



Yes, but—will our kids clash with our house?

BY CHARITY VOGEL

WHEN I FIRST tell people my daughter's name, they usually blink hard. And then they ask me to repeat it slowly. Sometimes they want the spelling, to boot.

"You mean like the little girl in *Peanuts*?" they ask. "Or like the—um, like the hospital?"

No, not really. My first daughter, who's now two, is named *Mercy*. That's right: Mercy, like the noun meaning compassion—not Marcy, Merry, Mersey, or Merci (all of which we've had to gently correct). The name isn't a family heirloom. No, we chose it because it seemed to us both beautiful and strong, conveying valor and virtue yet with a feminine sound. Plus, I have to admit, it does match our house.

Before you laugh, ask yourself this: As an old-house owner, do you find that your choice of living accommodations has turned into more a lifestyle? Does your old-house thing influence the way you make some decisions and even the way you lead your life?

Sometimes the proof is in the details. Think about your predilections and habits for a moment. Are you more likely to frequent thrift shops and antiques marts on a Saturday morning, rather than Macy's or Kohl's? Are you attracted to anything—men's shirts, blenders, mailboxes, soda pop—advertised with the word "vintage"? Have you started to collect home remedies (Grandma's mustard

plasters and homemade porcelain cleaner, yikes!) and cook retro meals like stroganoff, baked macaroni-and-cheese, and, save us, tuna casseroles?

If you answered yes to any of these, is it really too farfetched to picture yourself naming kids and pets with old-fashioned names? Maybe you already have! "Fetch, Hawthorne! Good boy!"

Trust me, it happens. Five years ago, my husband T.J. and I—out hunting for our first house together—fell in love with a fairy tale of a grand old Victorian: a three-storey, double-porched, partially shingled folk Victorian, built in 1898. This house lured us because, besides being almost obscenely loaded with goodies (matching stained-glass windows, double staircases, original hardwood floors), it also looked exactly like the kind of house a small child comes up with when asked to draw a family's house. From the blue-painted clapboards to the white window trim, the red-brick chimney to the flagpole out front, this is it. Even the tiny ad printed in the paper by the Realtor noted that picturebook quality: "This is one for the family photo album," it gushed. We were sold. When we walked around the big back yard that first day, accompanied by the elderly homeowner—who clearly found selling bittersweet—both T.J. and I knew right away that we could stay here for years, grow into this house, and raise a family here. [continued on page 40]

Turns out we were right. In five years, we've changed some things about our house. But the house has changed us more. Since the day we moved in, this old Victorian has been quietly, almost imperceptibly shaping us as people. We've always tended toward the durable, the long-lasting, toward things of quality, but now that bent has become almost a fixation. We always valued our books and paintings; in this old home, we showcase them as

of "Annabel" from Poe—get picked on just a little bit when they get to grade school? So what if someday when they are introduced as "the sisters Mercy and Annabel," it sounds as if they've stepped from the pages of a Civil War novel?

T.J. and I can't be the only ones out there doing this. Is it a coincidence that the rise in old-house mania (magazines, books, HGTV, DIY network, on and on) has

been matched by a rise in popularity of old-fashioned names for babies like Emma, Caleb, and Grace?

Besides, if there's teasing coming, they'll be ready to take it, my girls. Because they'll have

learned that having an old-fashioned, 19th-century name is distinctive and fun enough to be worth the minor irritations it might cause now and then. It's a lesson their mom knows only too well. (Check the byline on this article!) And it's one I look forward to sharing, over the years, as the girls grow up in this old-fashioned, sometimes irritating, beloved house. ✦

You own (*obsess over*) an old house and your children are growing up in it. Does this mean they'll get picked on in third grade?

valued treasures. I like to think this old house is making us better with time, even giving us a patina, the same way the staircase railing has developed a warm, oaken glow over the decades.

ABOUT THOSE KIDS' NAMES. Well, so what if Mercy and her baby sister—that would be Annabel Hope, the spelling

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