

American Architectural Styles & Colours

With diversity in the US national make-up translating into homes that reflect its people, we take a look at the evolution of the American Style as Denise Turner focuses on the hues and shades that colour American homes.

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Borrowing elements from around the world and infusing them into our home designs has given us façades that come in every hue and shape imaginable with a cultural diversity as rich as our people. This time, let's go on a journey across America, through time itself, and discover styles that have collectively come to define the American Style.

Early Classical Revival, Colonial Style 1770-1830

Features

- Portico (porch) dominates the front façade, equal in height.
- Porch roofs or centred gables supported by four columns (Roman, Doric, Corinthian or Tuscan) with a plinth (shallow square base).
- A semi-circular or elliptical fan light above the paneled front door.
- Windows are aligned horizontally and vertically, in symmetrical rows; usually five-raised on front façade.
- Exterior wall materials, in the order of most commonly used: wood, brick, stucco and cast stone.

Right after the Revolutionary War, public buildings were needed to house the new government. The Roman style, which represented grand ideals and enormous architecture was a natural choice. Early Classical Revival homes resemble the succeeding Greek Revival period with similarities in the doorway, cornice line and style of columns.

"Architecture begins when you place two bricks carefully together." *Mies van der Rohe*



Victorian, Queen Anne 1880-1910

Features

- Heavily ornamented form with multiple parts, including towers, domers, corbelled chimneys and bay windows with an asymmetrical façade.
- Textured wall surfaces with coursed shingles, clapboards, and decorative inset panels of saun wooden ornament.
- Steeply pitched, irregular shaped roof lines.
- Decorative wrap-around porches.
- Small square or diamond window panes, with 2/2 double-hung sash.

Rich in ornamentation, the Queen Anne style was named after an 16th century English Queen, becoming popular after the British Government displayed several samples at the 1876 Exposition in Philadelphia. Historically, Victorians were painted in earth tones, however, they bloomed into rainbow hues with multiple colour combinations after the Civil War. Today, the "Painted Ladies", as they are called, are famous in their own right with San Francisco's Six Sisters, occupying a place in our national consciousness.

"Buildings should be good neighbours." *Paul Thyri*



Craftsman, Bungalow 1905-1930

Features

- Low-pitched gable roof lines with unenclosed eave overhang and exposed roof rafters.
- Decorative false beams or braces added under gables.
- Mixed materials throughout, hand-crafted stone or woodwork structure and brick or stone foundation.
- Partial or full width porches.
- Tapered square columns or pedestals extending to ground level to support roof.

Emerging from the American Arts and Crafts Movement, this style was popular at the turn of the 19th century till the 1930s. Spurred by the British Arts and Crafts movement (since the 1880s), it was a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, placing the handwork of the individual worker and dignity of human labour foremost with its emphasis on hand-made over mass-produced.

"The materials of city planning are sky, space, trees, steel and cement in that order and in that hierarchy."

Le Corbusier



Spanish Eclectic 1915-1940

Features

- Low-pitched, red tile roof, with little or no eave overhang.
- One to two prominent arches above door, principle window or beneath porch roof.
- Stucco walls with an asymmetrical façade.

Primarily in the southwestern states of California, Arizona, Texas and Florida, the 1920s had many planned new communities founded in this style while older towns preferred the Spanish Colonial style. Spanish style homes before 1920 were free adaptations of the Mission style. It wasn't until the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego's Balboa Park, that accurate reproduction of more elaborate prototypes received global attention. The Exposition celebrated the opening of the Panama Canal and promoted San Diego as the first U.S. port-of-call for northbound ships passing westward through the Canal. The fair was held in San Diego's beautiful Balboa Park.

"Form ever follows function" *Louis H. Sullivan*



Kit Homes

From about 1906 to 1940, Sears Roebuck and Co. cornered the market in ready-to-build kit homes with a line called "Simplex Sectional Portable Buildings" or "Sears' Kit Homes" that were pre-cut and quickly bolted together with no sawing or nailing required. Kit homes provided an affordable, quality home with consumers purchasing their kit home from a regional dealer and collecting it at their local train depot.

The several floor plans and architectural designs offered range from Craftsman-Bungalow, English Cottage, Spanish Revival, Colonial Revival and several subtypes. Kit-Homes were an American ideal for most families' in the early to mid-1900. This two-storey, three bedrooms, one bath California Bungalow with conveniently arranged living spaces, built-ins and modern floorplan would suit all but the largest families for only USD 2,200.00.

