



My pal Becky Hart-Palo asked me if I ever found anything interesting inside of walls during house remodels. That prompted this piece. Thanks Becky. The Prof. is shy on material after, lo, these many years, and welcomes a nudge from time to time.

The simple answer is "yes," the quirkiest stuff shows up in the wall cavities and ceilings of old structures. In fact, a venerable tradition of placing items and scratching graffiti inside buildings has persisted down through time.

I have been told that in castle days, our dark-spirited ancestors buried a virgin under the corner stone during construction. In later years, a silver or gold coin supplanted virgins. I'm not sure if virgins became more scarce, or were simply esteemed of greater value.

Literature has numerous examples. Remember the poor cat mortared up inside a wall in E. A. Poe's short story "The Black Cat"? Or the lurid wall drawings in the contemporary novel of South Africa *Imaginations of Sand* by Andre Brink?

As a frequent remodeler, I've located a boodle of sundries: vintage newspaper clippings, packs of dessicated cigarettes, toy soldiers, Kewpie dolls, underwear, old whiskey bottles, a Flash Gordon ring, a mummified cat, 50- odd pounds of birdseed, diagonal pliers, an Indian Head penny, Greek coins, tortoise shell hair clips, a mortising chisel, a "Remember Pearl Harbor" button, an old love letter. Most of the items were inadvertently sequestered, the chisel, pliers, and Lucky Strikes for example. The birdseed got pack-ratted into a bathroom partition wall by vermin. The home owner kept replenishing her bird feeder for "those starving songbirds." The rats snaked the seed into a wall cavity and cached it for winter gnawing.

Peeling back some 70's panelling, we located a "growth stick" on one remodel. To our amusement, we were able to trace the maturation of the Sroufe Boys, Mike, Gerry and Peter, from infancy to teenhood, in one-inch gradations.

Several years ago, I was hired to remodel a fine old bead-boarded bathroom in South Tolovana Park, Coach Jack Ramsey's former beach house. Skinning back the interior wall coverings, I discovered a finely sketched bear torso on the interior of the south wall. The bear hunched over, its stylized backside facing the viewer, bare-naked and spread-eagled. "I can't bare this carpentry anymore!" the cartoon caption read, signed Joe something or other, Seaside Construction Co., 1939. As a long-time carpenter, that graphic had a certain charm for me.

Often scrawlings and inclusions are purposive. Peter Sroufe, veteran demo ace, allows as how he's found numerous \$500 Confederate bills inside of old wall framing, signed by an early Cannon Beach carpenter, Dave Firebaugh. The bills were a trademark, a finishing stroke left buried for the ages. We generally leave a signature, a comment or two, on the last shingles at the top of a gable. I remember placing a memorial shingle on the top of the Tolovana Park Community Hall the day after our good friend Louis Wilson died.

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From The Lower Left Corner
Victoria Stoppielo

Maybe a wake-up call

I watched the first presidential debates and wasn't very surprised by what I saw. My hunch is that no one else was either. At the beginning of the program it was announced that the Republican and Democratic candidates were neck and neck in the polls. Mentioned but not emphasized, however, was that the polls reflected "most likely voters." I'm not sure how that's defined, but it's probably people who are, first, registered to vote, and, second, voted in the last several national elections. In other words,

The problem is, the majority of potential voters didn't vote last time. In fact, we have a trend: No matter which party's candidate gets elected, he's been elected by a distinct minority of registered voters and an even smaller minority of the American people.

Unfortunately, the machinery of the major parties doesn't seem to care that this is the case. Probably as long as their control of business-as-usual in DC continues, the very troubling dynamic of a democracy with poor participation doesn't seem to disturb them.

The lack of turn-out is generally blamed on voter apathy, and it's assumed that apathy is the voters' problem, not the system's. It's also assumed that the voters' silence implies consent, that we're all happy with the way things are starting with Nixon's silent majority.

But I don't think so. My sense is that a lot of potential voters feel disgusted and alienated. Working class people have experienced economic policies that erode their value and rights in the workplace. Many others feel helpless and angry about deteriorating quality of life in their communities—whether it's concerns about public safety in large cities, declining quality of public education in many school districts, or high unemployment and lack of economic alternatives in rural areas like ours.

Among non-voters are probably many people referred to as "cultural creatives" by marketing researchers. Estimated to be 25% of the population, this group is interested in alternative methods, whether it's organically grown food, a wind generator for electricity, herbal supplements like echinacea when fighting a cold, or cooperative approaches to problem solving.

I also believe there are basically middle of the road people among non-voters who worry about life after retirement, the cost of a college education, and the deterioration of US infrastructure, and are disgusted that these major problems get superficial treatment while the two major parties engage in petty conflict. Finally, many non-voters are annoyed by the way big money seems to buy the opinions of members of Congress; they feel plain old unheard by the current political process.

While I identify with almost all the characteristics attributed to non-voters, I haven't missed a presidential election since I obtained the right to cast a ballot. However, an ad right after the debates captured my situation exactly. It said, "Vote for what you want. Otherwise you'll never get it." The ad was for Ralph Nader. Indeed, I've often felt I was voting for the lesser of two evils, that there was always a major compromise of my values in voting for one of the candidates.

Six months ago, I would have predicted I'd vote my standard Democratic ticket, but I'm tired, after eight presidential elections, of almost always voting with misgivings. The only president I can honestly say I'm proud to have voted for is Jimmy Carter, who has turned out to be a very decent, intelligent, compassionate man, both in and out of office. His response to the energy crisis in the 70's was decades ahead of his time; if we'd followed his leadership then, we could handle the current oil problem much more easily now. His response to the hostage crisis was seen as wimpy, but sword rattlers forget (or don't care) that no one died in the process.

I'm not saying the work of recent administrations is all bad it's just that a lot of it hasn't been good. Both parties have felt confident about approving NAFTA and GATT, shifting jobs out of the country as well as lowering standards for both environmental protection and working conditions.

I have to say Nader's views most closely match my own, whether they have to do with reigning in corporate power, subsidizing the poor instead of the rich, or protecting consumers and the environment. I think both parties need a wake-up call, and I think a strong turn-out for Nader just might be the ticket.

I believe in God, only I spell it Nature.
Frank Lloyd Wright

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