



A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture

Virginia Savage McAlester

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For the house lover and the curious tourist, for the house buyer and the weekend stroller, for neighborhood preservation groups and for all who want to know more about their community -- here, at last, is a book that makes it both easy and pleasurable to identify the various styles and periods of American domestic architecture.

Concentrating not on rare landmarks but on typical dwellings in ordinary neighborhoods all across the United States -- houses built over the past three hundred years and lived in by Americans of every social and economic background -- the book provides you with the facts (and frame of reference) that will enable you to look in a fresh way at the houses you constantly see around you. It tells you -- and shows you in more than 1,200 illustrations -- what you need to know in order to be able to recognize the several distinct architectural styles and to understand their historical significance. What does that cornice mean? Or that porch? That door? When was this house built? What does its style say about the people who built it? You'll find the answers to such questions here.

This is how the book works: Each of thirty-nine chapters focuses on a particular style (and its variants). Each begins with a large schematic drawing that highlights the style's most important identifying features. Additional drawings and photographs depict the most common shapes and the principal subtypes, allowing you to see at a glance a wide range of examples of each style. Still more drawings offer close-up views of typical small details -- windows, doors, cornices, etc. -- that might be difficult to see in full-house pictures. The accompanying text is rich in information about each style -- describing in detail its identifying features, telling you where (and in what quantity) you're likely to find examples of it, discussing all of its notable variants, and revealing its origin and tracing its history.

In the book's introductory chapters you'll find invaluable general discussions of house-building materials and techniques ("Structure"), house shapes ("Form"), and the many traditions of architectural fashion ("Style") that have influenced American house design through the past three centuries. A pictorial key and glossary help lead you from simple, easily recognized architectural features -- the presence of a tile roof, for example -- to the styles in which that feature is likely to be found.

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