

# YOUR OLD HOUSE

## what style is it?



a guide to historic  
housing styles

by Scott Barrett, BA



The Vancouver  
Heritage  
FOUNDATION



# introduction

by donald luxton

The historic houses of British Columbia present a rich and varied legacy that records in three dimensions the dreams and accomplishments of their builders. Houses provide shelter, but beyond this, also tell us stories about domestic functions, societal status, and personal aspirations. Each house is embedded in an historical context and timeframe, and when we analyze its style and details, we can better understand the people who lived there.

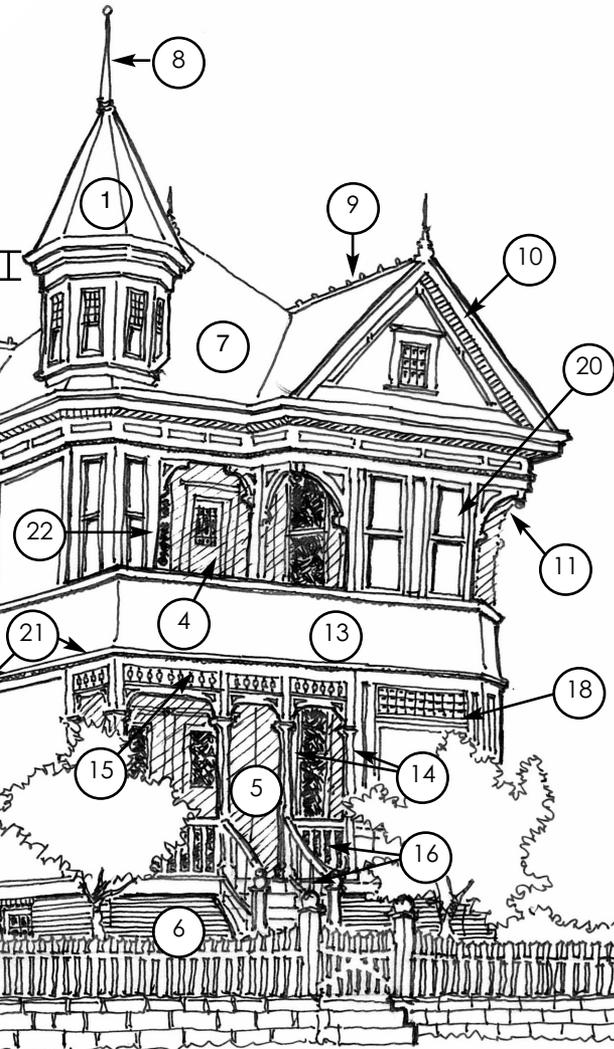
The structural and finishing elements of a house are inseparable from its symbolism. The style of a building is its distinctive shape or mode of expression, and is evoked partly by form and partly by decoration and finishes. Architectural styles appear and disappear due to fundamental shifts in society's values, cultural priorities, moral attitudes and economic status, and are more than just a change in fashion. Most 'high' style or academically-designed houses reflected a consciously-chosen image or mode of expression, which in British Columbia was usually the revival of an historical European model.

Not every house has an easily identifiable style. A prominent or lavish house is more likely to aspire to high style and 'academic' correctness –the equivalent of a pure-bred– while a more utilitarian or vernacular house may reflect a more eclectic blending of elements. By following this guide you will be able to determine, if not a particular style for your house, at least the influences that determined its appearance.



# g l o s s a r y

what to know  
and look for



1. Corner Tower
2. Gable
3. Cornice
4. Upper Deck
5. Verandah
6. Foundation – Brick  
Stone or Wood
7. Hipped Roof
8. Finial
9. Ridge Cresting
10. Bargeboard or  
Vergeboard
11. Bracket
12. Panel Mould
13. Belt Course  
(Decorative Sawn  
Shingles)
14. Verandah Columns
15. Cornice with Brackets  
& Turned Spindles
16. Turned Balusters on  
Verandah & Stair
17. Body – Horizontal  
Siding
18. Multi-Light Transom  
Window Sash
19. Water Table
20. Double Hung Sash
21. Belt Course Mould
22. Window Frame &  
Casing Mould

# Queen Anne

v i c t o

This type of architecture was part of the traditional and highly ornamented English aesthetic style known broadly as Picturesque Eclecticism. Popular in London during the 1860s it quickly moved to North America and became a prominent residential style. Although also very popular in other parts of North America, West Coast cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, Victoria and Vancouver embraced this style. The Queen Anne came to represent the ambitious aspirations and social climate of the West. Although locally it was generally more restrained, it became the most common housing type in late 19th century British Columbia, remaining popular as late as 1912.

what to look for what to look for



- asymmetrical rooflines and plan
- steeply pitched gable or compound hip roofs
- often included corner turret with domed or conical roof
- ornamentation often covered gable ends
- large corbelled red brick chimneys
- wrap-around verandahs were common
- highly ornamented surface textures highlighted
- bay windows common
- extensive wood trim inside and out
- drop siding, patterned shingles, mouldings, porch and eave brackets, 'gingerbread' styling
- finials and roof crests are a defining point of the style



1014 Catherine St., Victoria

This style was a less expressive form of architecture than the Queen Anne, and provided a more restrained approach to Victorian era housing. Lacking the turret and 'gingerbread' decorations of the Queen Anne, the Italianate relied on highly detailed elements such as frequently paired eave brackets. Based on Classical Revival models, symmetry was an early defining design element of the Italianate, although offset porches and irregular plans occurred later. Also associated with this style were "Second Empire" houses with their characteristic mansard roofs, a double-pitched roof with the lower section being significantly steeper than the upper.

or what to look for what to look



1449 Pembroke St., Victoria

- symmetrical treatment of plan and elevations
- low pitched roof and deep overhanging eaves
- entrance tower, but not in form of turret
- verandahs and porches extremely common
- bay windows
- variety of large double hung windows and round-headed windows
- classically influenced columns and pilasters
- extensive use of decorative mouldings

## Edwardian Vernacular

A stripped down and sober style, this form is characterized by a return to Classical influences. Rectilinear floor plans, gable or hipped roofs and more restrained ornamentation set the Edwardian and Neo-Classical apart. Although they were a deliberate departure from the Victorian styles, some common elements were employed. The simple and economical Edwardian house, a vernacular interpretation of the high Neo-Classical style, quickly became the most popular residential building style in Vancouver during the first decade of the 20th century.

what to look for what to look for



- bell cast, low hip roof with front dormer, or front gable roof with side dormers
- typically two storeys
- full width open front verandah with turned or square columns
- front entrance asymmetrically placed at one side
- bay windows
- wide roof overhangs
- exterior cladding in narrow boards or cedar shingles
- ground and upper floors would often be different materials and colours
- decorative elements included eave brackets, classically inspired mouldings and porch columns, multi-paned windows and diamond pattern leaded windows



42 W. 10th Ave., Vancouver

# r d i a n

## Neo-Classical

Derived from Italian Renaissance models, this style reflects a restrained Classical expression whose traditions were deeply rooted in the ancient architectures of the Western world. Classical styles experienced widespread popularity in North America after they were used to great effect for the buildings of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Although seen locally prior to 1913, the greatest influence of the Neo-Classical on houses was during the 1920s and 30s. Structural details often refer to Classical temples and civic architecture. Houses were symmetrically massed, lacking applied surface ornamentation while retaining traditional Classical features.

or what to look for what to look



1350 The Crescent, Vancouver

- architectural detail mimics Italian Renaissance precedents
- full height portico, or else a balustraded balcony above entryway
- giant order columns
- plain unornamented surfaces
- low-pitched roof
- front gable often designed to resemble a Classical pediment
- Palladian and decorative mullioned windows

This style was a sub-set of the broader Arts & Crafts movement that was divided into two distinct streams of influence. The first of these was the British Arts & Crafts, inspired by the earlier Arts & Crafts movement in Britain. The second was the American Arts & Crafts, based heavily on rural and vernacular styles in Britain and Japan as well as Switzerland. The Craftsman style was more closely related to the American Arts & Crafts, which matured on the West Coast, particularly in California, and represented a rejection of the classical inspiration of the Edwardian. The British Arts & Crafts style tended to be heavier in appearance, with freer massing and restrained decoration.

what to look for what to look for



## Common Elements

- asymmetrical plans
- multiple gable end roofs and dormers
- stucco, shingles, clinker brick, granite, smooth wood trim, and other natural materials
- rich contrasts in textures and materials

## American Elements

- expansive low pitched, gable roofs with deep overhanging eaves
- exposed structural elements, such as rafter tails, beams and brackets
- Orientalized California bungalow derived from this style

## British Elements

- some half-timbering carried over from the Tudor style
- bungalows based on this style were typically taller and came later in Vancouver and Victoria
- roughcast stucco used as the main wall cladding



2325 E. 1st Ave., Vancouver

# crafts

## Tudor Revival

Emerging from British Late Medieval architecture, this style can be seen on residential buildings ranging from small cottages to large opulent houses. Characterized by prominent half-timbering, strong masonry foundations and tall ornate chimneys, The Tudor Revival is closely associated with both the Victorian and Arts & Crafts styles. The half-timbering found on this type of house is derived from Elizabethan England, where heavy timber structural frames were infilled with masonry panels. Jerkin-head gabled or half-hipped roofs are sometimes used. This building type became popular in Vancouver and Victoria between 1900 and the 1930s.

or what to look for what to look



4397 W. 2nd Ave., Vancouver

- popular in Canada due to political and cultural ties to Britain
- used for houses and apartment blocks
- steeply pitched roof
- upper storey elements projected over lower storeys
- high contrast half-timbering used as cladding and applied to gable ends
- cedar shingles sometimes used as cladding
- brick or stone foundation
- masonry chimneys provided strong vertical elements
- tall narrow windows in groups of three or more
- stained glass and leaded 'lights' or windows common

## Period Revivals

This term addresses the return to traditionalism experienced in architectural styles between the two world wars. A resurgence in traditional styles made itself apparent in style revivals such as the Colonial, Georgian, Mission and Spanish Colonial. Their influence is widely found in historic architecture throughout the continent. Locally the revival styles were adapted, diluted and combined with varied results.

### Colonial Revival

Although it can vary from American interpretations, The Colonial Revival was based upon Classical architecture. Typical elements included bell cast roofs, a symmetrical plan, open front verandahs, eave brackets, classically inspired mouldings, Classical columns, and multi-paned Palladian windows. Houses of this style often sit upon a square or rectangular base and rise to a height of 2 storeys. Although similar to the Georgian, this style has a more subdued, vernacular appearance.

1509 Rockland Ave., Victoria



### Georgian Revival

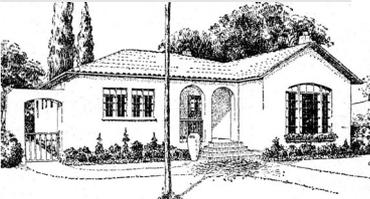
Based on the architecture of the Italian Renaissance, this style was initially popularized in Britain. Named for the reign of the four King Georges, it was the dominant architectural style in the American colonies in the 1700s. Its greatest popularity in BC was as an interwar period revival. Characteristic elements included a symmetrical plan, a façade divided into three, five, or seven bays, a hipped roof, a pedimented porch, columns, pilasters, cornices, multi-paned or Palladian windows, and generally Classical proportions.



1363 The Crescent, Vancouver

### Spanish/Mission Revival

This style originated in the Southwestern United States and gained popularity following the 1915 San Diego Exposition. It quickly became associated with the idealistic Californian dream and spread widely throughout the west. The style is typically defined by curved roof edges, flat stucco surfaces, open porches and balconies, roof tiles, arched window and door openings, colonnaded entrances and other references to Spanish forms.



This architecture became popular at the same time as automobiles and highways throughout the Southwest and up the West Coast.

Rather than being based on the revival of previous architectural styles, this style was a response to a new era. Founded on smooth, clean and simple lines it paid tribute to the machine age. Although closely related to Art Deco, it was a deliberate move away from heavy ornamentation and vertical massing. Based on simple geometric forms, the Moderne was not heavily decorated, and provided for a more simple and economical architecture than that of Art Deco. The Moderne style, sometimes referred to as 'Streamline' because of its smooth linear features, was widely applied to residences, theatres and industrial plants during the 1930s and 40s.

### what to look for what to look



- first major style to break from traditional building forms
- the streamline effect is closely associated with speed and technological advances of the time, such as ocean liners, aircraft, automobiles, etc
- box-like form sometimes relieved by rounded corners
- asymmetrical facades and plan
- horizontal, rather than vertical, emphasis
- flat roof with an interior gutter system
- horizontal grooves in wall surfaces to create decorative 'streamline' banding
- horizontally proportioned wide windows
- pipe railings and other nautical motifs



The Vancouver  
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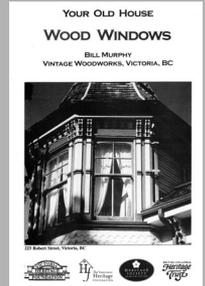
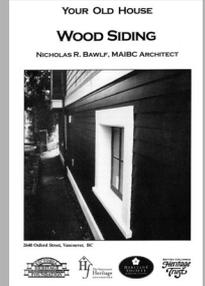
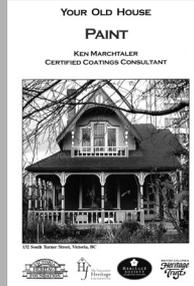
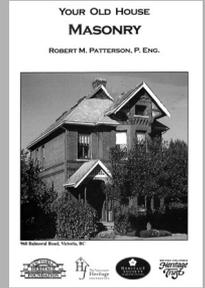
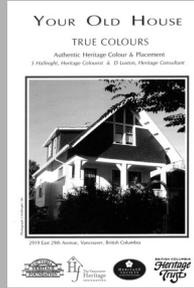


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Contact the Victoria Heritage Foundation at  
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# other titles in the series



## acknowledgements & image credits

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