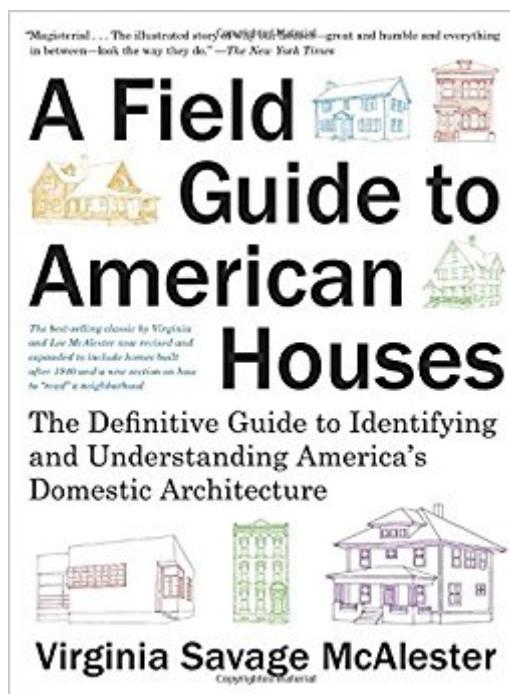


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# A Field Guide To American Houses (Revised): The Definitive Guide To Identifying And Understanding America's Domestic Architecture



## Synopsis

Now in paperback: the fully expanded, updated, and freshly designed second edition of the most comprehensive and widely acclaimed guide to domestic architecture: in print since its original publication in 1984, and acknowledged everywhere as the unmatched, essential guide to American houses. This revised edition includes a section on neighborhoods; expanded and completely new categories of house styles with photos and descriptions of each; an appendix on "Approaches to Construction in the 20th and 21st Centuries"; an expanded bibliography; and 600 new photographs and line drawings.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*Starred Review\* This outstanding volume covers more than 50 styles of American residential architecture, from early settlement homes of the seventeenth century to the modern "Millennium Mansions" of the present day. Expanded and completely revised from the 1984 edition, this edition includes American house design from the last three decades and adds more than 600 new photographs and illustrations. The introductory section, "Looking at American Homes," is broken down into distinct narratives. "Style: The Fashions of American Houses" distills the majority of houses into one of four principal architectural traditions; "Form: The Shapes of American Houses" features copious line drawings that show ground plans and proportions; "Structure: The Anatomy of American Houses" details the walls, roofs, and structural elements of a house; and "Neighborhoods: The Groupings of American Houses" highlights the different types

of neighborhoods, including a discussion of plans, density, streets and sidewalks, and development influences. Each section that follows covers a specific style (e.g., "Dutch Colonial," "Italianate," "Queen Anne," "Tudor," "Mission," "Prairie," "Ranch"), with notes on identifying features, principal subtypes, variants and details, and geographic occurrence. Numerous black-and-white photographs illustrate the wide variety of houses found within each style, and line drawings express both fine and broad details. The appendix "Approaches to Construction in the 20th and 21st Centuries" discusses prefabricated structures and "green" construction. Copious notes and a bibliography for further reference round out the work. Both scholars and average readers will find much to enjoy in this volume. Highly recommended for most public and academic libraries—and the price point may allow for a circulating copies.

--Rebecca Vnuk --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"The most authoritative dictionary of the language spoken by the built environment . . . McAlester's book is excellent for the layperson who wants to wander about the neighborhood with a bit more authority, or perhaps for the homeowner who can't decide what kind of windows might look best. It's also useful to those of us who study preservation professionally, to bring our insistence that buildings are just as alive as plants—and just as worthy of careful, affectionate attention—into the broader cultural conversation about urban spaces. That conversation, in which the most mundane elements of building design are cast as characters in the story of a city, turns the streetscape into something greater than the brick and limestone it's made of. It's alive, noisy—and demands our close attention." —Angela Serratore, *The New York Times Magazine* "Magisterial . . . The illustrated story of why our houses—great and humble and everything in between—look the way they do." —Michael Tortorello, *The New York Times* "Once you've pored through Virginia McAlester's photo-packed bible of American home design, you'll be able to identify the saltboxes, Dutch colonials, and brownstones lining your own street, and you'll understand the historical significance of each one." —Tina Jordan, *Entertainment Weekly* "The go-to resource for architecture spotters." —Peter Terzian, *Elle Décor* "Chronicles the past 400 years of American styles, from wigwam to mobile to modern." —Alexandra Wolfe, *The Wall Street Journal* "A classic." —Pilar Viladas, *House Beautiful* "Encyclopedic . . . For lovers of historic homes, this is a rich trove of not just details, but reasons for them." —Susan Clotfelter, *The Denver Post* "880 pages of scholarly

wonder." *Architectural Magazine* "The definitive guide to American housing styles." Jim Weiker, *The Columbus Dispatch* "Outstanding . . . Expanded and completely revised . . . Both scholars and average readers will find much to enjoy in this volume." Rebecca Vnuk, *Booklist* (starred review)

I always wanted to renovate an old house and purchased a beautiful Colonial Revival home built in 1915. My architect referred to the previous edition of this guide often during the renovation of my home. The new version proves without a doubt that the author is one of the nation's foremost authorities on architecture. There are so many beautiful illustrations that help people who learn visually like me, link terms with the actual architectural elements. The new guide has been updated to include all styles up to the present day. Not only is this book a must for students of architecture, but anyone who owns a house, is interested in buying a house, or is in the industry. Truly a masterpiece.

My dearly beloved is a big fan of houses. He loves to study the architecture and details of housing everywhere we go. So, when I saw this book reviewed in the *Wall Street Journal*, I knew it would be perfect for him. At the beginning of the book, there are charts with diagrams to help the reader identify the type of house he/she is looking at. For example, a sketch of a roof with a 2 or 3 word description, and the book recommends looking at one or more type of house to see which it is. However, it's also very good for reading, with chapters on the layouts of early towns and so forth. There is also a section on the housing used by various Native American groups. Each chapter about a style of houses includes a few pages of history, etc, before sketches, details about characteristics of the type, and photos of actual houses of each style from various parts of the country. Good for a long reading session, but it's also a fast and easy reference for when you just want to know what you've just seen.

After a decade of consulting my softbound copy of the earlier edition, I eagerly awaited this one. It is, at once, both familiar and new. My first impression was, "Wow, it's big; and heavy!" It's probably now out of the "field guide" category in the sense of portability. Perhaps the current one is similar to the hardbound 1st edition I never knew but the smaller, lighter softbound book was easier to toss under my arm and take off. I'm a clinical pharmacist by training - not an architect or architectural historian - so content accessibility is very important to me. Like the earlier edition, the book shines in this department but even brighter. I find the layout more logical, with the pictorial key and glossary

up front, not buried in the early pages. At first I couldn't figure the organization of the pictorial key but now I see it's clearly aimed at the sidewalk house viewer, e.g., me. Start at what you can see over the hedge and work down: Roof form, Dormers, Roof-Wall Junction, Chimneys, Porches, Windows, etc. Unfortunately, the typeface for the category headers is less eye-catching in the new edition, making it harder to skim to your section. The meat and value of the book is in the text. I haven't read it all, being most interested in the styles found here in southern California, but the content is again extremely accessible to the average reader. There continues the excellent use of line drawings, many that have been improved from the 1st edition. The photographs are much clearer on fine white paper than they were on the buff colored pages of the softbound previous edition. In my selective review I notice there are some new house photos and some different photos of 1st edition houses. There are also some photos deleted in this edition - so don't throw away your 1st edition! If I had to pick a single best new feature of the book, it would be the 45-page chapter, "Neighborhoods: The Grouping of American Houses," with historic photos, aerial line drawings and elevations of neighborhood types, and discussion of the history, growth and problems of neighborhood development. With some historic neighborhoods being nibbled to death by individual variances and code exceptions until they've lost their defining character, this chapter makes clear that individual houses - no matter how remarkable - are usually part of a collection worth recognition in its own right. Final assessment? This tome is no longer suitable for my backpack and the typeface choices make it less friendly for skimming but the expanded material is so good and so well integrated into the original [including the line drawings that look like they could have been there since 1984] that this "field guide" is still a must-have book for anyone interested in historic [or some-day historic] houses.

I love old houses so this review is based on that fact only (not an architectural student). This book is wonderful. It discusses and illustrates the styles of houses in the early days of our country to the present. There are detailed descriptions along with a plethora of photographs of all types of houses, my favorites being the Queen Anne, Tudor, and Gothic Revival (just a personal preference.) I think this is an amazing reference book, I would recommend it to anyone that loves old houses. In my case, because I was unfamiliar with a lot of the technical terms in McAlester's book, I also bought "Old House Dictionary", which helped immensely. Love this book.

This is probably the most-used resource book I have right now. I have the earlier edition and this is essentially the same thing with expanded sections of styles and sub-styles. Many pictures are

updated, many more are the same. I especially like the line drawings at the start of each chapter that identify the key elements for a particular style. This book has been very helpful for my current client- I'm identifying the architectural styles of hundreds of non-historic, usually obscure style structures. Those key elements have been great to reference quickly since I usually have a pretty good idea what each structure might be. Because of this book, there are about fifteen structures in another state that my client is considering preserving now that we have identified something unique about them. As a preservationist, that gets me jazzed up!

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