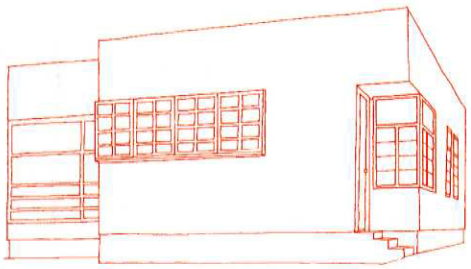
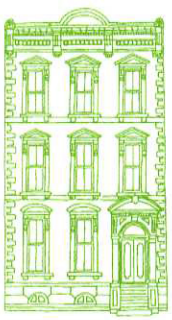
# A Field Guide to American Houses

*The best-selling classic by Virginia and Lee McAlester now revised and expanded to include homes built after 1940 and a new section on how to "read" a neighborhood*

## The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture





**Virginia Savage McAlester**

past. Responding to the modern idiom "Less is more," Venturi rebutted with "Less is a bore." Simplicity in design does not generate complex resolutions, which he believed to be the ultimate aim.

While paying homage to the past, many houses within this stylistic movement feature playful designs and ironic combinations. It is as if a repository of architectural elements existed and the architect could select any combination of forms. The elements selected could additionally be exaggerated, manipulated, and even distorted. This idea is illustrated in Vanna Venturi's house, in which Venturi dissected the proverbial arch, removing the keystone that provides the primary structural function of this architectural element. With a Postmodern style, the result can be a house that suits the desire for historic reference, fresh design, or contradictory interpretations.

A number of Postmodern architects, among them Robert Stern and Albert, Righter, & Tittmann, have now come to design New Traditional houses, often bringing to their designs the ability to slightly modify historic design elements and make them of today.

## Deconstructivism (1980s–present)

Deconstructivism is an architectural style that challenges the idea of oneness or unity in a structure and instead embraces the individuality of parts, producing designs that are fragmented. Deconstructivist philosophy regarded the parts of a whole more revealing than the whole itself, generating a multiplicity of interpretations. Applied to residential architecture, the form of a house is commonly divided into separate volumes that appear to have little coherent connection to one another. Each part is visually distinct from the others.

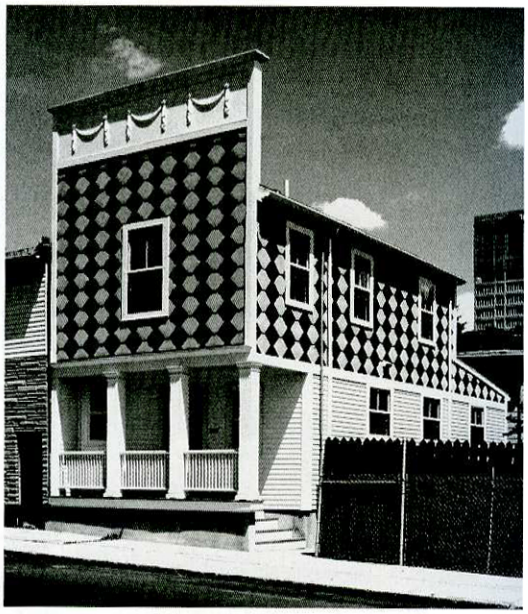
Deconstructivist houses have a wide range of influences but no visible single source or predictability in design, other than unusual geometries. Exteriors can look unfinished, complicating usual boundaries between indoor and outdoor space. The standard 90°-angle wall is no longer the default option. Windows can extend from walls to roof lines, creating an unexpected continuation of space.

The Frank Gehry house in Santa Monica illustrates this fragmentation of form and space, resulting in a visually unsettled design. In 1978 he first wrapped the original Dutch Colonial Revival house with unusual materials, obscuring any semblance of the original design.[71] An uneven and disjointed corrugated-metal wall envelops the facade, while chain-link panels are used near roof lines and glass windows. The house appears unfinished, following Gehry's belief that a "finished building has security, and it's predictable. I want to try something different. I like playing at the edge of disaster."[72]

These unusual designs presented engineering and construction challenges until the spread of CAD (computer-aided design) and CAM (computer-aided manufacturing). Used together, these programs can effectively visualize unusual three-dimensional spaces and electronically tool and manufacture corresponding work pieces needed for the design. Computer programs like these have allowed architects to more efficiently create and control their chaotic designs.

## POSTMODERN

1. Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1991. "Checkerboard House" (Albert House); Albert, Righter, and Tittmann, architects. Asphalt shingles form a black-and-gray diamond pattern that can be found providing a maintenance alteration in many parts of Boston. With its combination of subtle classical details and a Main Street false front, one might need a second look driving down the street to realize this is a new house, not a much modified one.
2. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1962. Vanna Venturi House; Robert Venturi, architect. One of the early Postmodern houses designed by the author of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* shows how Postmodernism could play with traditional elements. Here the blind arch above the entrance has a void where the keystone would have been historically placed for support. Note the square windows, one of the earliest uses of this distinctive window shape.
3. Carlsbad, California; 1982 (remodeled ca. 2010). A Postmodern remodeling of an earlier stucco town-house row. Each is getting its own front that dominates the appearance.
4. East Quogue, New York; 1979–1981. Lawson House; Robert A. M. Stern, architect. This iconic house combines a compact form with carefully placed historicist details. This entry facade has classical columns and an oversized eyebrow dormer window.
5. Rosemary Beach, Florida; 2003. George Israel, architect. An interesting Postmodern house with shaped parapets that also incorporate Deconstructivist features. The stucco wall on the right is not supported from below, and faux bullet holes add an almost destructive flare.
6. Pasadena, California; ca. 1990s. Stair-stepped gables combined with Postmodern porch supports and entry surrounds.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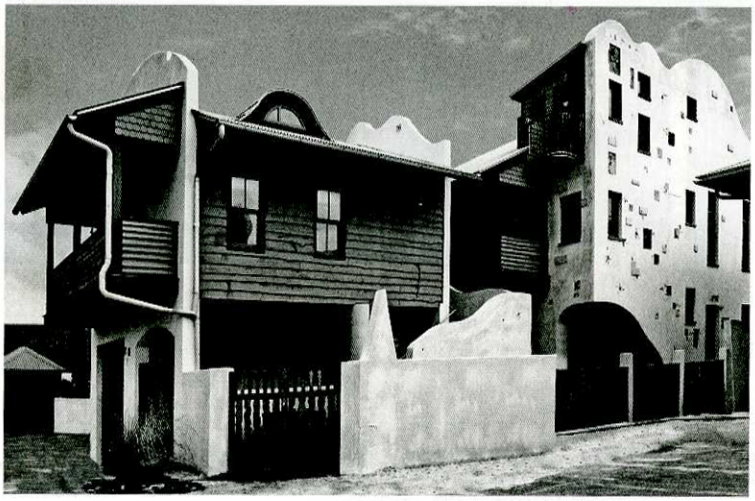
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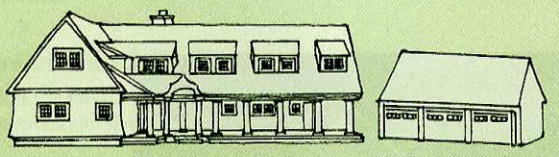
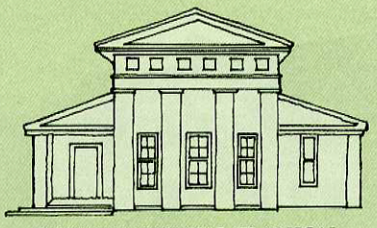
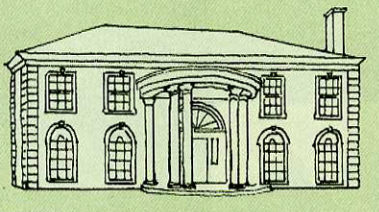


NEW TRADITIONAL SHINGLE

NEW TRADITIONAL COLONIAL REVIVAL



NEW TRADITIONAL CLASSICAL



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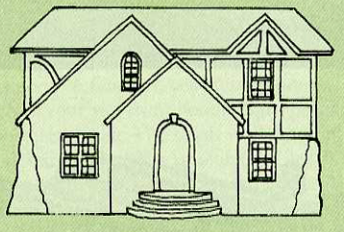

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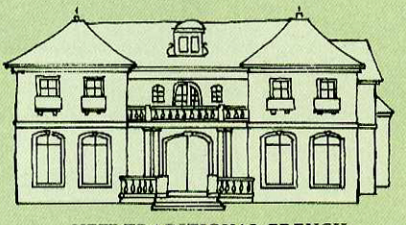

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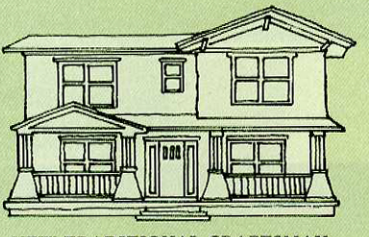

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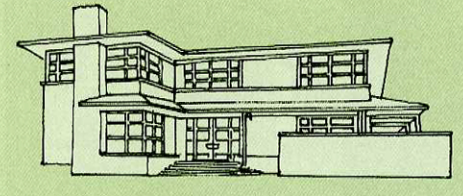

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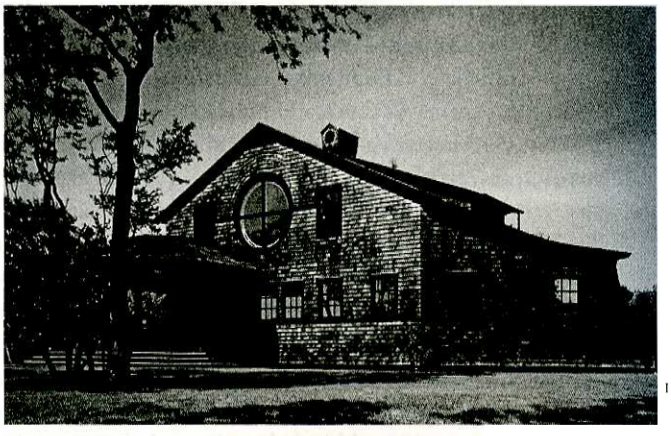
NEW TRADITIONAL MEDITERRANEAN

### SHINGLE

1. Fishers Island, New York; 1985. Berkowitz House; Albert, Righter & Tittman, architects. Also inspired by the Low House (page 379, Figure 8), this design angles the main facade, bending it backward on the right.
2. Medina, Washington (vicinity); 2008. A rectilinear interpretation of a Palladian window in the gables. Note how the side of the garage wing (on right) is detailed as if it were simply part of the house.
3. Fishers Island; 1981. "Gable in a Square"; Albert, Righter & Tittmann, architects. The broad front-facing gable of the Low House (page 379, Figure 8) has inspired this creative geometry.
4. Boston, Massachusetts (vicinity); 2001. Note the shingles curving into the recessed window in the gable.
5. East Hampton, New York; 2005. Mullen House; John Mullen, architect. A home with handsome, understated details. The entry is actually onto a split-level a few feet below the first floor.
6. East Hampton, New York; 1999. Shope Rheno Wharton Architects. This house has a broad symmetrical facade. Note the bank of paired doors leading from the house to the garden.
7. Seattle, Washington; 2005. A front-gabled Shingle with a 21st-century interpretation of cottage windows on the first floor.
8. St. Paul, Minnesota; ca. 2000. This has a full-width porch and multiple shed dormers on a gable roof.



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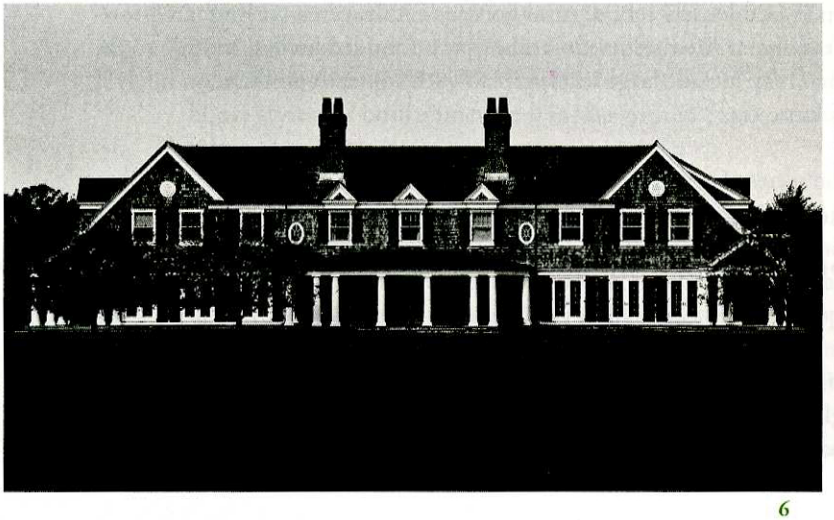

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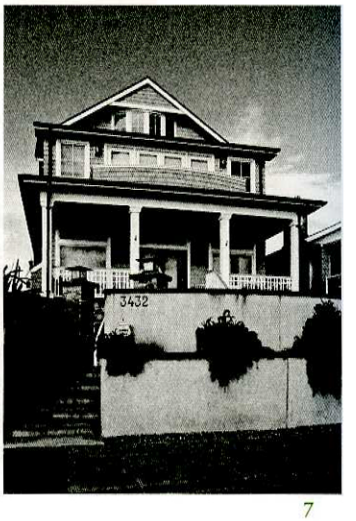


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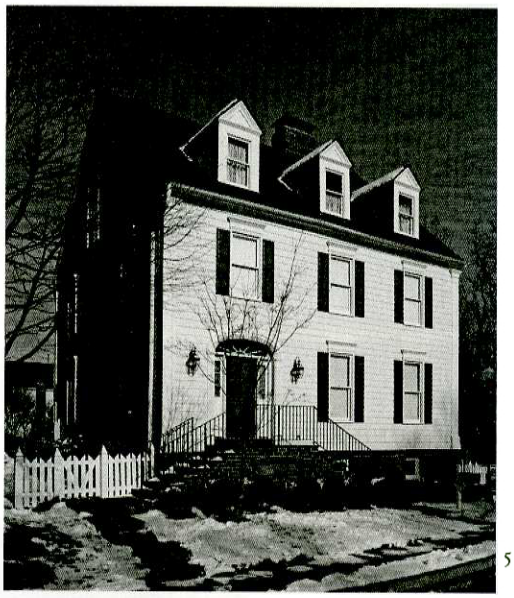
## COLONIAL REVIVAL (cont.)

5. Kentlands, Maryland; ca. 1992. This 1990s side-gabled example had the benefit of Kentlands' building guidelines to keep it simple, like most original Colonial houses.
6. Stillwater, Minnesota; ca. 2003. A side-gambrel example with full-width porch and broad shed dormer.
7. Dallas, Texas; 2000. Weathers House; Ann Abernathy, architect. A small and understated main house block is part of a much larger house designed in an additive manner—as is partially visible at right.
8. Boston, Massachusetts; 2004. Here triple wall dormers above the garage echo triple roof dormers on the house. The house and garage connect in an additive manner.
9. Kansas City, Missouri; 1998. This house was closely modeled after Virginia Georgian mansions with the use of red brick, high foundation, steeply pitched hipped roof, and very understated entry.
10. Kentlands, Maryland; ca. 2000s. At Kentlands, a subtle mix of house size within a block face combines with slightly different setbacks of houses on the lots to create pleasingly irregular streetscapes.
11. New England; 2009. Federal House; PPA, Peter Pennoyer and Elizabeth Graciolo, architects. Designed for a historic district, this elegant house has historic details that are carefully and subtly reinterpreted in some places.



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## CLASSICAL

1. Alexandria, Virginia; 2006. The two-story entry feature signals a house that is New Traditional rather than from the Eclectic era. Note that the entry porch and pediment are slightly out of scale.
2. Seaside, Florida (vicinity); ca. 2000. High foundation is required for possible floods. The small window size is less common on New Traditional houses.
3. Dallas, Texas; 2000–2004. Muse House; Quinlan Terry, architect. Larry Boerder, local architect. Solid masonry construction.
4. Dallas, Texas; 1975. This early example lacks an adequate entablature above the full-width porch and uses large windows more typical of Ranch houses.
5. Carillon Beach, Florida; 2000.
6. Seaside, Florida (vicinity); ca. 1990s. This front-gabled house is very similar to Figure 5. Compare the deeper entablature and more heavily molded cornice here to the much simpler one in Figure 5.
7. Highland Park, Texas; 2007. Gilliland House; Larry Boerder, architect. This house utilizes so many details of early 20th-century Neoclassical houses—including the South's beloved full-height entry porch with lower full-width porch subtype—that many neighbors think the house has been there for a century. Note the grouped windows, front door surrounded by lights, and the well-proportioned classical porches.
8. Carlsbad, California; 2006. Squared porch supports substitute for classical columns.
9. Cape Porch House; Albert, Righter & Tittmann, architects. This could be the country cousin of AR&T's Temple House (Figure 10). The Greek Revival elements here are simplified squared columns, corner pilasters, and a wide band of trim in the gable.

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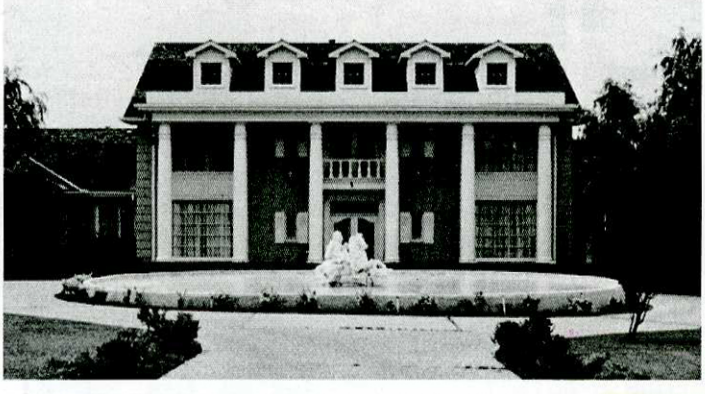

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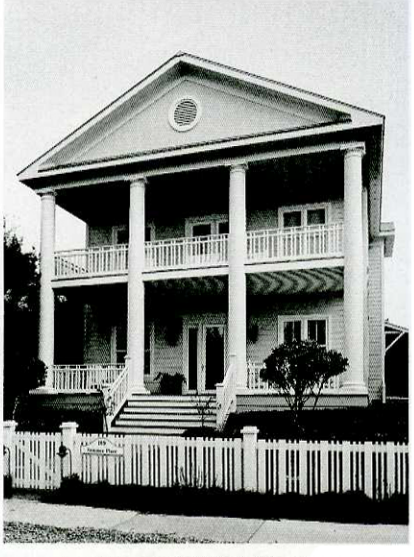

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10. Concord, Massachusetts; 1991. Temple House; Albert, Righter & Tittmann, architects. This striking new interpretation of the Greek Revival has dramatic pilasters on the gable front and an exceptionally wide frieze band with windows.

11. Santa Rosa Beach, Florida; 1997. This house, inspired by the full-facade porch of the Greek Revival style, has a small temple-form room on the roof rather than a more typical cupola.

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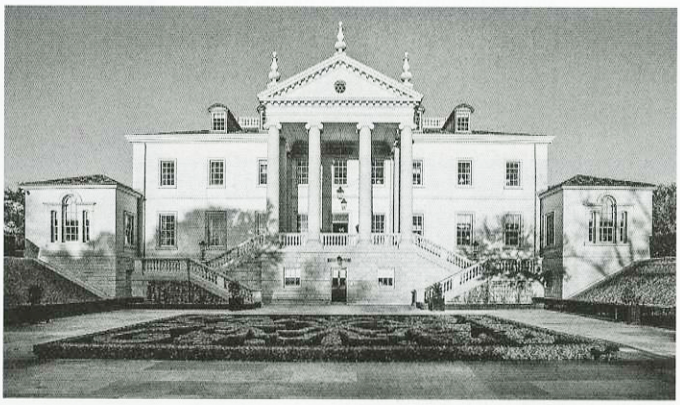

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