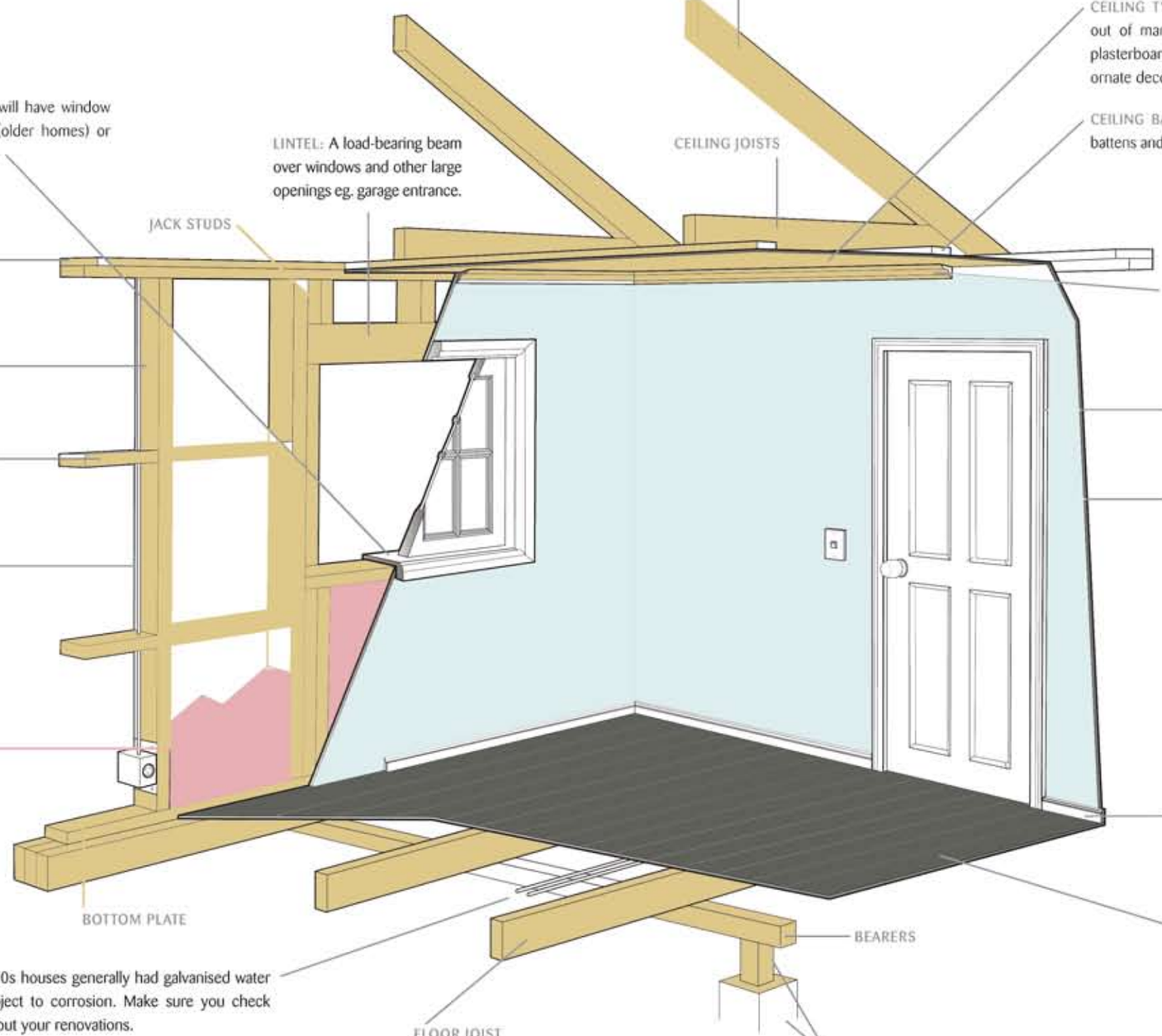
Understanding what's behind the old paint and wallpaper



WINDOW FRAME: Most houses will have window frames made from either wood (older homes) or aluminium (more modern homes).

LINTEL: A load-bearing beam over windows and other large openings eg. garage entrance.

CEILING TYPES: Over the years, ceilings have been constructed out of many different materials including timber, fibrous plaster, plasterboard and softboard. Some ceilings in older homes will have ornate decorative mouldings generally formed out of fibrous plaster.

CEILING BATTENS: In many older homes there will be no ceiling battens and the ceiling linings will be fixed directly to the ceiling joists.

SCOTIA, CORNICE OR COVE: These are different names for the decorative finish between the wall and the ceiling.

ARCHITRAVES: The timber trims around doors and windows.

WALL TYPES: Plasterboard was first used in the 1930s. Villas and Bungalows built pre-1920s have linings of timber boards, known as sarking or match lining, placed horizontally over the timber framing. The boards are covered in scrim (a jute fabric), paper and wallpaper.

WIRING: Original rubber sheathed wiring found in pre-1950s homes is made from tinned copper, insulated with rubber and covered with cloth. The cloth disintegrates and the rubber perishes over time which can make the wiring unsafe and a fire risk. Have an electrician check the wiring in each room as you renovate.

INSULATION: Homes built prior to 1978 are unlikely to have insulation in the walls which is why they are colder and more expensive to heat than new homes.

SKIRTING BOARDS: Vary extensively in design and width and are generally made of timber.

FLOORING: Beautiful native timber was used in most homes up until around 1965. In more recent times particleboard or plywood was used with an appropriate floor covering.

PLUMBING: Pre-1950s houses generally had galvanised water pipes which are subject to corrosion. Make sure you check them when carrying out your renovations.

PILE FOOTINGS: Some homes will have concrete pile footings. Others will have wooden piles extending directly into the ground. Many older homes require re-piling to straighten up and stabilise the home.