

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

"Stylistic designations aid in describing architecture and in relating buildings—perhaps of different chronological periods—to one another. But more than that, stylistic classification acknowledges that building is not just a craft, but an art form that reflects the philosophy, intellectual currents, hopes and aspirations of its time."

John Poppeliers et al., *What Style Is It?*, 1977

"All styles are good except the boring kind."

Voltaire, "L'Enfant Prodigieux," 1736

From the austerity of New England colonials, through the ornate extravagance of Second Empire, to the streamlined shapes of Art Deco, every architectural style possesses its own special characteristics of structure and ornament. This survey of 20 influential styles of American architecture celebrates a rich cultural heritage, representing four centuries of creativity. The text is adapted from the book *What Style Is It? A Guide to American Architecture*.

EARLY COLONIAL 1600s–1700

The term "late medieval" perhaps best describes 17th-century English colonial architecture in America. Residences were modeled after the ample but plain houses built in England in the late 1500s, in which medieval forms predominated: steeply pitched roofs, massive chimneys and small windows with leaded casements. In New England, where hardwoods were plentiful, the substantial half-timbered house was almost universal, with clapboard covering, low ceilings and small rooms to conserve heat in winter. In the southern colonies, airier one-story brick houses were built throughout the 1600s. Settlers from other parts of the world—France, Holland, Germany, Scandinavia and Africa—also brought their own building traditions to America.



Shiplap House, Annapolis, Md., a southern colonial. (M. Weil, HABS)

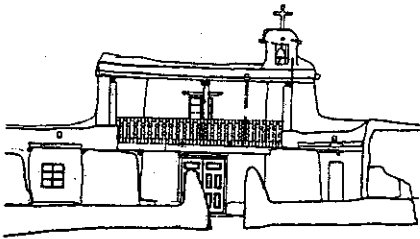
New England Colonial

- medieval half-timbered construction with clapboard covering
- steeply pitched gabled roof
- tall, massive, central chimney
- small leaded casement windows
- often a "saltbox" silhouette
- second-story overhangs

Southern Colonial

- brick or timber-frame construction
- steeply pitched gabled roof
- massive chimneys at ends of houses
- narrow plan, often only one room deep
- patterned, bonded brickwork

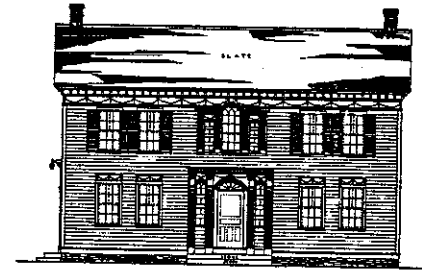
Taken from: Landmark Yellow Pages
Preservation Press
National Trust for Historic Preservation



Mission Church, Santa Ana Pueblo, N.M. (J. Shafer, K. Ahn, HABS)



Dr. Upton Scott House, Annapolis, Md. (J. Waite, HABS)



Harris House, Castleton, Vt. (W. Tarbell, HABS)

SPANISH COLONIAL 1565-1850

From Florida to California, the Spanish left a lasting architectural tradition that ranks only with that of the English. In addition to grid street plans, the most important remaining examples of Spanish colonial architecture in the United States are the mission churches of the Southwest; these were frontier versions of the exuberant baroque style of 16th- and 17th-century Spain, especially as it had developed in Mexico. Missionary priests reproduced the baroque style with whatever materials and labor were at hand. Walls were built of adobe or stone, often covered with lime wash or plaster. The New Mexico missions, strongly influenced by the building techniques of the Pueblo Indians, are the most austere.

The Spanish colonial style was revived beginning in the 1890s and into the early 20th century, particularly in California, Florida and the Southwest.

- adobe or stone construction, often coated with lime wash or plaster
- massive, unadorned, windowless walls
- flat or red tile roof
- projecting roof timbers, sometimes supported by decorative brackets
- twin bell towers
- Spanish baroque ornament applied to bare walls
- curved gable

GEORGIAN

1700-76

Named for the kings who ruled England for most of the 1700s, the Georgian style reflected Renaissance architectural forms made popular in England by the architect Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723). Wren's work was based on Italian architecture of the 1500s, especially that of Andrea Palladio (1508-80), who freely adapted Roman classical forms. In America, Georgian buildings had a symmetrical, axial composition enriched with classical detail.

The Revolutionary War brought a halt to construction projects and effectively ended the Georgian style in America, although conservative builders continued to use it into the 1800s. The style was revived at the time of the 1876 Centennial, when architects were moved by patriotic zeal to look to the American past for models.

- symmetry in plan and exterior design
- symmetrical arrangement of building parts on an axis
- geometrical proportions
- hipped roof
- main entrances emphasized with columns, pilasters and broken pediment
- sash windows
- Palladian windows
- classical decorative details

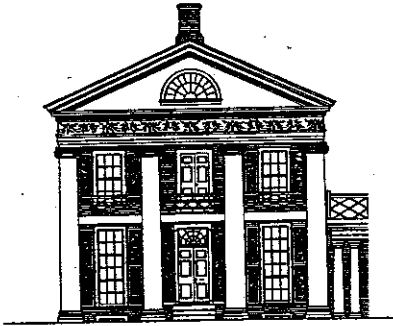
FEDERAL

1780-1820

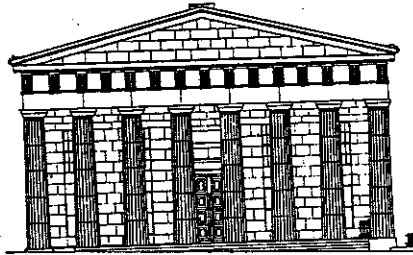
By 1776 a new style created in Britain by the Adam brothers had surpassed Georgian Palladianism in popularity. The Adamesque style combined Renaissance and Palladian forms, the delicacy of French rococo and features from recently excavated houses and villas of ancient Rome. In America it was called the Federal style because it flowered in the early decades of the new nation.

The Federal style differs most strikingly from the Georgian in its interior design and use of pastel colors. Many rooms were oval, circular or octagonal in shape. Mantels, cornices, doorways and ceilings were decorated with delicate rosettes, urns, swags and garlands. Federal-style buildings are found especially throughout the cities and towns of the eastern seaboard.

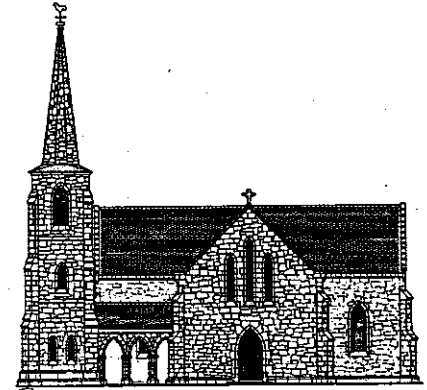
- low-pitched roof
- smooth facade
- large window panes
- exterior decoration confined to porch or entrance, such as fanlight over doorway
- delicate columns and molding
- louvered shutters
- circular, oval or octagonal rooms
- interior wall decoration of garlands, swags, urns and rosettes
- pastel colors



Pavilion II, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. (M.D. Sullivan, HABS)



United States Sub-Treasury, New York City. (T. Rachelle, HABS)



Christ Episcopal Church, Raleigh, N.C. (G. Small, P. Wilday, E. Jenkins, HABS)

JEFFERSONIAN 1790–1830

In the 1780s the state of Virginia asked Thomas Jefferson to find an architect to design a new state capitol. Instead, Jefferson designed the building himself. Inspired by the Maison Carrée, a Roman temple at Nîmes in southern France, he created the first pure temple form in American architecture. For Jefferson, the Roman orders symbolized Rome's republican form of government, which he saw being revived in the New World. Jefferson's architectural theories can be found in many red brick houses and courthouses in Virginia and places where Virginians settled.

- red brick construction
- raised first floor
- slender columns with smooth shafts
- pedimented portico
- classical moldings left plain and painted white
- lunette enclosed in pediment

GREEK REVIVAL 1820–60

The Greek Revival style symbolized for many the idea that America, with its democratic ideals, was the spiritual successor of ancient Greece. By the mid-1840s the Grecian motifs were used throughout the country for churches, banks, courthouses and other public buildings as well as for houses.

The most easily identified features are the columns and pedimented porch resembling a Greek temple. (Not every Greek Revival structure had these features, however.) Because ancient Greek buildings did not use arches, Greek Revival architects abandoned the arched entrances and fan windows so common in the Federal and Jeffersonian styles.

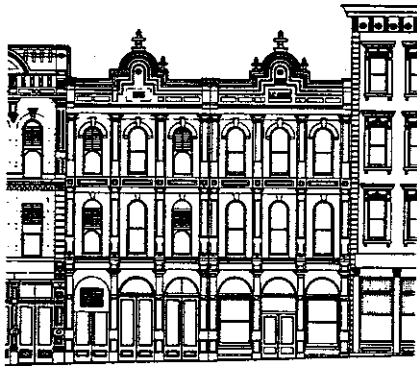
- pared-down simplicity
- columns (often fluted) and capitals
- pedimented roof
- tall first-floor windows
- heavy cornice
- rectangular transom over entrance
- plain frieze

GOTHIC REVIVAL 1830–90

The Gothic Revival was fostered by literature's Romantic movement of the late 1700s and early 1800s, which glorified the medieval past and was brought to America from England. By the 1830s a growing taste for the romantic—coupled with dissatisfaction with the restraints of classical architecture—turned the Gothic Revival into a popular movement.

It was an enduring style. The invention of the jigsaw made possible the fanciful wooden scrollwork known as Carpenter Gothic. After the Civil War, architects produced the eclectic High Victorian Gothic style, which drew on Italian and German as well as English Gothic models. In the late 19th century more authentic Gothic designs emerged in Collegiate Gothic, which left its stamp on many college campuses. Gothic Revival remained the most influential style for churches well into the 1900s.

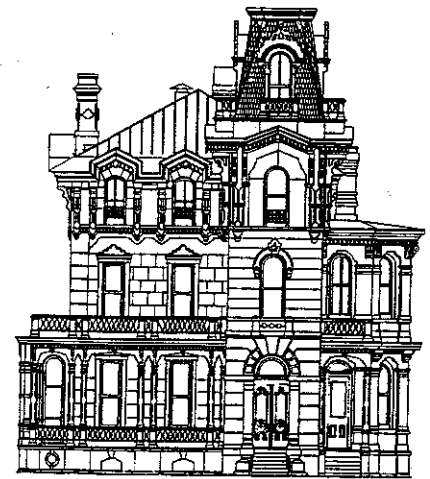
- steep gabled roof
- pointed arches
- picturesque silhouette
- towers and battlements
- bay and oriel windows
- leaded stained glass
- crenellation
- "gingerbread" trim on eaves and gable ends



Public Square, Nashville. (R. Dunay, HABS)



Oriental Greek Orthodox Church, Jacksonville, Fla. (R. Moje, HABS)



Goyer-Lee House, Memphis. (M.P. Frederickson, D.K. Pattison, HABS)

ITALIANATE 1830-80

The architecture of Italy inspired this building style. Also known as the Tuscan, Lombard, round, bracketed and even the American style, the Italianate could be as picturesque as Gothic or as restrained as the classical. In the 1850s it was very nearly America's national style.

The development of cast-iron and pressed-metal technology in the mid-1800s permitted the mass production of such decorative features as bracketed cornices and window moldings. These features were applied to a variety of commercial buildings and urban row houses. New York, St. Louis and Portland, Ore., had districts of cast-iron buildings in the Italianate style. Towns across America still boast stores with cast-iron fronts masquerading as Italian palaces.

- low-pitched or flat roof
- round arches
- heavily decorated, bracketed cornices and eaves
- scroll-shaped brackets
- tall first-floor windows
- hood moldings over windows
- cupola
- ample porches or verandas
- cast-iron facades on some commercial buildings

EXOTIC REVIVALS 1830-1930

Reflecting the period's romantic turn of mind, 19th-century architects explored exotic historic styles in search of appropriate forms. The Egyptian Revival was inspired by French archeological work in Egypt. This massive style was considered appropriate for prisons, mausoleums, cemetery gates, churches and monuments. In the 1920s the style was revived once more for movie theaters.

Near Eastern architectural forms were adopted in the Moorish Revival style, chiefly for garden kiosks, clubs, hotels, theaters and a few ostentatious mansions. In the mid-1800s the style was also associated with the Jewish Reform movement in America and was used in the design of synagogues.

Egyptian Revival

- battered (sloping) walls
- battered window and door frames
- columns topped with palm or lotus capitals
- concave cornice
- winged-disk motif

Moorish Revival

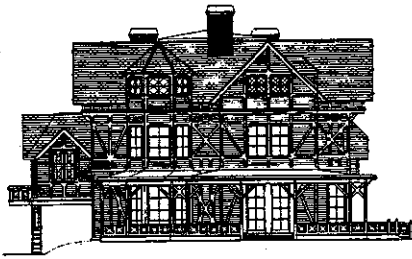
- Moorish arches
- domes of various sizes and shapes
- minaret-like spire
- intricate surface decoration, including mosaics and tiles

SECOND EMPIRE 1860-90

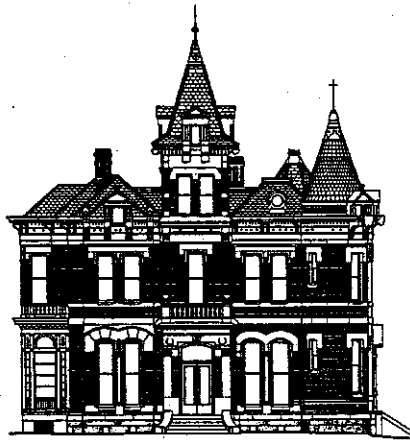
Picturesqueness, asymmetry and eclecticism marked the architecture of the mid- to late 19th century. Architects borrowed freely from a variety of styles, placing great emphasis on character and a sense of permanence.

The Second Empire style takes its name from French designs built during the reign of the emperor Napoleon III (1852-70). The hallmark of the Second Empire style is the mansard roof, adopted from the 17th-century French architect François Mansart (1598-1666). The styles, which aspired to a monumental and ornate look, was used widely for public buildings and many houses.

- mansard roof
- prominent projecting and receding surfaces
- paired columns
- projecting central bay
- classical pediments and balustrades
- windows flanked by columns or pilasters
- arched windows with pediments and molded surrounds
- tall first-floor windows



John Griswold House, Newport, R.I. (J. Chimura, HABS)



John Houghton House, Austin, Tex. (D. Yturralde, HABS)



Isaac Bell House, Newport, R.I. (T. Schubert, HABS)

STICK STYLE 1860-90

The Stick Style evolved from the Carpenter Gothic to flourish in the mid-1800s. Embodying the ideas that architecture should be truthful, Stick Style houses expressed the building's inner structure through its exterior ornament. A series of boards was applied over the clapboard surface—most often on gable ends and upper stories—to symbolize the structural skeleton. Sometimes diagonal boards were incorporated to resemble Tudor-style half-timbering.

- wood construction
- vertical, horizontal or diagonal boards applied over clapboard siding
- angularity, asymmetry, verticality
- roof composed of steep intersecting gables
- large veranda or porch
- simple corner posts, roof rafters, brackets, porch posts and railings

QUEEN ANNE 1880-1900

Eclecticism is the keynote of the Queen Anne style. The name was coined in England to describe buildings that grafted classical ornament onto medieval forms. The style is varied and decoratively rich, with picturesque and asymmetrical silhouettes shaped by turrets, towers, gables and bays. First floors were often brick or stone, while upper floors were of stucco, clapboard or decorative shingles. The picturesque effects were best employed in sprawling, free-standing residences, but the Queen Anne style also had a major impact on the urban row house. The typical projecting bay front topped by a gable or pinnacle roof is found in cities from Boston to San Francisco. Decorative brick patterns, molded bricks and stained-glass transoms brought features of the Queen Anne style to row houses and small commercial buildings throughout the 1880s and 1890s.

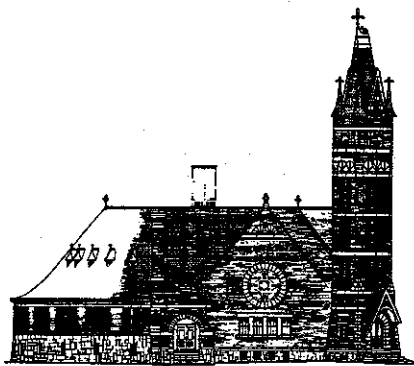
- rambling, asymmetrical silhouette
- corner towers or turrets
- steep gabled or hipped roof with dormers
- huge "medieval" chimneys
- verandas and balconies
- contrasting materials and colors
- second-story overhangs
- gable ends with half-timbering or stylized decoration

SHINGLE STYLE 1880-1900

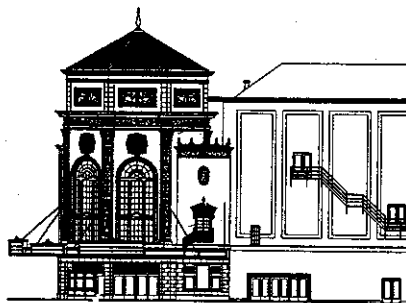
A completely American style that grew out of the Queen Anne, the Shingle Style was born in New England. It reflected the post-Centennial interest in American colonial architecture, especially the shingle architecture of coastal towns that were being rediscovered as fashionable resorts.

Less ornate and more horizontal than the Queen Anne house, the Shingle Style house is a rambling two- or three-story structure entirely covered with unpainted wooden shingles. The first examples of the fully developed style appeared in the 1880s. Among the most important practitioners were H. H. Richardson, Bruce Price and McKim, Mead and White. Some of Frank Lloyd Wright's earliest work was in the Shingle Style.

- unpainted wood shingles entirely covering the exterior
- prominent roofs, either steeply pitched or with long slopes
- rough-surfaced stone or field rubble used as contrasting materials
- turrets and verandas integrated into the overall design
- eaves close to walls
- reduced ornament



First Presbyterian Church, Salisbury, N.C. (G. Anastes, E. Mills, HABS)



Bank of San Mateo County, Redwood City, Calif. (A. Weinstein, HABS)



Grand Riviera Theatre, Detroit. (C. Morrison, HABS)

RICHARDSONIAN ROMANESQUE 1870-1900

As interpreted by H. H. Richardson (1836-86), the Romanesque became a different and uniquely American style. Abandoning the vertical silhouettes and smooth stone facings of the earlier Romanesque Revival, Richardson's version was more horizontal and rough textured.

Richardsonian Romanesque was favored for churches, university buildings, train stations and courthouses. Although Richardson produced few houses in this style, elements of his work found their way into many residences of the period. The broad arches, squat columns and eyebrow dormers of numerous row houses pay tribute to Richardson's popularity.

- massiveness
- stone construction with rock-faced finish
- broad round arches
- tower or towers
- broad roof planes
- squat columns
- deep-set windows, bands of windows
- cavernous door openings
- doors and windows defined by contrasting color or short, robust columns
- little carved or applied ornament

BEAUX ARTS 1890-1920

Les beaux-arts ("the fine arts") refers to the aesthetic principles of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

American architects who studied at the Ecole or who were trained by its graduates were influenced by the school's academic design principles, which emphasized the study of Greek and Roman structures, composition and symmetry.

Beaux Arts architecture is characterized by large and grandiose symmetrical classical compositions with a wealth of exuberant detail and a variety of stone finishes. American Beaux Arts designs generally were for colossal public buildings. About 1900, however, such designs gave way to more sedate forms, which were used for the town houses and country and resort villas of the wealthy.

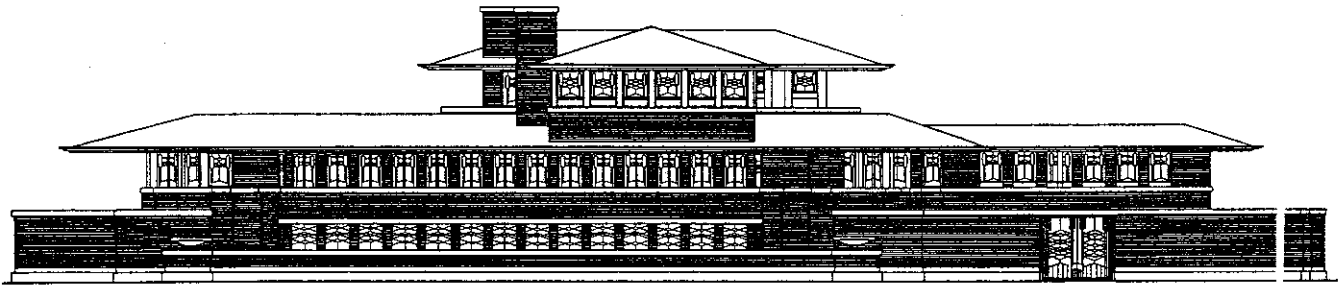
- grandiose composition
- imposing stairway
- large arched openings
- variety of stone finishes
- projecting facades or pavilions
- monumental columns
- classical ornament
- enriched entablature topped with a tall parapet, balustrade or attic story
- pronounced cornice
- decorative swags, medallions, cartouches and sculpture

CLASSICAL REVIVAL 1900-20

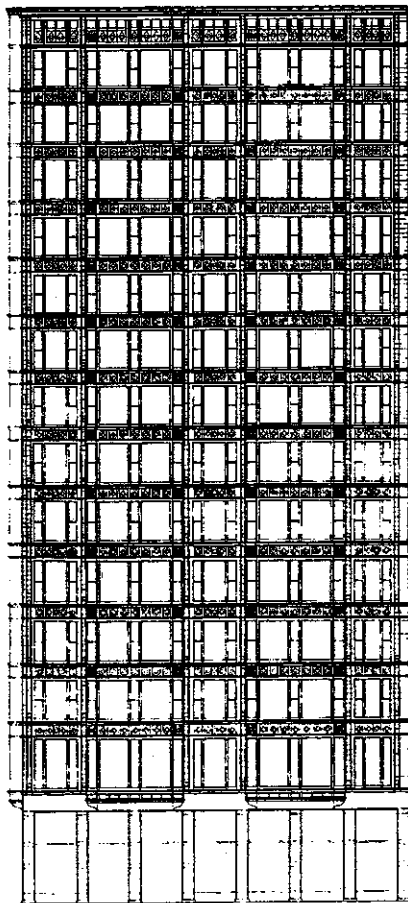
The later, more refined stage of the Beaux Arts style influenced the last, or 20th-century, phase of the Classical Revival in the United States. In the late 1800s and early 1900s commissions for public buildings and grand houses generally went to architects trained in the Beaux Arts tradition, who produced designs based on classical and Renaissance models.

Less theatrical than Beaux Arts, the Classical Revival style is based more on Greek than Roman architectural orders. Consequently, the arch is not often used, and highly decorated moldings are rare. The style was used primarily to create massive public buildings on a grand scale.

- monumental size
- symmetry
- giant columns
- Greek and some Roman classical forms
- smooth or polished stone surface
- unadorned entablature and roof line



Frederick C. Robie House, Chicago, in the Prairie Style. (J.J. Erins, HABS)



Reliance Building, Chicago, in the Chicago Style. (P. Borchers, N. Clouten, HABS)

CHICAGO STYLE 1875-1910

In the late 1800s Chicago-based architects and engineers exploited new construction technologies to produce the tall commercial buildings that would transform cities around the world. Until then, building height had been limited by the ability of masonry walls to support upper stories. By using a cast-iron or wrought-iron skeleton frame—coupled with improvements in fireproofing, wind bracing and foundation technology and the invention of the elevator—Chicago architects began to create commercial buildings of six to 20 stories.

The best-known architect of this school was Louis Sullivan (1856-1924). His buildings are easily identified by their distinctive low-relief decoration of intricately interwoven leaf designs around the entranceway, cornice and windows.

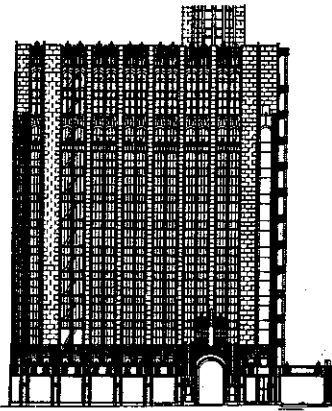
- tall rectangular buildings of six to 20 stories
- three-part construction: one- or two-story base with large display windows; shaft housing identical floors of offices; elaborate cornice
- gridlike exterior mimicking the steel skeleton
- large areas of glass, terra cotta or other non-supporting material
- vertical piers between windows, emphasizing height
- stripped, no-nonsense exterior

PRAIRIE STYLE 1900-20

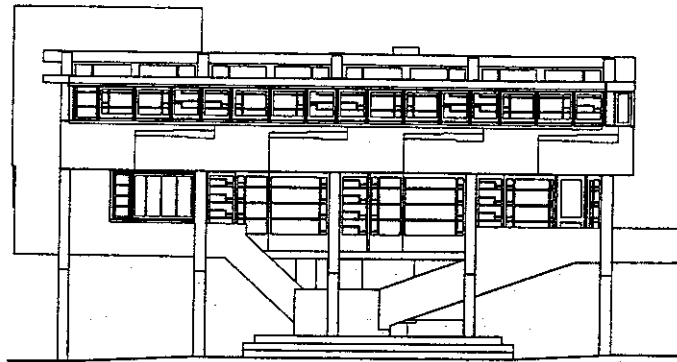
About 1900 another group of Chicago architects developed a distinctive midwestern residential style, known as the Prairie Style. Their acknowledged leader and spokesman was Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). Rejecting the currently popular revivals of historic styles, they sought to create buildings that harmonized with the midwestern prairie. The Prairie Style house had a strongly horizontal appearance, emphasized by porches, walls and terraces extending from the main structure. Windows were arranged in horizontal ribbons and often featured stained glass in stylized floral or geometric patterns.

Interiors were as innovative as exteriors; Prairie School architects often designed furnishings for their houses.

- low, horizontal silhouette
- wide overhanging eaves
- porches, walls and terraces extending from the main house to emphasize horizontal lines
- low-pitched roof
- low, plain rectangular chimney
- walls of light-colored brick or stucco and wood
- horizontal ribbons of casement windows; stained-glass accents in stylistic floral or geometric designs
- walls at right angles; no curves



Richfield Oil Building, Los Angeles.
(R. Giebner, HABS)



Lovell Beach House, Newport Beach, Calif. (R.H. Nagata, S.A. Westfall, HABS)

ART DECO

1925-40

Art Deco took its name from the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes, held in Paris in 1925 as a showcase for works of "new inspiration and real originality." Art Deco—or Art Moderne or Modernistic, as it was variously called—was the first popular style in the United States to break with the tradition of reviving historic styles.

Art Deco consciously strove for modernity and an artistic expression of the machine age. Its forms were simplified and streamlined. Essentially, Art Deco was a style of decoration and was applied to jewelry, clothing, furniture and handicrafts as well as buildings. At its best, Art Deco architecture was a harmonious collaboration of architects, painters, sculptors and designers.

- streamlined shapes
- surfaces of concrete, smooth-faced stone or metal
- vertical emphasis
- facades often arranged in a stepped series of setbacks
- hard-edged, low-relief geometrical designs and stylized figures or floral motifs
- accents in terra cotta, glass and colored mirrors
- multicolored, often vivid, designs

INTERNATIONAL STYLE

1920-45

The hallmarks of the International Style are stark simplicity, vigorous functionalism and flexible planning, all based on modern structural principles and materials. Whereas Chicago School architects merely revealed skeleton-frame construction, International Style architects revealed in it.

Ribbons of windows became an important design feature, creating a horizontal feeling even in high-rise buildings. Artificial symmetry was studiously avoided, but balance and regularity were fostered. Mundane building components such as elevator shafts and air-conditioning machinery became highly visible aspects of design. Many of the most famous architects working in 20th-century America—such as Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Richard Neutra and Marcel Breuer—designed in the International Style.

- concrete, glass and steel construction
- complete absence of ornamentation
- symmetrical but balanced composition
- horizontal emphasis
- flat roof
- smooth and uniform wall surface
- horizontal bands of windows
- corner windows
- windows set flush to the wall

FURTHER READING

- What Style Is It: A Guide to American Architecture.* John Poppeliers, S. Allen Chambers and Nancy B. Schwartz, Historic American Buildings Survey. 1977. Rev. ed. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1983. 112 pp., illus., gloss., biblio.
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