

a field guide to american houses 1

a field guide to american houses 1 offers an in-depth exploration of the diverse architectural styles that define residential buildings across the United States. This guide serves as an essential resource for historians, architects, real estate professionals, and enthusiasts seeking to identify and understand the characteristics that distinguish American houses. From colonial influences to modern innovations, the variety of styles reflects the country's rich cultural heritage and regional adaptations. By examining key features such as rooflines, window types, and building materials, this field guide provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of American residential architecture. This article also highlights important historical contexts and common design elements, making it easier to recognize and appreciate these homes in different parts of the country. The detailed classification and descriptions included here facilitate a better grasp of how American houses have developed through time. Below is a structured outline of the main topics covered in this guide.

- Colonial and Early American Styles
- Victorian and Revival Styles
- Craftsman and Bungalow Styles
- Mid-Century Modern and Contemporary Styles
- Common Architectural Features Across Styles

Colonial and Early American Styles

Colonial and Early American houses represent some of the earliest architectural forms found in the United States. These styles emerged during the 17th and 18th centuries, influenced heavily by European settlers, particularly from England, the Netherlands, and Spain. The designs emphasize simplicity, symmetry, and practicality, reflecting the settlers' needs and available materials. Recognizing these homes is fundamental to understanding America's architectural roots.

Georgian Colonial

The Georgian Colonial style was prominent from 1700 to 1780. It is characterized by its symmetrical facade, centered front door, and evenly spaced windows. Typically constructed with brick or wood siding, Georgian houses often feature a paneled front door capped with decorative crown molding and flanked by pilasters. The roof is usually side-gabled or hipped, and dormers are common on the upper floor. Interiors often have a central hall floor plan with formal rooms on either side.

Saltbox

The Saltbox style is a variation of Colonial architecture that originated in New England. It features a

long, pitched roof that slopes down to the rear, generally with two stories in the front and one in the back. This design provided additional living space while allowing rain and snow to easily shed from the roof. Saltbox homes typically have a central chimney and simple, unadorned facades.

Spanish Colonial

Found primarily in the southwestern United States, Spanish Colonial homes date back to the early 1600s. These houses are often constructed with adobe or stucco walls and have flat or low-pitched tile roofs. Key features include thick walls, small windows with wrought-iron grilles, and interior courtyards. The style reflects Spanish and Mexican influences adapted to the arid climate of the region.

Victorian and Revival Styles

Victorian and Revival styles flourished in the United States during the mid-to-late 19th century into the early 20th century. These styles are known for their ornamental details, asymmetry, and eclectic influences. They often incorporate intricate woodwork, towers, and vibrant colors, showcasing advancements in building technology and changing tastes during the Industrial Revolution.

Queen Anne

The Queen Anne style, popular from 1880 to 1910, is one of the most recognizable Victorian house types. It features asymmetrical facades, steeply pitched roofs, prominent front-facing gables, and wrap-around porches. Decorative elements such as patterned shingles, spindlework, and bay windows are common. Towers or turrets often accentuate the design, creating a picturesque silhouette.

Second Empire

Second Empire houses, prevalent between 1860 and 1880, are distinguished by their mansard roofs with dormer windows. This French-inspired style emphasizes verticality and elaborate ornamentation, including brackets under the eaves and molded cornices. These homes often have tall, narrow windows and ornate door surrounds, conveying a sense of grandeur and sophistication.

Colonial Revival

Emerging in the late 19th century and continuing into the 20th, Colonial Revival sought to revive elements of early American colonial architecture. Common features include symmetrical facades, accentuated front doors with pediments or fanlights, double-hung sash windows with shutters, and classical columns supporting porches. This style reflects a nationalistic desire to connect with America's architectural heritage.

Craftsman and Bungalow Styles

The Craftsman and Bungalow styles became widespread in the early 20th century, emphasizing handcrafted workmanship and natural materials. These homes are known for their low-pitched roofs, wide eaves with exposed rafters, and inviting front porches. The styles reflect the Arts and Crafts movement's reaction against industrialization and mass production, focusing on simplicity and harmony with the environment.

American Craftsman

American Craftsman houses often feature a low, gabled roof with wide overhanging eaves and decorative beams or brackets. Porches supported by tapered square columns are typical, as are double-hung windows with multiple panes in the upper sash. Interiors emphasize built-in cabinetry and use of natural wood. This style gained popularity between 1905 and 1930.

Bungalow

Bungalows are generally smaller, one-and-a-half-story homes with efficient layouts. They showcase a casual yet refined aesthetic, often incorporating dormer windows and open floor plans. The front porch is a defining element, fostering a connection between indoor and outdoor living. Bungalows are commonly found in suburban neighborhoods developed during the early 20th century.

Mid-Century Modern and Contemporary Styles

Mid-Century Modern and Contemporary houses represent architectural trends from the mid-20th century to the present day. These styles prioritize functionality, clean lines, integration with nature, and innovative use of materials. They often reject traditional ornamentation in favor of minimalism and open interior spaces.

Mid-Century Modern

Mid-Century Modern homes, popular from the 1940s through the 1960s, feature flat or low-sloped roofs, large windows, and open floor plans. The use of glass, steel, and concrete is common, creating seamless transitions between indoor and outdoor environments. These homes often incorporate geometric forms and emphasize horizontal lines.

Contemporary

Contemporary architecture reflects current trends and technologies, often blending elements from various styles. These houses feature sustainable materials, energy-efficient designs, and innovative layouts. Asymmetry, large expanses of glass, and integration with the surrounding landscape are typical, providing a modern aesthetic tailored to individual lifestyles.

Common Architectural Features Across Styles

Despite the diversity of American house styles, several architectural features recur across different periods and regions. Understanding these elements aids in identifying and categorizing homes within the field guide to American houses 1.

Roof Types

Roof design varies greatly and can be a key indicator of style. Common roof types include gabled, hipped, mansard, flat, and gambrel roofs. Each serves both functional and aesthetic purposes, influencing the home's silhouette and interior space.

Window Designs

Windows range from simple double-hung sash to elaborate bay and casement windows. Decorative shutters, window grids, and stained glass are stylistic details that reflect the era and cultural influences of the home's design.

Porches and Entryways

Porches often serve as transitional spaces between indoors and outdoors. Their size, shape, and ornamentation vary from the modest stoops of Colonial homes to the expansive wrap-around porches of Victorian houses. Entryways frequently feature decorative elements such as pediments, columns, or sidelights that enhance curb appeal.

Materials and Finishes

Construction materials not only affect durability but also define the aesthetic character. Wood siding, brick, stone, stucco, and adobe are among the most commonly used materials. Finishes and paint colors often correspond with the architectural style and regional climate.

- Gabled, hipped, and mansard roof types
- Double-hung, bay, and casement windows
- Front porches, stoops, and porticos
- Wood, brick, stone, stucco, and adobe exteriors

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'A Field Guide to American Houses' about?

'A Field Guide to American Houses' is a comprehensive reference book that helps readers identify and understand the architectural styles of American residential buildings from the 17th century to the present.

Who is the author of 'A Field Guide to American Houses'?

The book was written by Virginia Savage McAlester, a noted architectural historian and expert on American domestic architecture.

What makes 'A Field Guide to American Houses' a valuable resource?

Its detailed illustrations, photographs, and clear descriptions make it easy for readers to recognize various architectural styles and features in American houses.

Does 'A Field Guide to American Houses' cover modern architectural styles?

Yes, the guide includes a wide range of styles from colonial times through the 20th century, including modern and contemporary architectural designs.

How can 'A Field Guide to American Houses' help homeowners or buyers?

It can help homeowners and buyers identify the style and historical significance of a house, aiding in preservation decisions or enhancing appreciation of architectural details.

Is 'A Field Guide to American Houses' suitable for beginners in architecture?

Absolutely, the book is designed for both professionals and novices, providing accessible explanations and visual aids to understand American house styles.

Additional Resources

1. *A Field Guide to American Houses*

This comprehensive guide by Virginia Savage McAlester is a seminal work that categorizes and describes the architectural styles of American houses from the colonial period to the present. It includes detailed illustrations, photographs, and floor plans, helping readers identify different house styles by their distinctive features. The book is an essential resource for architects, historians, and homeowners interested in the evolution of American residential architecture.

2. American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home

This book serves as a practical reference for identifying American residential architectural styles. It offers clear descriptions, historical context, and visual examples of various house types, making it easy for readers to recognize and understand the design elements unique to different periods and regions across the United States.

3. The Architecture of Country Houses

Written by Andrew Jackson Downing, this classic work explores the design and construction of rural American homes in the 19th century. It emphasizes harmony with the natural environment and provides inspiration for picturesque and practical country house designs. The book remains influential for those interested in historic American domestic architecture.

4. Houses of Boston's Back Bay: An Architectural History, 1840-1917

This detailed study focuses on the distinctive residential architecture of Boston's Back Bay neighborhood. It covers the evolution of styles and urban development, highlighting how social and economic factors influenced American house design in one of the country's most iconic historic districts.

5. Victorian Houses: A Guide to the Architecture of the American Home

This guide delves into the ornate and diverse Victorian styles that dominated American residential architecture in the late 19th century. It explains the characteristics of styles such as Queen Anne, Gothic Revival, and Italianate, supported by photographs and architectural drawings to aid identification and appreciation.

6. Classic Houses of Portland, Oregon, 1850-1950

Focusing on Portland's rich architectural heritage, this book surveys a century of residential design in the Pacific Northwest. It illustrates how local materials, climate, and cultural influences shaped the construction and style of American houses in this region.

7. The American House in the 20th Century: Architecture and Society

This book examines the transformation of American residential architecture throughout the 20th century, considering social trends, technological advances, and cultural shifts. It provides a broad overview of modern house styles and the factors that influenced their development.

8. Craftsman Style

Focusing on the Arts and Crafts movement's impact on American homes, this book highlights the Craftsman style's emphasis on hand-crafted woodwork, simplicity, and natural materials. It offers insights into the design principles and historical context of this influential early 20th-century style.

9. Historic Houses of the American West

This book explores the unique architectural styles found in the western United States, from adobe pueblos to Victorian mansions. It provides historical background and visual documentation, showcasing how geography and culture have shaped American residential architecture in the West.

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