

Vernacular: How Buildings Learn From Each Other

WHAT GETS PASSED from building to building via builders and users is informal and casual and astute. At least it is when the surrounding culture is coherent enough to embrace generations of experience.

"Vernacular" is a term borrowed since the 1850s by architectural historians from linguists, who used it to mean "the native language of a region." Chris Alexander adopts a similar usage when he declares that a "pattern language" is the medium of humane building design. "Vernacular" means "vulgar" sometimes and "the bearer of folk wisdom" sometimes. It means "common" in all three senses of the word—"widespread," "ordinary," and "beneath notice."

In terms of architecture, vernacular buildings are seen as the opposite of whatever is "academic," "high style," "polite." Vernacular is everything not designed by professional architects—in other words, most of the world's buildings, ranging in assigned value from now-precious Cotswold stone cottages and treasured old Cape Cods to the despised hordes of factory-built mobile homes. In the eyes of tastemakers, old vernacular is lovely. New vernacular (including everything we might call Low Road) is unlovely.

There is a magazine called *Progressive Architecture* but none called *Conservative Architecture*. If there were such a magazine (a good idea, in my view), it would be largely about vernacular architecture, which is profoundly cautious and imitative, so immersed in its culture and its region that it looks interesting only to outsiders.

Eminent folklorist Henry Glassie has described vernacular

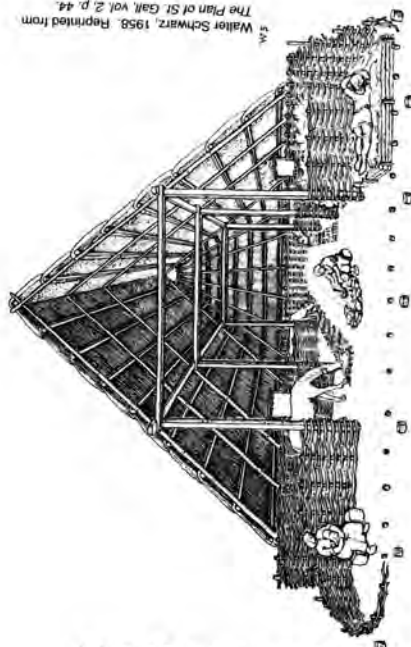
building tradition in operation:

A man wants a house. He talks with a builder. Together they design the house out of their shared experience, their culture of what a house should be. There is no need for formal plans. Students of vernacular architecture search for plans, wish for plans, but should not be surprised that they find none. The existence of plans on paper is an indicator of cultural weakening. The amount of detail in a plan is an exact measure of the degree of cultural disharmony; the more minimal the plan, the more completely the architectural idea abides in the separate minds of architect and client.¹

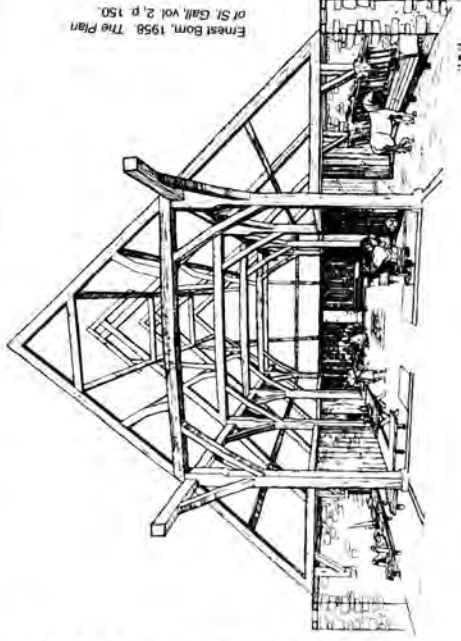
Vernacular building traditions have the attention span to incorporate generational knowledge about long-term problems such as maintaining and growing a building over time. High-style architecture likes to solve old problems in new ways, which is a formula for disaster, according to Dell Upton at the University of California. Vernacular builders, he says, are content to accept well-proven old solutions to old problems. Then they can concentrate all their design ingenuity strictly on new problems, if any. When the standard local roof design works pretty well, and materials and skills are readily available for later repair, why would you mess with that?

Vernacular buildings evolve. As generations of new buildings imitate the best of mature buildings, they increase in sophistication while retaining simplicity. They become finely attuned to the local weather and local society. A much-quoted dictum of Henry Glassie's states that "a search for pattern in folk material yields regions, where a search for pattern in popular material yields periods."² Roof lines and room layout are regional.

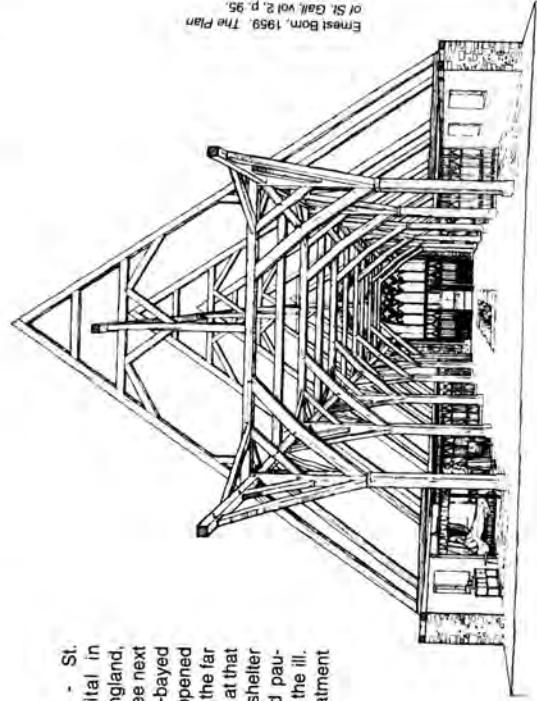
ca. 300 BC - Reconstructed from archaeology at Groningen in The Netherlands, this typical combination of house and barn shows how the wide center aisle (naeve) is used for circulation and common uses such as the fire, while the side aisles can be subdivided for specialized or private functions.



ca. 820 AD - Reconstructed from detailed plans for a Benedictine monastery at St. Gall, Switzerland. As depicted in the plan for this House for Distinguished Guests, servants occupied the left aisle around the side entrance, while horses were stabled in the aisle flanking an exit to privies on the right. Guests had private rooms at each end and dined in the common area around the open fire in the nave.



ca. 1295 AD - St. Mary's Hospital in Chichester, England, still survives (see next page). The six-bayed infirmary hall opened into a chapel at the far end. A hospital at that time provided shelter for pilgrims and paupers as well as the ill. No medical treatment was attempted.



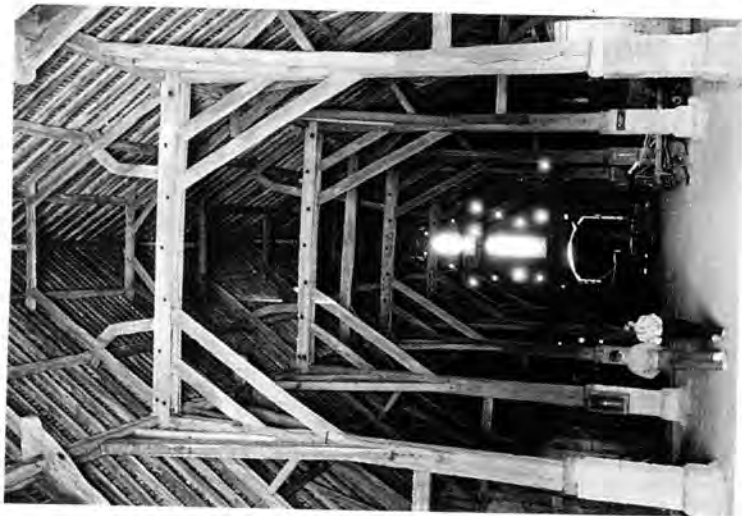
THREE-AISLED STRUCTURES in northern Europe date at least from 1300 BC and continue their evolution to this day. They were robustly multi-purpose—Nordic sagas chronicle their use as dwellings, dining halls, celebration halls, kitchens, dormitories, and barns for cattle or hay. Often many of the uses combined in one building or followed each other in sequence. These drawings are from the impeccable work, *The Plan of St. Gall*, by Walter Horn and Ernest Born (see Recommended Bibliography).

Paint color and trim vary with fashions in style. The heart of vernacular design is about form, not style. Style is time's fool. Form is time's student.

You can see it in two major forms of European rural building of ancient lineage. The Mediterranean masonry courtyard house has long been celebrated for its perfect fit with local climate and landscape and the multi-generational needs of extended families. Less well-known but equally admirable is the long, three-aisled, steep-roofed wood structure developed in the forests of the north. Here the courtyard equivalent—the double-wide aisle in the middle with its central fire—was enclosed from the inclement weather. With the thatch-bearing rafters supported at their center of load by vertical timber columns, the buildings were easy to raise and then easy to adapt. The side aisles invited subdivision for a variety of purposes and for privacy. Growth came easily by adding bays at either end, and yet the interior was always kept unified by the wide central aisle. The form has survived the

1 Henry Glassie, "Vernacular Architecture and Society," *Vernacular Architecture: Ethnoscapes*, Vol. 4, Mete Turan, ed., p. 274. This is exactly the point that Christopher Alexander makes in *The Timeless Way and A Pattern Language*.

2 Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1968), p. 33.



9 August 1991. Brand.

1991 - The tithe barn at Great Coxwell, Oxfordshire, is 152 feet long, 43 feet wide, 48 feet high. William Morris, who lived nearby, regarded it as "the greatest piece of architecture in England." The sophisticated bracing of beams and roof evident here is thought to have worked out in wood the forms later used in stone cathedrals.

ca. 1910 - St. Mary's Hospital (see previous page) was converted to an almshouse in 1535, offering private rooms. These partitions and chimneys date from 1680. In the four bays remaining (of the original six) are eight two-room dwellings still used for old people, and the center aisle still opens into the chapel.



Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England. Neg. no. BB 89/9520.

TIMBER-FRAMED ROOFS, steep-pitched, are perfectly capable of lasting seven centuries, as in the Great Coxwell barn (ca. 1310) and St. Mary's Hospital (ca. 1295). Their three-aisled form kept them useful.

millennia magnificently in barns and cathedrals and is worth reviving for houses.

The lesson for the ages from three-aisled structures is that columns articulate space in a way that makes people feel comfortable making and remaking walls and rooms anchored to the columns. You can always visualize what you might do next to improve the space plan. The recent engineering triumph of huge free-span interior spaces is actually a loss for intuitive adaptivity. The effect of wide-open space is oppressive rather than freeing.

The space plans of vernacular buildings are typically generic and general-purpose. The identical bays of three-aisled structures and the additive identical rooms of courtyard houses had been found to be the most inexpensively adaptable over time. Vernacular design is always prudent about materials and time, seeking the most pragmatic building for the least effort and cost. It provides an economical grammar of construction. Let there be a central passageway and stair hall, say, with roughly identical pairs of rooms on each side upstairs and down. (That was the "double pile" house that the fathers of George Washington and James Madison built and that pervaded eastern America.) The specifics of material, style, and finish were left to the builder and dweller.

To the cultural historian Ivan Illich, the spare clarity of such

³ Ivan Illich, *In the Mirror of the Past* (London, New York: Marion Boyars, 1992), p. 56.

⁴ Dell Upton introducing Thomas Hubka, "Just Folks Designing," *Common Places*, Dell Upton, John Michael Vlach, eds. (Austin, GA: Univ. of Georgia, 1986), p. 426.

⁵ Title above, pp. 431 and 433.

buildings was honed by countless real and individual lives:

Dwelling is an activity that lies beyond the reach of the architect not only because it is a popular art; not only because it goes on and on in waves that escape his control; not only because it is of a tender complexity outside of the horizon of mere biologists and system analysts; but above all because no two communities dwell alike. Habit and habitat say almost the same. Each vernacular architecture... is as unique as vernacular speech. The art of living in its entirety—that is, the art of loving and dreaming, of suffering and dying—makes each lifestyle unique. And therefore this art is much too complex to be taught by the methods of a Comenius or Pestalozzi, by a schoolmaster or by TV. It is an art which can only be picked up. Each person becomes a vernacular builder and a vernacular speaker by growing up, by moving from one initiation to the next in becoming either a male or a female inhabitant. Therefore the Cartesian, three-dimensional, homogeneous space into which the architect builds, and the vernacular space which dwelling brings into existence, constitute different classes of space.³

And they were arrived at by different classes of design. The process of vernacular design is treated, even by its admirers, with undeserved condescension, insists building historian Thomas Hubka. In an introduction to Hubka's paper "Just Folks Designing," Dell Upton summarizes:

Hubka carefully distinguishes the vernacular builder's process of design, in which existing models are conceptually taken apart and then reassembled in new buildings, from the professional designer's manner of working, in which elements from disparate sources are combined to solve design problems anew. He characterizes the vernacular architect's process as "preconstrained"; by *choosing* to limit architectural ideas to what is available in the local context, the vernacular architect reduces the design task to manageable proportions.

Although this mode of composition seems superficially to generate monotonously similar structures, it allows in fact for considerable individuality within its boundaries, permitting the designer to focus on skillful solution of particular problems rather than on reinventing whole forms.⁴

Hubka says in the article that, far from constricting the folk builder's own creativity and individuality, this approach frees them:

The folk designer simply signs his signature much smaller [than contemporary designers] but by no means less forcefully. This signature is in the details, in the care, and in the craft of building (and while the modern observer might not see this signature you can be sure his contemporaries saw it). Folk architecture that appears unified, homogeneous, even identical becomes, on closer inspection, rich, diversified, and individualistic.

Hubka concludes: "A case can, and should, be made for folk design method as one of the most pervasive and well-conceived design methods in the history of civilization."⁵ He recommends that contemporary architects study it.

I was drawn to talking with vernacular building historians because, more than other architectural historians, they focus on how the buildings *work*. In America the discipline is new and young—some call it a "children's crusade"—having been pioneered in mid-20th-century by the likes of J. B. Jackson (vernacular landscapes) and Henry Glassie (folk material culture) and fostered by the growth of the preservation and environmental movements.

Vernacular building historians excel at "reading" buildings—analyzing the physical evidence of what actually happened in a building, and when, and why. I inquired about the tricks of the trade with Orlando Ridout V, head of the Office of Research, Survey and Registration of the Maryland Historical Trust, based in



BUILDING HISTORIAN Orlando Ridout points out what skilled masons did for a 1774 triple townhouse in Annapolis, Maryland, designed by his ancestor John Ridout: "When they struck the joints, see how they pulled the mortar away from the brick, and then they added this little incised line in the center of the joint, and it gives a very precise, neat look. When the sun is coming down on it, it casts a shadow and it punches the wall really nicely."

historic Annapolis. A second generation architectural historian and onetime builder himself, Ridout reminded me of field biologists and geologists. For such people the world is a constant puzzle and revelation, filled with what Vladimir Nabokov called "transparent things, through which the past shines!"

As we strolled around Annapolis, Ridout explained how to see through a building. "Traditionally architectural history, because it came from art history, has tended to focus on style. Style is the last thing that I would teach a student about architectural history, because it's so misleading. I could care less what style a building is. I want to know when it was built, and how it evolved, and what floor plan it had, and how the spaces in that house were used. The best way to approach dating a building and unraveling the sequence of change is to look at things that are least likely to lie to you—essentially, the things that are least self-conscious. The living room is a self-conscious part of the house. The front facade is a self-conscious part of the house, where the owner is trying to make a statement to the world about what he is about—whether it's 'I'm a simple man with simple tastes' or 'I'm richer than you are and don't you forget it' or simply, 'I have crossed the



RIDOUT: "We're looking at number 80 and 82 East Street. We have a house that's gone through one major period of change. There's some indication of that change in the brickwork on the left hand gable end, but the upper gable and entire facade is circa-1840s brickwork. We can see those familiar mid-19th-century wooden lintels over the windows and door, and it has a corbeled brick cornice, which is very typical of the second quarter of the 19th century. It has the plainer, uniform-looking brickwork that we associate with the first half of the 19th century. But we do have some clues that there's something earlier here—changes in the brickwork at the end. We also have the water table breaking out, creating the sense of a real foundation. The stuff in the back was probably added in the late 19th century. It has typical 'German' siding—some people call it 'novelty siding'—from usually the late 19th and early 20th century."

threshold of gentility. I can now afford a brick house with a fancy entrance porch."

"So you head for the parts of the house where nobody has tried to dress things up, and that's the attic and the cellar. In the attic what you're really looking for is where a second period of construction has encapsulated an original period of construction. Even the windows sometimes get buried in place, and the paint colors are all still there. The most original hardware's always at the top of the house. It got the least amount of use, and nobody cares if it doesn't look great, so it stays there. Go up and look at the servants' quarters."

"The thing that is most helpful in figuring out a building's history

I asked Ridout what the historic building inventories and archaeology of Maryland suggested about the comparative survivability of the various kinds of old buildings. He said the main survivors were masonry buildings, even though they were only 15 percent of what was originally built. Medium to large houses survived the best, because there is always use for them. Small houses were built shoddy and disposable. Barns survived fairly well, thanks to being solidly constructed. Specialized farm buildings perished of obsolescence, with one interesting exception.

"Small domestic outbuildings that are well built tend to survive. Everybody can find a use for a 12- or 14-foot-square building. Meat houses, for example, tended to be very well built. They were either of masonry, log, or very heavy timber frame construction, partly because they were carrying a lot of weight—maybe 2,000 pounds of ham hanging from the roof—and they had to be theftproof. They usually were relatively close to the main house, so they're still convenient to this day. These days they're full of lawnmowers and weedcutters and turpentine and bicycles. They're very hard to measure because they're always crammed with junk."

Vernacular building historians of the current breed are interested in any kind of building from any period, including the present. The patriarch J. B. Jackson has remarked, "The older I get, the more interested I get in the future that's waiting for us. I don't think it will have much dignity, but it will have vitality."⁸ And vitality is what he inspired people to study.

One of the things that would be worth investigating in contemporary buildings is the *informal* pathways of influence. The formal pathways of architect influencing architect have been

⁸ Interview with Jane Holtz Kay reprinted from the *New York Times* in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (21 Sept. 1989). J. B. Jackson's influential books include *The Necessity for Ruins* (Amherst: Univ. of Mass., 1980) and *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1984).



"If we look at the right hand gable end of the building, where the stucco has been stripped away, we can see very clearly, part way up, the 18th century gable end of the building, with evidence of at least three small windows and very nice Flemish bond brickwork, and glazed headers forming a diamond pattern in the center of the wall."

"Stucco can be a real problem for people, because they don't like it aesthetically, and so they take it off, not realizing that usually stucco went on to solve a problem or to cover up messy aesthetics. One reason for stucco is, if you've got water penetration problems, it's the cheapest, fastest fix. In the 1830s it was popular to stucco a building anyway, so often they were built with crummy brick, or broken brick, reused brick. People later spend thousands of dollars to tear all the stucco off, and then they've got a wall that's worthless and they've got to put it all right back up."

"It's a standing seam metal roof. Beginning in about the middle of the 1840s you see quite a bit of it, especially in dense urban neighborhoods because of the fire prevention qualities."

is technology. Building technology never lies. No 18th-century builder ever had access to a machine-made nail. He had to use a handmade nail. He'd never seen a circular saw. He couldn't buy his boards planed in a planing mill or his plaster lathing cut on a bandsaw. An 18th-century house is totally a hand crafted building, with very distinctive tool marks, methods of construction, joinery, nails, interior finishing elements—whether it's the plaster lathing or the trim around the door or the way he framed the base of the chimney. The industrial revolution begins to show up in the late 1790s, but it really doesn't begin to take hold until the 1840s and 1850s in the Chesapeake area. After the Civil War you have a sea change. Then you're basically building national housing."



"It's gone through one of those cycles in the left hand gable end of the building, where the stucco has been stripped away, we can see very clearly, part way up, the 18th century gable end of the building, with evidence of at least three small windows and very nice Flemish bond brickwork, and glazed headers forming a diamond pattern in the center of the wall."

"Stucco can be a real problem for people, because they don't like it aesthetically, and so they take it off, not realizing that usually stucco went on to solve a problem or to cover up messy aesthetics. One reason for stucco is, if you've got water penetration problems, it's the cheapest, fastest fix. In the 1830s it was popular to stucco a building anyway, so often they were built with crummy brick, or broken brick, reused brick. People later spend thousands of dollars to tear all the stucco off, and then they've got a wall that's worthless and they've got to put it all right back up."

"It's a standing seam metal roof. Beginning in about the middle of the 1840s you see quite a bit of it, especially in dense urban neighborhoods because of the fire prevention qualities."

is technology. Building technology never lies. No 18th-century builder ever had access to a machine-made nail. He had to use a handmade nail. He'd never seen a circular saw. He couldn't buy his boards planed in a planing mill or his plaster lathing cut on a bandsaw. An 18th-century house is totally a hand crafted building, with very distinctive tool marks, methods of construction, joinery, nails, interior finishing elements—whether it's the plaster lathing or the trim around the door or the way he framed the base of the chimney. The industrial revolution begins to show up in the late 1790s, but it really doesn't begin to take hold until the 1840s and 1850s in the Chesapeake area. After the Civil War you have a sea change. Then you're basically building national housing."

studied to death, but they explain little about where most of the real action is. Even in matters of style, some elements seem to have lives of their own, like classical columns. A decorative Post-Modern column refers to the Beaux Arts column, which referred to the Renaissance column, which referred to the classical Roman column, which referred to the classical Greek column of stone, which referred to the earlier wooden column made of a tree. They are all mostly nonfunctional and expensive to craft. Clem Labine, founder of *Old House Journal*, has commented, "While the popularity of classicism has certainly waxed and waned, there hasn't been a period in over two millennia when someone in some part of the world hasn't been fitting architraves across column tops."⁹ Modernism swore it would get rid of these pagan temple ornaments forever, and the first thing Post-Modernism did was put them back.

Something evidently drives continuity between buildings at a mythic level. Masonry fireplaces and chimneys have been utterly obsolete since the popularization of the Franklin stove by the 1830s, yet 160 years later every house that can afford it still has at least a facsimile of a masonry fireplace and chimney. Some deep lullaby croons, "Hearth and home."

In some high-style buildings the architect decrees and the client accepts—a status battle lampooned in Tom Wolfe's *From Bauhaus to Our House*—but in most buildings it is the other way around. And clients seldom innovate. They borrow. They see something they like, and they insist that their building be "like that." How did running water, bathrooms, central heating, and air conditioning originally get into houses? Not via architects. Historian Daniel Boorstin tells an interesting tale of the dialogue between public and private buildings:

In the older world [of Europe], the *public* facilities tended to copy the *private*. Inns were shaped like large private residences, town halls were fashioned after the palatial dwellings of rich citizens. But the urban communities which sprang up in the United States in the nineteenth century were

bristling with newcomers, while there were still few rich men and, of course, no ancient palaces. Here public buildings and public facilities made their own style, which gradually influenced the way everyone lived.¹⁰

It was raffish commercial buildings rather than the stately institutional ones that led the way. Grand hotels, which historians consider to be an American invention, introduced gas light, spring mattresses, running water and central heating by mid-19th century. Guests soon took insistence on such luxuries home with them. Once people had experienced air conditioning in movie theaters in the 1930s, they could not bear to live without it at home. Maybe home adoption is the final test of the success of a new building element. That the sealed windows and services-hiding dropped ceilings of offices have not migrated to the home may signify that they are ultimately failures.

Sometimes a building form takes off and becomes so widely popular that its design is assumed to be anonymous—"folk"—when in fact it was some individual's bright idea. America's roadside service stations were largely created and continuously updated, right up to the time of interstate truck stops, by one man.

⁹ Clem Labine, "Please Pass the Civitas," *Traditional Builder* (Dec. 1990), p. 4.

¹⁰ Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Random, 1973), p. 350. He has a whole chapter on "The Palaces of the Public" in *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random, 1965), p. 137.

¹¹ Brendan Gill, *Architecture Digest* (May 1991), p. 27.

¹² A counter-argument could be made that the eighteen volumes of *Sweet's General Building and Renovation Catalog File* offer way too many products—21,000 pages of stuff from 2,300 manufacturers in 1992, and growing—and they are always too new for any knowledge to accumulate about whether they work or not. This is the opposite of choice-narrowing vernacular design, which knows a few things very well and clings to them.

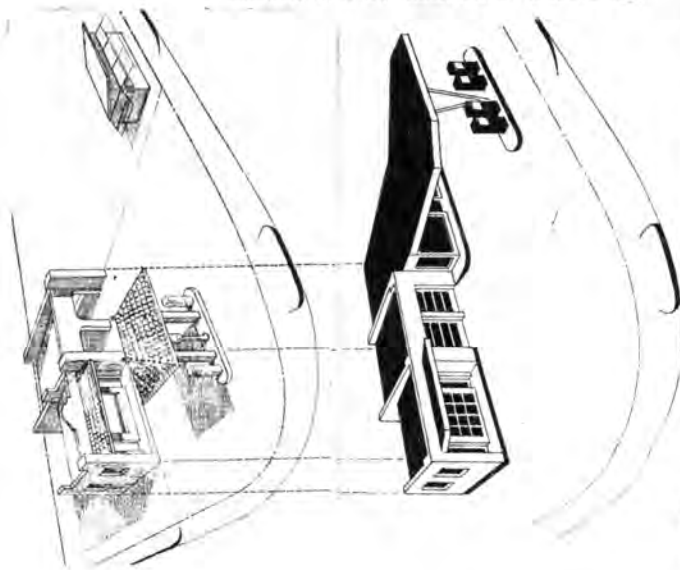
¹³ I am indebted, in my bare-bones account of the generation of Santa Fe style, to discussion with Chris Wilson, a cultural historian at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. His forthcoming book, *The Myth of Santa Fe: Tourism, Ethnic Identity, and the Creation of a Modern Regional Tradition* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico), will be a landmark study of the commercialization of vernacular form. A preview may be found in his paper, "New Mexico in the Tradition of Romantic Reaction," *Pueblo Style and Regional Architecture*, Nicholas Markovich, et al., eds. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990), pp. 175-194.

work attracted the admiration of Frank Lloyd Wright (a rare event) and the flattery of imitation by countless developers.

It may be that one of the reasons architects are so driven toward surface originality is that their industry compels them to uniformity throughout the rest of a building. Caught between the rigid requirements of building codes, the standard solutions of professional books such as *Architectural Graphic Standards*, and the standard products of *Sweets Catalog*, there is not much room for creativity, so architects grab what they can.¹² This is a gain and a loss for quality in buildings. The worst are less bad because of having to meet fairly intelligent standards. But the best are less innovative as a whole, and they are less likely to be finely adapted, or adaptable, to their unique circumstances. Instead of learning from each other, such "catalog architecture" buildings are guided by a standard homogenized pool of building lore which is no longer regional and often not even national, but world-encompassing, inescapable and unchallengeable.

How else can we explain the survival from decade to decade of the aluminum-frame sliding glass door? It seems to serve simultaneously as door, window, and wall, but it's terrible at all three. As a door it's fiddly and awkward to open, and dangerous, since it has the vicious property of looking the same when open or closed, and people walk smack into the glass. As a window it reveals too much in both directions and makes any view quickly boring. And it's worthless as wall, being nonstructural and noninsulated, bleeding heat in whatever is the wrong direction. The sliding glass door is a measure of how remote the builders' decisions have become from the users' experience and of how powerless users are in the face of standardized building doctrine.

Where a regional tradition does survive into the modern world it can work potent magic, even when adulterated. A textbook case is the triumph in the American southwest of "Santa Fe style" (also called "Pueblo Revival").¹³ Visitors today to Santa Fe, New Mexico, are thrilled to find an entire city of low, beautifully sculptured adobe buildings gleaming in the high desert sun,



ca. 1945 - CARL PETERSEN not only designed American gas stations for Gulf Oil and Pure Oil from 1914 to the mid-1950s, he designed the radical updating of his own creations. Not an architect, he shaped thousands of buildings that became a vernacular conspicuously characteristic of the nation and the times. When he retired he was designing the first truck plazas for the new interstate highways.

Carl Petersen devised these buildings for several American oil companies from 1914 to 1970, and his designs were copied by the competition. Suburban "ranch houses," which defined the American 1950s, largely came from a little-known Californian named Cliff May. For years his designs wouldn't sell. Then a contractor advised him to stop trying to hide the driveway and garage and instead flaunt them, because Americans love showing off their car. With that his career took off. He personally designed a thousand ranch-style houses and had 18,000 built to his design by developers. "On the strength of these figures, it could be claimed for May that he is probably the most popular architect that has ever lived," observed one critic.¹¹ Though May never went to architecture school and never got a license, his



ca. 1668 - Spanish colonial governor Don Pedro de Peralta had the "palacio real" (royal palace) built in the new capital of Santa Fe in 1610 as a rude fort and administrative headquarters. From 1680 to 1692, following the Pueblo Revolt, Tewa and Tano Indians occupied the building, converting it to a multi-story pueblo until the Spanish recaptured it. Americans seized the building from Mexico in 1846 and housed the Territorial Governor there for decades. Sawn lumber was showed off in the *portal* columns.

US Army Signal Corps Collection. The Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 9099.



ca. 1882 - Always approaching a ruinous state ever since it was built, the Palace was renovated in 1877 with a metal roof and a fancy balustrade on the *portal*. Decoration on the near end included an elaborate brick cornice and stucco painted to look like stone. The interior was still a mess in 1878 when Governor Lew Wallace moved in. He wrote of his writing room: "The walls were grimy, the undressed boards of the floor rested flat upon the ground; the cedar rafters, rain-stained as those in the dining-hall of Cedric the Saxon, and overweighed by tons and tons of mud composing the roof, had the threatening downward curvature of a shipmate's cullass. Nevertheless, in that cavernous chamber I wrote the eighth and last book of *Ben-Hur*."

Ben Wittick. The Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 15376.

obviously redolent with history, inheritors of America's most ancient building lineage. It is all a 20th-century invention.

Santa Fe style developed from the collision of three vernacular building traditions and one generation of calculating boosters. It was an epic of cross-cultural borrowing. The mythic baseline comes from the Indian multi-story adobe and stone "apartment houses" of New Mexico and Arizona that were built dense and high by the agricultural Pueblo tribes. They were stepped down, terrace by terrace, toward the south and southeast to soak up the sun's warmth. Spanish explorers arrived in the area in 1540 and began colonizing in 1598 (twenty-two years before the Mayflower Pilgrims) with an architecture somewhat similar to the Indian pueblos based on the traditional Mediterranean courtyard house—masonry, flat-roofed, with small general-purpose rooms added casually.

The Indians soon adopted several Spanish innovations. They replaced puddled adobe with wood-formed adobe bricks laced with straw. They replaced smoky open fires in the pueblo rooms

SANTA FE STYLE. America's oldest public building, the adobe Palace of the Governors (1610) on the Santa Fe plaza, was the first expression of the city's determination to redesign itself as a tourist town. One of the devisers of the architectural Indian-Spanish-Anglo amalgam called Santa Fe style was archaeologist Jesse Nusbaum. From 1909 to 1913 he remodeled the *portal* of the Palace backward past its Victorian and Territorial periods to an imaginary colonial look. The result was one of the four or five New Mexico buildings most influential as a model for thousands of Santa Fe style buildings.

with the
began v
Spanish
raphers
opened
and sou
that not
Spanish
only can
The thir
after 182
accelera
milled lu
manufac

14 For a de
"When a Ro
Anglo/Span
(Albuquerque



ated in 1877 an elaborate an Governor ed boards of hall of Cadric g downward ght and last



1913 - In 1909 the Palace was turned over to the brand new Museum of New Mexico, and its first employee, Jesse Nusbaum, set about rebuilding the *portal*. In one of the old adobe walls he found embedded a round wood column and corbel, which he took as a pattern for the new columns. Like most Santa Fe style buildings, the Palace *portal* only looks like adobe. As shown in this photo by Nusbaum, he built for the ages with stuccoed brick.



1991 - For nearly a century now the remodeled Palace of the Governors has been one of the major attractions in Santa Fe, with its excellent museum inside and its daily market of jewelry offered by local Indians on colorful blankets under the *portal*. Tradition is what you make it. That is, most traditions were once someone's bright idea which was successful enough to persist long enough for people to forget that it was once someone's bright idea.

with the shapely adobe corner fireplace called a *fogón*, and they began whitewashing interior walls. Outside, they added the Spanish beehive oven, the *horno*, beloved of tourist photographers. Meanwhile the Spanish, imitating the Indians, often opened their courtyard houses into L- and U-shapes facing south and southeast. The colonial capital in Santa Fe was so isolated that not much further influence came from Europe. The nearest Spanish city was thirty days' travel to the south, and trade caravans only came once every three years. Two centuries went by.

The third force, Yankees, started arriving on the Santa Fe Trail after 1821 and brought with them a frontier vernacular and an accelerated pace of change. By 1850 local sawmills were making milled lumber, doors, and windows. Soon came glass and manufactured metal hardware. After 1879 the Atchison Topeka &

Santa Fe railroad brought in even more goods and Anglos (the regional name for non-Spanish whites). They imported the region's first architectural *style*—a derivative of Greek Revival known today as the Territorial style, featuring rudimentary ornamentation such as pediments over doorways and decorative brick atop adobe walls.

While the Anglos were adopting some Spanish practices such as *portales*—covered walkways in front of commercial buildings—the traditional Spanish buildings were becoming thoroughly hybridized. They remained one-story, small-roomed, low to the ground, and casually additive, but they began to acquire pitched roofs, porches, and specialized rooms. Instead of showing their back to the street and facing inward on courtyards, they turned around to face the street, and new Spanish buildings were set back from the street with an Anglo-style front yard. The gradual specialization of rooms was complete when plumbing arrived in the 1920s and established once and for all which room was the kitchen.¹⁴

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of the Anglo/Spanish hybridization see Christopher Wilson, "When a Room Is the Hall," *Mass* (Summer 1984), pp. 17-23. Good illustration of the Anglo/Spanish intersection is in Bainbridge Bunting, *Of Earth and Timbers Made* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico, 1974).

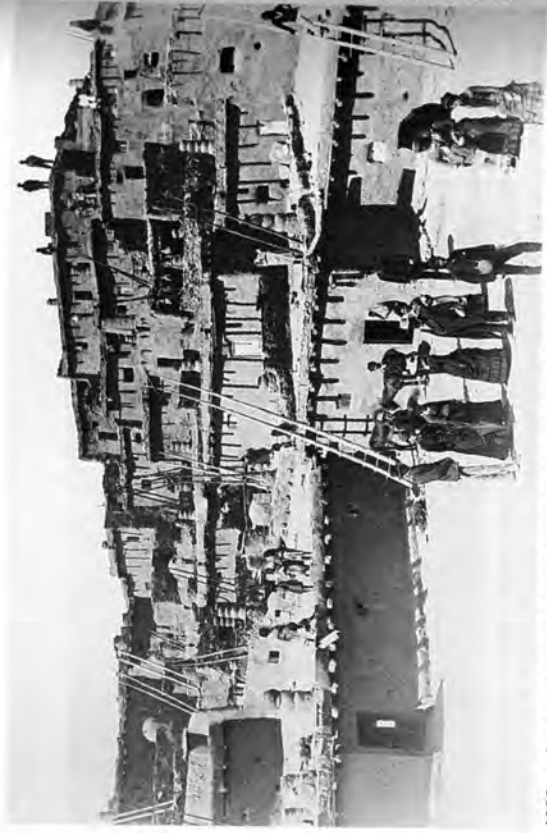


Timothy H. O'Sullivan. Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 72624.

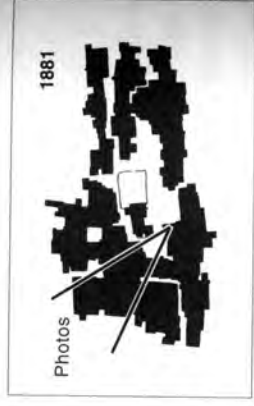
1873 - By the time of this photograph the Zuni Pueblo complex was renowned for being five stories high, but it had been perhaps seven stories high in the early 19th century. The village was founded about 1400 AD. When the ladders were drawn up, the complex of several hundred rooms became a fortress against raids by Navajos and Apaches. New rooms were added casually to the top of the structure, turning former roofs into floors and terraces. The terraces were public walkways and the site of family activities such as food preparation. These photos were taken from atop the Brain Kiva, still in use, and the Big Plaza in the foreground continues to serve ceremonial occasions such as the Shalako celebration in mid-winter.

"CONTINUAL FLOW, continual change, continual transformation," said cultural historian Rina Swentzel, describing her own Pueblo village of Santa Clara in this century. The best documented transformation was at ZUNI PUEBLO, west of Albuquerque, New Mexico. For all the violent physical change, Zuni culture and traditions remain remarkably intact. The enormous changes evident in these photos were wrought piecemeal, family by family.

ca. 1900 and 1978 - Zuni house interiors changed as radically as the exteriors. The 1900 living room shows whitewashed walls, a hooded fireplace, ledge for seating and shelving, a skylight, and kerosene lamp (right). A hooded fireplace still dominates the 1978 living room, where Francine Laate is about to make bread and G. Olawson and Tom Awalate chat on the sofa.



1882 - A party of visiting whites provides entertainment for the Zunis. Ground-level doorways are beginning to appear.



The core structures of Zuni pueblo dispersed as the need for defense diminished and wheeled vehicles made streets useful. These maps by Victor Mendeleff, Alfred Kroeber, and Perry Borchers are reprinted from the excellent paper, "Contemporary Zuni Architecture and Society," by T. J. Ferguson, Barbara J. Mills, and Calbert Seciwa in *Pueblo Style and Regional Architecture* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990), pp. 103-121. North is up. I have added lines to show the angle of view in the photo series.



A. C. Vroman, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Neg. no. V-668. These two pictures were in Vol. 9, Southwest of the Handbook of North American Indians (Washington: Smithsonian, 1977), pp. 486 and 487.



Frederick Maude. Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 95320.

ca. 1895 - Sash windows on streets.



Melva Teves. Zuni Archaeology Program, Pueblo of Zuni.



Frederick Maude, Museum of New Mexico, Neg. no. 9520.

ca. 1895 - Sash windows brighten interiors, and the coming of wagons starts to open up the village with streets.



1915

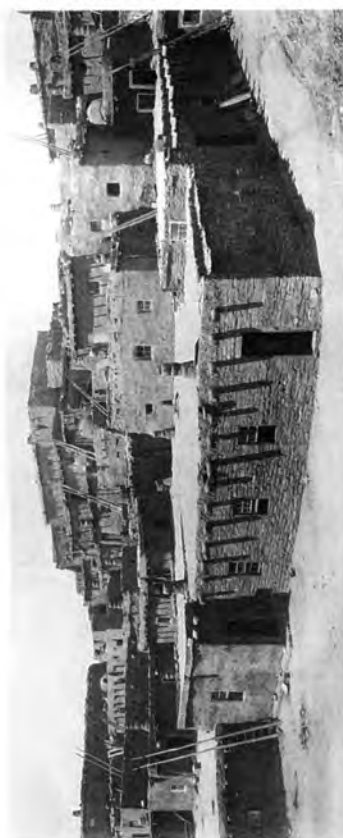


1972



Melga Teves, Zuni Archaeology Program, Pueblo of Zuni.

1992



A. C. Vroman, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Neg. no. 2293-B.

1899 - Sandstone masonry and a higher ceiling probably accompanied the foreground building being used for the masked giant Shalako dancers.



Museum of New Mexico, Neg. no. 61740.

ca. 1912 - More windows, more doors, higher ceilings in this photo by Jesse Nusbaum.



Museum of New Mexico, Neg. no. 5019.

1945 - Even newer masonry, soon to be followed by pitched roofs.



9 March 1992, Brand.



12 April 1934. M. James Slack. Library of Congress. Neg. no. 209473 - HABS NM 31-ACOMP 1-37.

1934 - At Acoma Pueblo (west of Albuquerque), the house of Indian Santana Sanchez radiates the textured dry austerity that became the Santa Fe aesthetic, but his *fogón* is highly functional—cooking food, heating the small room, providing a convenient shelf, and staying out of the way of traffic in the corner. The practice of hanging working stuff on the walls—Shaker-fashion—was not adopted by Santa Fe style.



T. Hammon Parkhurst. Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 32106.

ca. 1935 - The house of artist Randall Davey in Santa Fe exhibited the growing inventory of Santa Fe style decor items, including an added-on kiva fireplace. The building originally was a sawmill, built in 1847 by the US Army. In 1935 Davey had lived there for fifteen years.



1985 - An illustration from the nationally influential book *Santa Fe Style* (1986) shows a recent prestigious second home outside of Santa Fe. The tiled floor, Taos drum, leather chair, and antlered skull (made iconic by local artist Georgia O'Keeffe) have joined the decor canon. By now the room is designed around the kiva fireplace.

WHOSE FIREPLACE is it? Anglos call it a "kiva fireplace" and put several in every Santa Fe style building, carefully burning piñon firewood upright in the approved local manner. The name shows that Indians are considered chic and Spanish not-so-chic, because the built-in corner fireplace is in fact Spanish and is called a *fogón*. The Indians picked it up from the Spanish colonists. They never did put any in the kivas (ceremonial clan rooms)—that would have been too much of a cultural trespass.

Goods from the money economy came slowly to the self-sufficient Pueblo Indians but eventually overwhelmed them. Since the need for defense was reduced under colonial protection, ground-level doorways began to appear. Some families began to move away from the massive "apartment" blocks to live closer to their crops and flocks. Glass windows replaced the old tiny windows of selenite (crystallized gypsum), and stovepipe replaced adobe chimneys. Adobe walls gradually gave over to stone or, later, concrete block. Leaky flat roofs—no surprise—were covered with low pitched roofs. Steadily since the 1950s the Indians have dispersed into subdivision-style housing, much of it funded and designed (often obtusely) by the US government. Through it all, they succeeded in maintaining their spiritual practices and cultural identity.

At the very time the Indians were buying into Anglo convenience for housing, the Anglos were heading the opposite direction. In 1912 Santa Fe realized it was facing a crisis. Bypassed by the railroad, it was steadily losing population. The only hope lay in attracting tourists, and tourists were flocking to see the pueblos

and Spanish colonial buildings such as the old mission churches. Led by former easterners—archaeologists Edgar Hewett, Sylvanus Morley, and Jesse Nusbaum, and the artist Carlos Viera—the Santa Fe Planning Board began the search for a “Santa Fe style” that would evoke visibly the town’s considerable history. It had to be different from the newly successful Mission Revival style in California. Jesse Nusbaum and Carlos Viera made extensive photographic surveys of pueblo and vernacular Spanish buildings and assembled them into an influential exhibition. An idiosyncratic warehouse in Colorado by architect Isaac Hamilton Rapp was identified as a perfect example of the new style. It was a romanticized copy of the Spanish mission church at Acoma Pueblo.

Quickly a number of public buildings on Santa Fe’s plaza were built or rebuilt in the new Pueblo-Spanish-Anglo blend. They had pueblo set-back upper rooms and dramatic *vigas* (ceiling log ends protruding from exterior walls). They had Spanish *portales* with exaggerated corbeled columns, mission-style towers and balconies, and pseudo-Spanish tiled floors and decoration. Hidden inside were the Anglo construction and services. The buildings looked massive, apparently crafted of adobe sculpted by hands and weather, but most were actually stucco on brick or wood frame.¹⁵

It was a brilliant concoction. Soundly researched, ably carried through, fiercely enforced, the new style turned Santa Fe into America’s most coherent old city. The style responded perfectly to the romantic cherishing of vernacular simplicity that arrived in America with the Ruskin-Morris-inspired Arts and Crafts movement, and it fed on later infusions of romanticism that came with the artists’ colonies of the 1920s and hippies in the 1960s (I was in that group). Dominant Santa Fe style architects such as John Gaw Meem were able to stave off Modernism by claiming that their style incorporated Modernist principles. “Some old forms,” he argued, “are so honest, so completely logical and native to the environment that one finds—to one’s delight and surprise—that modern problems can be solved, and are best

solved by [the] use of forms based on tradition.”¹⁶ What about the tourists? In a 1912 speech the archaeologist/booster Sylvanus Morley had proclaimed:

None of us may live to see the day, but sometime in the future there will surely come a generation of Santa Feans who will not be eternally sleeping at the switch; but who will realize the possibilities of a Glorified Adobe City, and reap the golden harvest therefrom. Then, and not until then, will Santa Fe enter upon the epoch of increased and ever increasing prosperity, which is hers by right of every association, historic, geographic, and climatic.¹⁷

In 1992, newspapers reported, “Santa Fe, NM, bumped San Francisco from the top spot in Conde Nast Traveler’s annual Readers Choice poll as the best travel destination in the world.”¹⁸ A home-decor style book titled *Santa Fe Style*¹⁹ was a national bestseller. All through the 1980s, “Santa Fe” shops and restaurants permeated America’s malls and airports and even invaded Europe. The galleries of tiny Santa Fe became America’s third-largest market for art, following New York and Los Angeles. Commercializing vernacular had turned adobe into gold.

¹⁵ Real adobe currently costs about 40 percent more than other forms of structure because it is so labor-intensive. The saying is, “You have to be very rich or very poor to build with adobe in Santa Fe.” Adobe has one advantage in being absurdly easy to demolish; just let the rain get at it.

¹⁶ John Gaw Meem, “Old Forms for New Buildings,” *American Architect* (145: 2627; 1934), pp. 10-21; cited in Christopher Wilson, “New Mexico in the Tradition of Romantic Reaction,” *Pueblo Style and Regional Architecture*, Nicholas Markovich, et al., eds. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990), p. 185.

¹⁷ Sylvanus G. Morley, “A Most Selfish Thing for Santa Fe,” quoted in Nicholas C. Markovich, “Santa Fe Renaissance: City Planning and Stylistic Preservation, 1912,” title above, p. 205.

¹⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* (22 Sept. 1992), p. D4.

¹⁹ Christine Mather and Sharon Woods, *Santa Fe Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986). It sold 110,000 copies in four years and inspired half-a-dozen imitators.



Santa Fe outside of antlered joined the the kiva

ent in
t
nic,
nish
om
the
been

ence
In
in
os



21 May 1900. Rev. John C. Guilleto. Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 13183.

1900 - The church of San Estaban at Acoma was begun by Fray Juan Ramirez after his arrival as the mission padre in 1629. The construction labor took ten years.



Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 1971. The photo appears in Beatrice Chauvenet, John Gaw Meem: Pioneer in Historic Preservation (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico, 1965), p. 38.

ca. 1915 - An attempt at restoration in 1902 produced blocky bell towers. Earlier known restorations occurred in 1710 (when the bells date from) and 1810. The loggia in the foreground is part of the convent attached to the church.



Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 1982.

ca. 1940 - A group of Anglo preservationists called the Society for the Restoration and Preservation of New Mexico Mission Churches raised money to restore the church and put Santa Fe architect John Gaw Meem in charge of the project. The work ran from 1924 to 1930, employing Acoma labor. For structural as well as aesthetic reasons Meem designed a slight batter (slope) in the bell tower walls, which were rebuilt of stone set in adobe mortar.



School of American Research, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives. Neg. no. 5280. The photo appears in Carl D. Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style* (Univ. of NM, 1988), p. 77.

1908 - It was all a client's idea, actually. Colorado businessman C. M. Schenk, president of the Colorado Supply Company, asked his architect to use the church at Acoma as the model for a warehouse at the company's mining camp at Morley, Colorado. The architect was Isaac Hamilton Rapp, who had done strictly conventional brick and stone buildings up to that point. He made a stab at what the San Estaban bell towers might once have looked like and reversed the position of the convent loggia so the towers would draw the eye of passing train passengers toward an arroyo to the right.

The archaeologist Sylvanus Morley was in charge of an exhibit to be called "New-Old Santa Fe" at the Palace of the Governors. On September 20, 1912, he wrote to Rapp:

Quite by accident, there has fallen into my hands a picture of the Colorado Supply Co.'s store at Morley, Colorado, designed by you. The thing is so absolutely in the spirit of "The Santa Fe Style" that I am taking this liberty of asking you to allow us to exhibit the original drawings, maps, elevations, etc. of this structure at our coming exhibition.... The extension of the native architecture to all kinds of buildings is, I believe, possible; and your success at adapting an old church to the highly specialized needs of a commercial house confirms me in my belief." [Carl D. Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style* (Univ. of NM, 1988), p. 77]

Rapp sent a watercolor, and the exhibit was a huge success. The building itself, kernel of so many others, was later demolished.



9 May 1922. Grand

1992 - In any weather (I was there in bracing snow flurries), a visit to the mesa citadel of Acoma is one of the great Southwestern experiences, always climaxed by the Acoma guides with a visit to the historic church.

Jesse L. Nusbaum. Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 60254.

1915 - The New Mexico Museum of Natural History was a sensation. It was a pueblo—assessing attracting and that they kept

IMITATION
Spanish in true Spanish impressiveness late 19th no one knew architect of Santa Fe. Then another church so San Esteban undertook churches population mesa. The is 150 feet walls 10 feet and stone carried up beams, trusses mountains slaves. It is doing some



Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 28861.

ca. 1919 - Of course Rapp got the commission to build the Fine Arts Museum of New Mexico (1916) in Santa Fe. It is a beautifully designed building, inside and out—its details an encyclopedia of contemporary research on Spanish and pueblo buildings. Santa Fe style had arrived. A complete exemplar was in place. Rapp had refined his bell towers through three iterations. Ten years later John Gaw Meem would add one more back at Acoma.



13 March 1991. Brand.

1991 - Rapp's third copy of the Acoma church is safe from demolition or remodeling. Like the Palace of the Governors portal across the street on Santa Fe's plaza, the Fine Arts Museum is built of brick and stucco and is so revered only a terrorist would dare change it.



Jesse L. Ruckman. Museum of New Mexico. Neg. no. 00254.

1915 - The New Mexico Building at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, designed by Rapp, was a sensation. So was the Painted Desert Exhibit—five acres of cliff ruins, Navaho hogans, and pueblos—assembled by Edgar Hewett's New Mexico Museum, which was learning ever more about attracting and educating tourists. (San Diegans liked Rapp's stucco-on-wood-frame building so much that they kept it, and it is there still, much remodelled.)

IMITATION RESHAPES ORIGINAL. The massive adobe Spanish mission church (1630s) at Acoma Pueblo is a true Spanish-Indian hybrid and one of the most impressive buildings in the Southwest (left). By the late 19th century, the bell towers were so eroded that no one knew how they originally looked. One architect (Rapp) guessed at their appearance in a series of Santa Fe style imitations of the building (above). Then another architect (Meem) restored the original church so that it matched Rapp's imitations.

San Esteban was a prodigious 17th century undertaking. The largest of all Spanish mission churches in the region, it served the most remote population—a village on top of a sheer-sided 400-foot mesa. There is no water, no trees, no dirt. The church is 150 feet long inside, 33 feet wide, 50 feet high, with walls 10 feet thick. Its estimated 20,000 tons of adobe and stone (not counting the necessary water) had to be carried up the mesa on a steep trail. The 40-foot roof beams, tradition insists, were borne by hand from mountains 20 miles away. Indians were never good slaves. It must have been either faith or the joy of doing something really impossible and spectacular.



the Colorado house at the no had done San Esteban o the towers

ta Fe" at the / Co.'s store he Santa Fe wings, maps, f the native pling an old belief." [Carl

many others,



coma is one o the historic

9 May 1992. Brand.

But native adaptivity got left behind when vernacular *form* was translated into "vernacular" *style*. Real adobe was inherently fluid, the opposite of stuccoed wood frame or concrete block. Chris Wilson summarizes the systemic loss: "It was the change from an ad-hoc, open-ended, accretion form to formal designs conceived completely before the building is built; from multipurpose spaces and widely shared design and construction knowledge to specialized rooms and uses in buildings and the specialized knowledge of professional architects and builders." Specialized knowledge distances buildings from users. Specialized space hinders future flexibility. Santa Fe style seized all that was picturesque in the local vernacular traditions and threw away much that was wise.

Popularity over time, such as Santa Fe style has achieved, is something worth exploring. What makes some building forms proliferate more widely than others? The question has also been raised in biology, where it is termed "hyperdiversity." What makes creatures such as ants, rodents, and orchids so common and variable? It might be worth examining the attractions of three house types that became hyperdiverse in this century—Cape Cods, bungalows, and mobile homes. Does their extended popularity say anything about what current vernacular evolution selects for?

Children draw houses as unpreventably as they draw faces. No matter where they actually live, they nearly all draw the same house—one story, door in the middle, two windows to each side, pitched roof seen from the front, a central chimney with a swirl of smoke, and an inviting path up to the door. The classic Cape Cod house. It is so simple, rudimentary, austere, and yet practical that it fulfills the mythic image of house.

In its original profusion in coastal Massachusetts (including Cape Cod) the house was built by people dealing with very little money and a lot of wind. Its three major downstairs rooms and upstairs garret huddled around the massive heat-storing central chimney serving multiple fireplaces. The house hunkered low to the ground with shingled or clapboarded walls and narrow eaves.



1959 - CAPE COD HOUSE. In fact on Cape Cod (North Truro), this late-18th-century Cape has grown a sequenced pair of kitchen ells, flagged by the narrow stove chimneys. ("Ell" as in one limb of an "L.") Until the mid-20th century, kitchens were considered noisome necessities to be pushed as far away as conveniently possible. Apart from the formally symmetrical front, windows appear to have been added as needed.

It was so compact and solidly built of timber-frame that Cape Cods frequently were dragged on skids from site to site. "The most distinctive feature of the Cape Cod house is the roof," writes Stanley Schuler in *The Cape Cod House*.²⁰ It dominated the house, medium-pitched—8 to 12 inches to the horizontal foot (35° to 45°)—devoid of interruption or ornament. The roof's simplicity made it leak-free, cheap to build and maintain, and easy to add to. "Everyone started with the Cape Cod box and expected to add on," says Massachusetts builder John Abrams. "It's very easy to take those broad expanses of roof and put something into them—put in a dormer, have another roof come off for an ell. It's even easier to add onto the gable end, because you don't have to connect the roofs. Most modern buildings have their roofs much more broken up."

The Cape Cod was the standard cheap New England house from 1750 to 1850, spreading into New York and the Great Lakes states with a Greek Revival skin but the same essential floor plan. After decades of eclipse by Victorian and other styles, it suddenly re-

emerged
wrote in
design, no
Cod Cott
named Ro
and found
windows
design flo
in the hou
Cape beca
Schuler. "a
basic integ

What are t
small, soli
looks resp
conservati
If the Cape
form which
all began w
some rude
raw wood
realize you

²⁰ Stanley Schuler, *The Cape Cod House*, Introductory Study (New York: Dover Publications, 1964).

²¹ Quoted in Stanley Schuler, *The Cape Cod House*, p. 10.

²² Quoted in Stanley Schuler, *The Cape Cod House*, p. 10.

²³ Anthony D. Nye, *The Cape Cod House*, subtitle is: "The Cape Cod House: A Study in Vernacular Architecture—possibly the most important type found in every corner of New England."

²⁴ The exquisite Cape Cod house, by Charles and F. Schuler, Architects. The Cape Cod House (Salt Lake City: P. Schuler, 1964).
²⁵ is "Furniture and

emerged on a national scale. An editor of *Architectural Forum* wrote in 1949, "Twentieth Century America's most popular house design, now scattered throughout the entire country, is the Cape Cod Cottage."²¹ Starting in the 1920s, a Massachusetts architect named Royal Barry Wills revived the low-cost Cape Cod house and found ready customers during the Depression. With larger windows all around and dormers upstairs for more room, the design flourished through the 1930s and 1940s and then took off in the housing boom after World War II. "That's when the Cape became the most widely built house in the world," says Schuler. "Its enduring quality is its simplicity, attractiveness and its basic integrity."²²

What are the traits, then, that selection preferred? The Cape is small, solid, simple, cheap, growable, and carries a big roof. It looks respectable but stands apart from fashion, secure in the conservatism of its Yankee vernacular background.

If the Cape Cod house remained surprisingly true to type, a house form which became known for its diversity was the bungalow. It all began with a common epiphany. You're in your third week at some rude holiday cabin, luxuriating in its Spartan simplicity, its raw wood and stone, its casual access to the outdoors, and you realize you're shockingly happy. "This is so great," you sigh, "why

don't we live like this all the time?"

Bungalows came to England originally as vacation cottages in the late 19th century, a northern-summer translation of what had become the standard rural house for British colonial officials in India (hence the exotic name). Hence also the name of its broad porch—verandah. The most distinctive feature of a bungalow, its low-pitched wide roof extending out over the verandah, was originally designed to deflect tropical rains and welcome tropical breezes. In Britain and later in America it served a different function, reconnecting the inhabitants to the outdoors. In both countries, quantities of bungalows were built for the growing middle class, which had acquired money and leisure enough for a rustic second home. Soon the same design was discovered to serve admirably on small city lots in the new streetcar suburbs with their new customer—small nuclear family, no servants, not much cash, wants a yard.

In America after the turn of the century, the bungalow came to represent a whole philosophy that was best expressed in Gustav Stickley's influential magazine, *The Craftsman* (1901-1916). Bungalow chronicler Anthony King writes that the magazine, "fusing architecture with social reform, was devoted to the development, both in theory and practice, of the three main principles of the Arts and Crafts philosophy—simplicity, harmony with nature, and the promotion of craftsmanship. The bungalow was to become the incarnation of all three."²³ The physical expression of this philosophy reached its pinnacle in the work of California architects Greene and Greene, whose sometimes extravagant bungalows in Pasadena (1904-1909) are venerated to this day.²⁴ The combination of an appealing philosophy, high-style fame with Greene and Greene, and the quick-and-cheap needs of new subdivisions made the "California" bungalow the standard expansion housing of the 1910s and 1920s. Sears & Roebuck sold them by mail order. Architectural historians regard them as the direct parent of the ranch house, which spread bungalow horizontality even broader on the bigger lots of the automobile suburbs of the 1940s and 1950s.

²⁰ Stanley Schuler, *The Cape Cod House* (West Chester, PA: Schiffer, 1982), p. 13. Additional historical lore can be found in Ernest Allen Connolly, "The Cape Cod House: an Introductory Study," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (May, 1960).

²¹ Quoted in Stanley Schuler, title above, p. 15-16.

²² Quoted in Clare Collins, "Old Houses Are Tremendously Strong," *New York Times* (9 April 1989).

²³ Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1984), p. 134. King's subtitle is: "The Production of a Global Culture." He makes his case, since "it is a dwelling type—possibly the only one—which, both in form and name, can almost certainly be found in every continent of the world." (p. 2.)

²⁴ The exquisite oiled woodwork, rough stone, and grandly connected rooms in houses by Charles and Henry Greene continue to inspire contemporary builders, clients, and some architects. The best books are *Greene and Greene*, vols. 1 and 2, by Randall L. Makinson (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1977 and 1979). Vol. 1 is "Architecture as a Fine Art"; Vol. 2 is "Furniture and Related Designs."



1920 - At the South Florida Fair in Tampa, a model bungalow promises a quick ride on Florida's real estate boom—"Completed in 7 1/2 Days With 5 Men."

Bungalow scholar Clay Lancaster claims that the bungalow let America escape from the dead weight of Victorian and Queen Anne style:

The bungalow vogue made new and definite contributions to the evolution of home planning in the direction of informality and unpretentiousness, use of common, natural materials, integration of house and landscape setting, simplification of design that became closely allied to practical requirements, and concentration on livability.... The American house during the bungalow period became lighter in construction, more flexible and open of plan, and less fussy in its furnishings.²⁵

The bungalow, in other words, was an exceptional teacher.

People who live in those old bungalows today say there's not much occasion to remodel or demolish them because they work so well as is. They're a little cramped and dark, but the open

BUNGALOWS were mass-marketed by lumber companies ("From the Forest to You") as well as individually crafted to a high level of sophistication by architects such as Greene and Greene (see page 68). In the judgment of architectural historians, "The bungalow is one of the most successful vernacular houses ever built. It has been adapted for all regions and all climates. It was built in clusters, in rows, and as single houses, finished in several aesthetics, and scaled up and down both as to size and cost." [Jan Jennings, Herbert Gottfried, *American Vernacular Interior Architecture 1870-1940* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1988), p. 342.]

²⁵ Clay Lancaster, *The Bungalow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 1.

²⁶ These numbers are based on the average site-built bungalow in the United States, which cost \$18,500 in 1980 (or semi-free or wide") mobile homes.

²⁷ Virginia Aronson, *The Bungalow* (1987), p. 475.

²⁸ Allan D. Watts, *The Bungalow* (1987), p. 475.

layout of rooms with space-saving built-in benches and inglenooks keeps them comfortable. (Bungalows were the first houses in America with a spacious "living room," a clever kitchen, and a porch built in.) The big overhanging roof protects the whole structure from rain and sun. The emphasis on detailed craftsmanship continues to reward the eye and fend off the repairman. When they were built, bungalows were referred to as "the least house for the most money," but it was a good investment, evidently.

If, on the other hand, you want the most house for the least money, a mobile home is what you get. Mobile homes typically cost a fourth to a half of what comparable site-built houses cost. That's why 10 percent of all houses in America are mobile homes, housing 12.5 million people. In 1985, mobile homes comprised one-fifth of all new houses sold in the US, and two-thirds of all new low-cost single-family houses.²⁶ Polite culture only notices them after a tornado or hurricane tears up a few, but in the words of the authoritative *Field Guide to American Houses* they are the "dominant folk house of contemporary America."²⁷

This tenth of all US housing has only one book about it, fortunately a good one. Allan Wallis's *Wheel Estate* begins, "The mobile home may well be the single most significant and unique housing innovation in twentieth-century America. No other

innovation addressing the spectrum of housing activities—from construction, tenure, and community structure to design—has been more widely adopted nor, simultaneously, more widely vilified."²⁸ They began as travel trailers in the 1920s, creatures of the American highway. They grew gradually in size till they became "house trailers" used for temporary postwar housing, sometimes as long as 55 feet, but still only eight feet wide. One innovator, Elmer Frey, invented the term "mobile home" and the form that would live up to it, the "ten-wide"—a ten-foot-wide real house that would usually travel only once, from the factory to the permanent site. For the first time there was room for a corridor inside and thus private rooms. By 1960 nearly all mobile homes sold were ten-wides, and twelve-wides were starting to appear.

A mobile home is an instant house. You wheel it in one day, hook up to the local utilities, and you're home. Everything works—plumbing, wiring, heating. It was all assembled in one smooth operation at a factory out of light wood frame on a steel chassis, clad with aluminum sheeting. The roof of white-enameled metal reflects the sun and sheds rain better than most site-built roofs. Half of all mobile homes are in specialized parks, among the last real communities in America, drawn together in part by physical closeness, in part by the need for political solidarity against enemies.

Mobile homes are always being attacked. By aesthetes for their appearance. By bigots for housing the "wrong" people. By the construction industry for "unfair" competition. By local government for paying insufficient taxes. (In fact, mobile-home park operators usually provide services such as sewage, water, garbage, and thoroughfares that government is spared paying for.) Many counties simply outlaw mobile homes. In 1970 the federal government recognized that most of the nation's low-cost housing was in mobile homes, and it set out to help the industry, but it messed up. HUD (Housing and Urban Development) came up with such a burdensome set of regulations that small manufacturers were driven out of business. Allan Wallis points out that "the smaller manufacturers, who needed a distinctive

²⁵ Clay Lancaster, "The American Bungalow," *Common Places*, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia, 1986), p. 103.

²⁶ These numbers come from the thorough study by Allan D. Wallis, *Wheel Estate* (New York: Oxford, 1991), pp. 13 and 230. See Recommended Bibliography. In 1988 the average site-built home cost \$100,000 for 2,000 square feet (\$50 per square foot)—\$138,000 if you add the average land price. An average "single-wide" mobile home of 970 square feet cost \$18,500 (\$19 per square foot)—and land was either rented in a mobile-home park or semi-free on a relative's rural property. Even a really roomy multi-section ("double-wide") mobile home of 1,430 square feet cost only \$33,500 (\$23.40 per square foot).

²⁷ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *The Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Knopf, 1987), p. 475. See Recommended Bibliography.

²⁸ Allan D. Wallis, title above, p. v.



27 April 1993. Brand.

1993 - TRAILERS, because of their mobility, lead surprisingly long lives. You can get an old one cheap, haul it somewhere rural where regulations aren't too strict, and start a homestead. The sequence here, near Wallis, California, was started with the left hand trailer in 1980. The one in back came in 1982, and then the common room joined them. The day I visited, the place felt spacious and pleasant, full of books and sunlight.

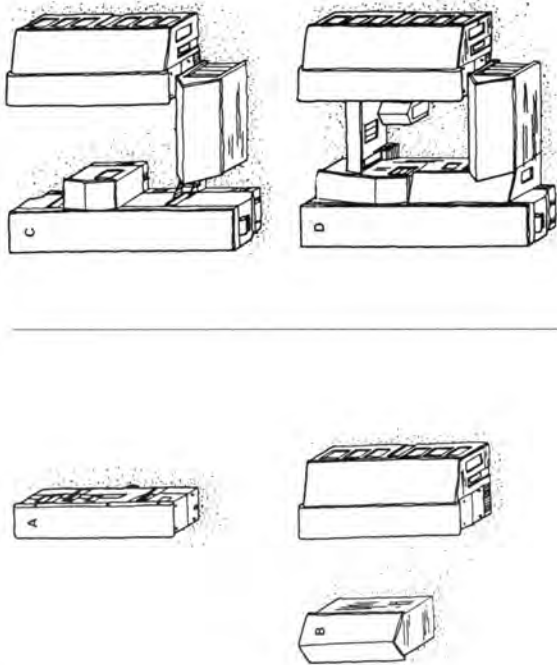
product to compete, were often a source of design innovation."²⁹ A highly creative industry was made stodgy by the strictures of approval.

But that hasn't yet stifled the creativity of mobile-home dwellers. The low initial cost and severe boxiness of mobile homes invites elaboration. Full-length shed roofs are added, first as a kind of porch, often later closed in to become new interior space. The need for storage, acute in mobile homes, customarily leads to the purchase of a "Tuff Shed" or other small metal structure. Sometimes, in unregulated rural areas, a whole normal house is built around the "seed" of a mobile home. More often, additional

²⁹ Allan D. Wallis, "House Trailers: Innovation and Accommodation in Vernacular Housing," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III*, Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, eds. (Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri, 1989), p. 42.

³⁰ Allan D. Wallis, title above, p. 41.

³¹ *Wheel Estate*, p. 239. John A. Kouwenhoven, "What is 'American' in Architecture?" *The Beer Can by the Highway* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 156.



Assembling a mobile home compound has several advantages over just getting a bigger (double-wide) home. It costs less to start; it has better natural lighting; you can adapt better to family, financial, and site circumstances; and you get a nice enclosed courtyard after a while. This drawing of a typical sequence is by Allan D. Wallis.³⁰

mobile homes are added to form an informal compound, well daylight and loosely adaptive. Wallis writes, "The factory-built mobile home together with its site-built modifications represents an extension of two vernacular traditions, one industrial and the other user-based. In no small part the success of the mobile home as a form of industrialized housing must be attributed to the fact that it readily permits user modification."³⁰

Wallis goes further. He quotes John Kouwenhoven on the attributes of American vernacular design—"resilient, adaptable, simple, and unceremonious"—and concludes that mobile homes express a native energy, an "aesthetic of process."³¹ Mobile homes are openly make-do, unfinished. They embody the vitality and unembarrassed lack of dignity that J. B. Jackson sees enlivening the American future. They demonstrate vividly that however much

buildings m
So, what do
homes tell a
one thing, v
(Mobile ho
extra roof to
climates, pi
building for
market eco
successful c
each other
proliferate.
It should be

16 August 1991. Brand.

homes all are tiny. Small buildings are dramatically cheaper to build and to maintain. So long as people of modest means outnumber the rich, small will always win. Also, small invites the metamorphosis of growth. Only bungalows, because of their low overhanging roofs and tight city lots, discouraged growth and change. But bungalows were the most hyperdiverse of the three because of the quality of their legend. Popular songs were written about bungalows; whole magazines pushed their philosophy of informal naturalness. More than either Cape Cods or mobile homes, bungalows spread a pattern language—big homey living room with prominent fireplace, conveniences and furniture built in, connection to the outdoors, horizontality.

The difference between style and form is the difference between a statement and a language. An architectural statement is limited to a few stylistic words and depends on originality for its impact, whereas a vernacular form unleashes the power of a whole, tested grammar. Builders of would-be popular buildings do better when they learn from folklore than when they ape the elite. As for the elite: what might be accomplished with their abundant intelligence and creativity if architects really studied the process and history of vernacular designs and applied that lore in innovative work? We might get buildings that could be as original as needed, but still would feel profoundly familiar and right, and would invite change.

It would be a relief after all those smugly decorous buildings that "refer to" stylistic details of one vernacular tradition or another and miss the integrated lore. Of all buildings they are the most maddeningly perverse. They look like they should work, and don't.



1991 - MOBILE OFFICES, just bare shells with a few windows and rudimentary services, are perhaps the most flexible and widely used of contemporary Low Road buildings. You see them used as film studios, classrooms, government offices, and on-site construction offices, as here on King Street in London. I confess that I looked at the highrise being built and wondered, "Why bother? Why not just keep stacking these things?"

buildings may be sold as a product, they are lived as a process.

So, what do the successes of Cape Cods, bungalows, and mobile homes tell about the vernacular process in industrial times? For one thing, vernacular is no longer regional, except in detail. (Mobile homes in really hot climates, for example, often grow an extra roof to ventilate away the radiant heat from the sun. In cold climates, pitched roofs are added to shed snow.) Successful building forms are broadcast nationally, driven by the national market economy. Builders and developers imitate the most successful of their competition. *That* is how buildings learn from each other in this century. Whatever buyers flock to will proliferate. What do they flock to?

It should be no surprise that Cape Cods, bungalows, and mobile

(double-wide) financial, and ing of a typical

well built represents and the mobile home ne fact

attri- simple, xpress a ure d unem- the much