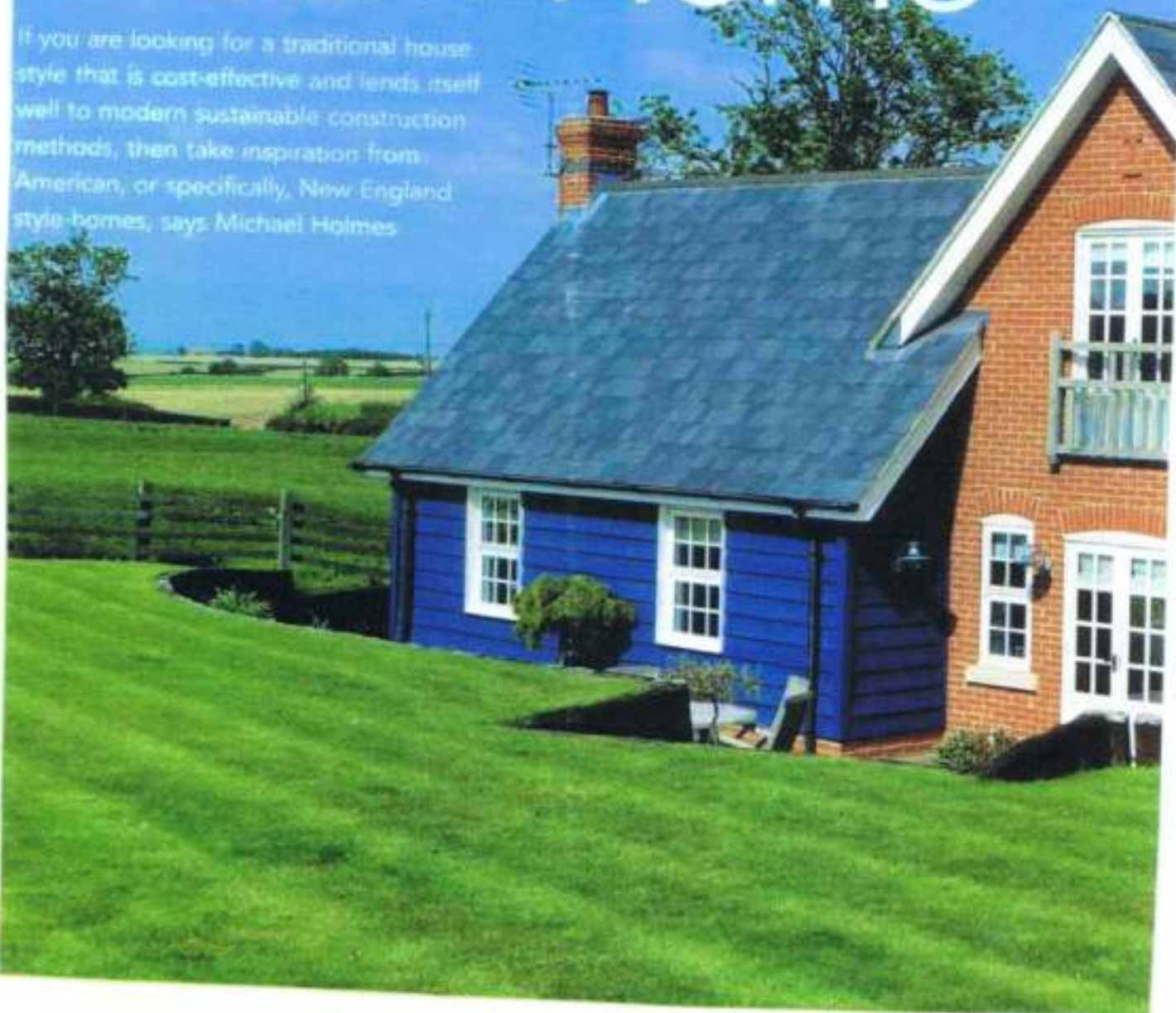


DESIGN MASTERCLASS:

Achieving The American Dream Home

If you are looking for a traditional house style that is cost-effective and lends itself well to modern sustainable construction methods, then take inspiration from American, or specifically, New England style homes, says Michael Holmes





OLD AND NEW ENGLAND MEET

Reminiscent of traditional vernacular houses from the south-east of England, from where the origin of the style was exported to the American continent, the New England style is typified by its simple rectangular form with side-gabled pitched roofs, often with dormer windows, painted timber siding, open porches, and large sliding sash windows.

Inside the look is typified by wooden flooring, woodburning stoves, folding louvered shutters and neutral, often pastel paint shades based on natural pigments — elements which are all currently very popular.

In the UK, it can be difficult to negotiate a truly New England-style house with the planners, so homes tend to be heavily influenced by the style instead. This new house in Lincolnshire compromises by partially cladding the exterior in a vernacular brick.



The Building Form

THE STYLE EVOLVED WITH MODERN CONSTRUCTION METHODS AND FASHIONS

New England style originated along the Mid-Atlantic seaboard of the United States, where early 17th century English settlers built heavy timber framed, timber-clad houses in a simple symmetrical style — typical of the houses they had left behind in the south-east of England, particularly Kent, Sussex, Suffolk and Essex.

The Salt Box (I-house)

These houses were typically two storeys high, one room deep and two rooms wide, with a central brick chimney, or a chimney on one gable end. The roof would be side-gabled and steeply pitched, originally to carry a thatch or reed roof, but this was quickly succeeded by timber shingles due to the region's high winds and driving rain.

To enlarge this basic form, the simplest solution was the addition of a half-depth single storey lean-to extension across the back, covered by extending the roof down at the same pitch. The resulting shape is very similar to a traditional 'salt box', hence the name of this style of house.

Other options for enlarging the floorplan include adding a gabled wing at the back to form a T-shape, or adding an aisle structure along the front, back or in some cases both elevations (known as Plantation style) to form an open porch.

Cape Cod

Another style that originated in New England during the 17th century is the Cape Cod house, named after the settlement where they were first built. Cape Cod houses are one and a half storeys high, one room deep and two rooms wide, with rooms in the roof and often a central brick chimney.

This type of house was typically extended with the addition of a lean-to across the back with a shallow monopitched 'shed' roof.



Basic forms and traditional shapes

Above right: A 'salt box' lean-to was a common way of adding space; this is a UK interpretation. Right: A Georgian-style 'Colonial' house in the US. These became more ornamented over time, with elaborate door surrounds and detailing.



Careful attention to detail

Clockwise from above: A Cape Cod-influenced Irish home clad in local stone. The common salt box was typically one room deep and two rooms wide with a central chimney. This front-gabled structure is classic folk-Victorian.



Gable Fronted

One significant change to the New England style that became fashionable from 1830-1850 was the introduction of the 'gable fronted' house. Instead of having gables at the sides, the traditional form is turned side on, so the gables face front and back.

Gable fronted houses can be one-and-a-half, or two storeys high, and the form lends itself very well to narrow sites, as the floor plan tends to be deeper than it is wide. Gable fronted houses can easily be enlarged by the addition of wings to form an L- or T-shape.

Craftsman Style

What we now think of as New England style can be found across much of America. Eventually the style gave way to Victorian, Gothic Revival, Queen Anne and other architectural styles across the country.

New England style was revived in the late 19th to early 20th century when the Craftsman style - influenced by the British Arts & Crafts Movement - became fashionable.



THE DETAILS

HOW TO ACHIEVE THE RIGHT ROOF AND CHIMNEY DESIGN

The Roof

Roof pitches were traditionally steep on early New England houses (over 45°) as the tradition was brought over from England, where the roofs were designed for thatching. The use of timber shingles allowed lower, more economical roof pitches (using less material) of 30° to 45°.

Using the roof space as accommodation is a frequent feature, with dormer windows in many different styles. In some areas the traditional end-gabled roof evolved into the gambrel roof, with an increased pitch for the lower section of the roof creating even more usable roof space. A new house in the style can have more or less any traditional pitched-roof configuration.

Chimneys

A brick chimney in the centre of the house or on one or both gable ends is a typical feature of the original New England style. However, from the 1830s onwards, the chimney gradually gave way to the metal range and stove in America, with a simple metal flue. Brick chimneys are therefore an option for a New England-style house, but not essential. It is more cost-effective and energy efficient to incorporate a room-sealed stove with a metal flue than to build an open chimney. This will also suit anyone looking to build a low-energy home. In design terms, if one or more chimneys are felt to be an important feature, they can be used to house a metal flue for a stove and can be sealed so they need not be a source of energy loss.

Georgian Style

As construction methods progressed away from heavy timber framing and new cheaper and more versatile lightweight framing methods were developed, different roof configurations and deeper 'massed' room plans became possible. Houses were no longer limited to being one or two rooms deep and so started to get larger with central hallways and chimneys on both gable ends.

This refined housing was built by the wealthier citizens and influenced by the architectural fashions in Europe, including Georgian, and then Classical revival styles such as Adam style and Neoclassical style.



Use the Right Materials

PAINTED TIMBER BOARDING AND ROOFING SHINGLES WERE THE PREDOMINANT MATERIALS IN NEW ENGLAND

Structure

New England houses are traditionally timber frame and clad in painted timber boarding, usually fixed horizontally with timber casing around windows and cover strips over junctions at external corners.

“Softwood is inexpensive”

Timber frame is a cost-effective and entirely dry (no mortar) construction method. It is also a space-efficient option, as the external walls need only be 175-225mm in depth due to the insulation within the structural wall.

A good modern-day alternative is structural insulated panels (SIPs), which offer superior airtightness and integral insulation.

Wall Cladding

Painted softwood cladding is a relatively inexpensive and sustainable material. Western redcedar and European larch are both widely used. Microporous paints that allow the timber to breathe will reduce maintenance requirements, as will pre-coloured factory-finished cladding boards that have a vinyl (emulsion) layer.

Another cladding option is timber shingles, which may be laid in a number of different coursing patterns.

Low-Maintenance Options

Thermally treated softwood (Accoya® or ThermoWood®) is a low-maintenance option worth considering, as is plastic

(vinyl) boarding and cement particle board. They are available pre-coloured and look convincingly like painted timber cladding. These options will only require occasional cleaning and should never need repainting.

The Roof Covering

Timber shingles are the predominant roofing material and this is an option that is finding favour in the UK. Shingles are wedge-shaped rectangles of durable timber such as oak or cedar, laid in an overlap. They will need replacing every 10-40 years, so a more durable alternative is to use small-format slate double lapped in a similar style. ▶

Opt for modern updates on classic materials. Cladding like this is a great alternative to shingles; Marley's Cedar boarding is indistinguishable from painted timber. Note the shingle cladding on this US house.



Doors & Windows

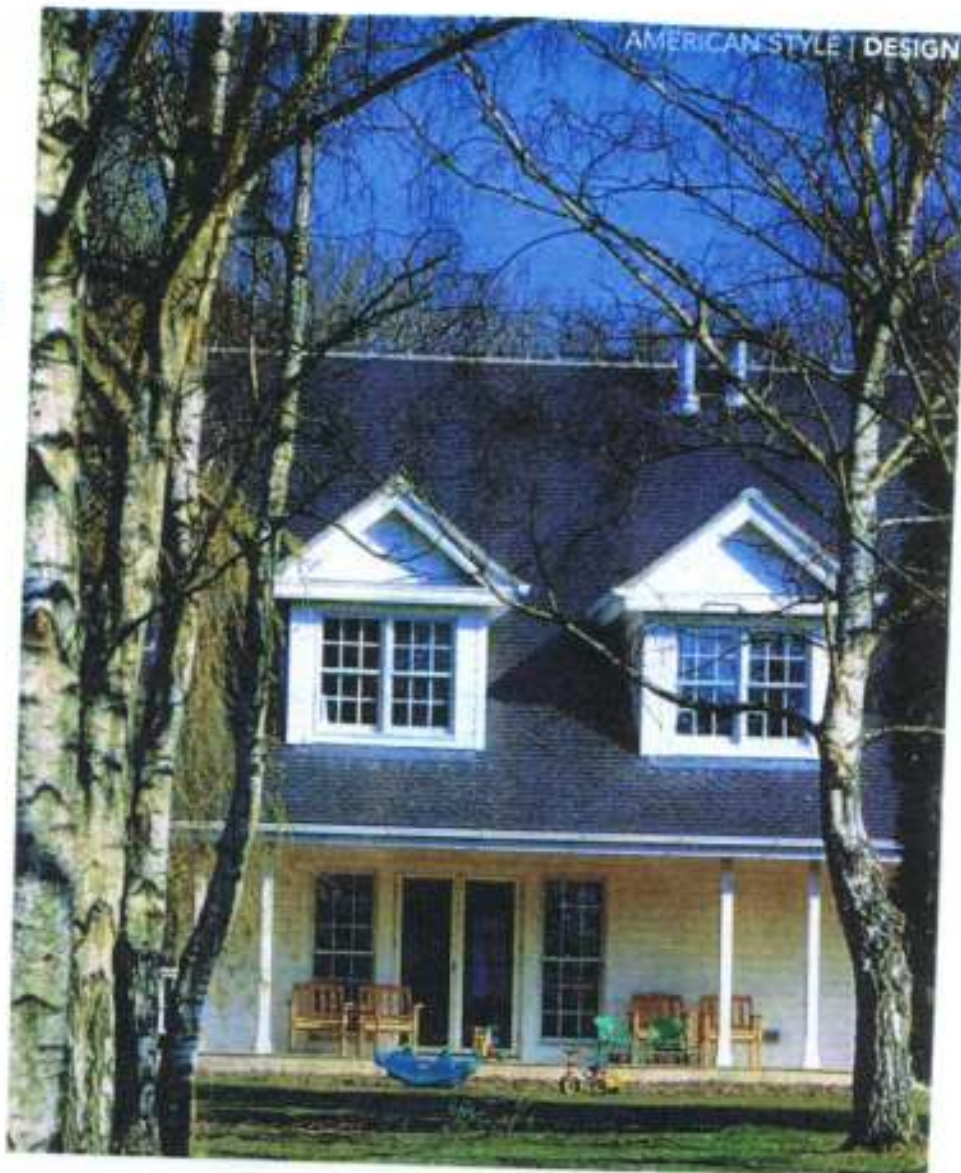
SLIDING SASH WINDOWS AND FRENCH DOORS ARE KEY FEATURES

Early New England houses had small side-hung casement windows, with small rectangular or diamond shaped panes of glass held together by strips of lead. From the 18th century casements were superseded by multi-paned sliding sash windows.

Sliding sash windows remain the predominant window type for a New England-style house. The emphasis of the windows should always be vertical rather than horizontal, as should each subdivided pane of glass. Larger window openings can be formed by grouping sash windows together side by side, but each individual window should retain a vertical emphasis.

As timber frame external walls are not usually very deep, windows are often fitted flush with the external face of the building with a timber surround and timber sill.

Original New England houses have painted panelled doors both inside and out, and this is a style that still suits today. Glazing is often incorporated either into the



Aim for classic, elegant lines

Cucernit from Alessi (left); Dormer windows are a common feature; Sash windows reign supreme in New England style; those are from Scotts of Thrapston; French doors are a popular addition — try Mumford & Wood



door itself, or into the door frame with a fanlight or sidelights, for instance.

Glazed panelled 'French' doors are a popular feature for creating access to the garden, often in combination with sidelights, and possibly fanlights above too.

There are several suppliers of American sliding sash windows and French doors supplying the UK market. Popular in the US are composite windows, combining timber surrounds with a low-maintenance exterior of plastic or powder-coated aluminium. ▶



Michael's Key Tips

- ➔ **Use as much timber as possible.** From the structure to the cladding, windows, doors and shutters, timber is the dominant material.
- ➔ **Opt for sash windows.** New England-style windows are almost exclusively sliding sash.
- ➔ **Remember the local vernacular.** You can be heavily influenced by New England style, but care must be taken to link to local traditions.



Porches

A SWEEPING VERANDA IS A TELL-TALE SIGN OF A NEW ENGLAND HOME

An important and distinctive design feature of the New England style is the porch, which is better known in the UK as the veranda. This is a covered outdoor room that is open on one or more sides. It may be at the front of the property, side or back, depending on orientation.

There are two design options for creating a porch: inset beneath the main house roof, or as an add-on created by projecting the main roof or adding a separate roof, supported by posts or columns. ❖

USEFUL CONTACTS: **Timber Cladding** Bennett's Timber: 01472 350151; Coyle Timber Products: 01225 427809; John Bask: 01427 613858; Sisk Timber Products: 01551 495 3111

Low-Maintenance Timber-Style Cladding Central Woodwork (Marley Floor): 01281 722588

Cemwood (Cambs): 020 8501 8993; James Hardie: 0800 968 3103; Sash Building Products: 01827 317200

Thermally Treated Timber Cladding Accoya: 020 8150 8825; Thermowood: 0800 00 44 55; **Shingles** Carrone: 020 8301 0900; John Bask: 01427 613858; Timber Ltd: 01865 862223; Western Timber: 0800 135 7111

Windows Anderson Windows: 01203 511122; Mavin Architectural: 020 8569 6222; Masterframe: 01274 516410; Murrill & Wood Ltd: 01625 818755; Scots of Shropshire: 01852 732366

New England Shutters ENK Shutters Co. Ltd: shutters.com; Long Island Shutters: 01992 524888; Plantation Shutters: 020 8671 9222; The California Company: 0845 123 5661; Select Interior Shutters: 01461 788 9669; Shutter Design: 01423 359230; The New England Shutter Company: 020 8675 3099

Shutters

THE CLASSIC WINDOW DRESSING

The louvered shutter is a classic feature of New England style. The tradition evolved from the solid internal window shutters of the 18th and early 19th century houses. The narrow louvers replaced solid panels as a way to control sunlight to prevent overheating, and to provide security and privacy whilst still allowing free movement of air when the windows are open.

Made-to-order louvered shutters are widely available and can take the place of curtains for a clean and uncluttered look.

Cream painted hardwood shutters from The California Company (0845 123 5661) are perfect for emulating the New England look.

