

## Bay Area Victorian Building Exterior Design

### I. Major types

- A. Technology: Improvements in lumber mills and nail manufacture made balloon or platform frame construction dominant from 1830s to present day. Manufactured paints by Sherwin-Williams made the colorist movement possible. Redwoods supplied abundant, easily milled, durable lumber.
- B. Italianate, 1840-1885, dominant during Civil War era: flat roof with cornice across top, window hoods, porticos over doors, balustrades on porticos. May have flat front (older) or bay windows.
- C. Queen Anne, 1880-1910: Gable in front, recessed entry porch or large portico, may have a tower, asymmetrical, elaborate decorations, bay windows and porches
  1. Stick (within Queen Anne, 1860- 1890): no round towers, possibly an octagon, no gingerbread, uses trim on walls to create panels, wrap around porches, vertical and horizontal planks on exterior walls, vertical sticks decorating top panels, spindle detailing below porch roof.
  2. Eastlake (within Queen Anne or even within Stick): square bay windows, highly stylized, ornamental and decorative versions of stick style; machined geometric shapes, not florid curves.
  3. Shingle Style (1880-1900) got rid of most decorations and covered everything with shingles, also had large porches.
- D. Other types: Gothic Revival, Second Empire, Colonial Revival, Classical Revival, hybrid and exotic one-off styles, Edwardian.
- E. Houses by architects could merit a major type designation; adaptations by the middle class and builders are called Vernacular Victorian or Folk Victorian.

### II. Structure. A module is a major part of a two or three story building, a vertical unit for a door with windows above (entry module), or a module with just windows.

- A. Flat or planar style (no distinct modules). Entry may be a little recessed, but not structurally set back. Planar style may also have bay windows on one side.
- B. Narrow entry module (7-8') plus wide window module (14-17')
  1. Window module recessed
  2. Entry module recessed
  3. Three modules: entry and middle window recessed behind a porch; round tower module with witch's cap, forward.
- C. Towers may be round or octagonal and are usually on the front on one side or the other. The round roof is called a witch's cap.
- D. Victorians on urban lots in the bay area had little room for wings and were rectangular in footprint, sometimes with side bay windows.

### III. Roofs

- A. Roofs may be flat (with a cornice), steep gable, or a mix of flat and gable. A gable is the extension of the wall from the top plate to rafters in an inverted V shape. A gable roof extends outward over the gable. A decorative cornice or bargeboard is put along the edge of the roof extension. Hipped and pyramid roofs are not Victorian.

- B. Parapets (on planar type): extension of flat front wall above cornice with nothing behind it, just for show.
- C. Eaves are extensions of sloped roofs beyond walls, on sides of house with gables facing front.

#### IV. Walls and corners

- A. Walls are sheathed with dimensional boards and covered with clapboards or shingles or both.
  - 1. Clapboard siding creates horizontal lines on otherwise flat surface. Clapboards are long, thin, and notched to fit horizontally, overlapping from above for drainage.
  - 2. Decorative shingles in many styles of shingle shapes (scallops, half circle, points, box) and can be applied in many patterns, called imbrication, a pattern of overlapping shingles of different shapes.
- B. Corners may be trimmed with corner boards or quoins.
  - 1. Corner boards, long straight vertical molding on corners.
  - 2. Quoins: rectangular short planks resembling stone blocks. of alternating size on a corner.

#### V. Entries and doors are on the front left or front right side of the house.

- A. Size: small, a bracketed portico; medium, a columned portico, large, a columned porch.
- B. Doors: single or, on larger houses, double
- C. Doors are paneled, for example, with two square panels below and two very tall rectangles above, or one large rectangle above and two fancier shapes below. A door could have a large square below with a decoration like a wreath and a large rectangle above with a circle window and decorative corners. A door could have six small square panels below a large single rectangle with a circle window and fancy trim

#### VI. Windows, called transoms if the window is over a door and a door window if in the door.

- A. Window tops may be arched or square. Windows on a round tower may also be round.
- B. Relation to wall: windows may be on the plane of the wall, in a slanted bay, or in a square bay. Bays may come out from the wall or start from the foundation. If the bay window comes out from the wall, it is also called an oriel window.
- C. Main windows are segmented and double hung, and generally tall. Exceptions: windows on porches or above porch roofs, and some front-facing main bay windows.
  - 1. Segmented means two windows of the same size one above the other.
  - 2. Double hung means the segmented windows are in sashes which allow them to open. Each sash slides in its own slot or track. Ropes on sides of upper and lower sashes goes up to a pulley and down inside the casing to a counterweight.
  - 3. A few windows may be three windows high and triple hung.
- D. Windows may have several panes of glass, each glass piece being a light (light may also refer to the whole window). A 9 light window would have a large middle rectangle, almost square, with small square lights in the corners and long rectangular lights on the sides.
- E. A single window is likely on a porch in the middle of the house with the door on the side, with a similar central window on the second floor with a door on the side opening onto the roof of the porch.
- F. A window in a gable is called a dormer and may serve a storage attic or a room under the roof.

- G. A window with a curved top may have a curved decorative piece above it below the window hood, called window shield. It is likely to be decorated, e.g., with a circle in the middle and geometric or floral lines in a frame left and right.
  - H. Flashed glass is clear glass dipped into melted colored glass leaving a thin colored coat. Flashed glass is often in multi-light windows in the smaller lights. For example, the upper sash of a segmented window might have five small rectangles of flashed glass across the top and four down the left and right, and this pattern could be repeated in a door window.
- VII. Porticos, balustrades, and banisters
- A. If a cornice comes out squarely over a door and covers an entry, it is called a portico. If held up by brackets, it is a bracketed portico.
  - B. The top of a portico may have a balustrade, a low ornamental railing, which is also squarely below the second floor window. A balustrade is a kind of small balcony coming out from the building face. The balustrade consists of newel posts and newel caps at the corners, upper and lower rails or horizontal supports across the top of the front and the sides connecting to the newels, and closely-spaced balusters connecting the upper and lower rails. The newel caps may be flat or have fancier round shapes on top.
  - C. A staircase leading to the entry or porch may have a banister with the same elements as a balustrade, except on the diagonal as a hand rail.
- VIII. Cornices and brackets combine long clean horizontal molding with short decorative support molding below. Cornice: long straight horizontal (diagonal on gable roof) trim or molding sticking out from building held up by brackets: short vertical supports.
- A. The main cornice is at roof level; the upper cornice is between the main cornice and the top window; the belt cornice is around the top of a lower bay window from wall to wall; the porch cornice is around the top of a porch
  - B. Brackets can be single or double, be small or big, and have curves and carving
  - C. If over a single window, it is called a window hood, with brackets at ends.
  - D. Cornices may also be over doors and porches
  - E. Cornices may be flat (straight top) or segmented, with an arch section or small gable shape in the middle of a top segment over a straight segment below)
  - F. Pediment: A cornice may come across the bottom or the middle of a gable, creating a triangle called a pediment. If the cornice crosses the middle, it creates a small triangle above and an isosceles trapezoid below. The pediment is usually highly decorated, often with a sunburst. A dormer may be in the full gable triangle, in a smaller high triangle, or in the trapezoid.
  - G. Pediment may also refer to triangular or arched decor over a window or door, or to a decorated area over a window (same as a window shield) or door.
  - H. Cornice return: on a gable roof, a short horizontal cornice coming in from the low point of the descending diagonal cornice. A cornice return would typically be found with a cornice across the middle of the gable.
  - I. In an attenuated form, sills below windows are mini-cornices and may be supported by mini-brackets.
- IX. Columns, colonettes, and pilasters are support pillars.
- A. A column is free standing, holds up a portico (entry roof) or porch roof, and has a

decorative top, called a capital. Columns are usually round and may be plain or fluted. they may be big or be three small columns clustered together. If the columns on a porch are tripled, then the newels on the balustrade above are also tripled. Columns may go directly to a porch roof or go part way up to an arch or arches which support the roof.

- B. A portico may be a bracketed portico or a columned portico depending on what supports it, with a columned portico likely to cover a larger entry.
  - C. A colonette is a very small diameter column on the corners of a bay window, between the windows and between the window and the wall.
  - D. A pilaster is square molding on the wall of an entry surround and has a decorative top, called a pilaster cap. The cap may support brackets which hold up a portico.
- X. Panels are rectangles created by other features, for example, above and below windows, below cornices and window hoods between brackets, especially if the brackets are big and come down a bit, and on doors as recessed rectangles of thinner wood supporter by thicker structural door pieces. Panels may be also called panel molding.
- A. A panel may also be called a frieze.
  - B. Panels and friezes may be plain or decorated..
- XI. Small decorative objects
- A. A sawn decorative is cut with a saw
    1. Dentils: long rows of little boxes below a cornice or arch.
    2. Balusters may be sawn rather than turned, making a sawn portico balustrade
    3. Arch and keystone: Arches are found over entries, doors, porches, and windows and may include at the top a decorative keystone, a small inverted isosceles trapezoid trim shaped like a keystone of a stone arch.
    4. Since the arch fits in a rectangle, the areas above the arch left and right may also be decorated with a sawn decorative. On a door, the area below the arch may have a transom with a curved top.
    5. An oxbow shape curved board may be the entry to a porch
    6. A gable, instead of a cornice, may have a sawn decorative called a bargeboard or vergeboard, with a distinctive sawn pieces at the lower ends.
    7. Brackets can be symmetrical or in a fancier sawn shape, and occur at the upper corner of a house behind a bargeboard and next to a conventional bracket. Corner brackets may combine scroll cuts and spindle work (combining sawn and turned decoratives). They occur below a roof extension over the diagonal window of a bay window, connecting the roof over the diagonal window to the main window on one side and the side wall on the other.
  - B. A turned decorative is shaped on a lathe.
    1. Balusters are usually turned in the main middle portion to make a fat round spindle of varying diameters, with ends left square (a turned portico balustrade).
    2. Spindle work can be found above an arch entry to a porch. It has many parallel small rod and ball verticals making an open screen.
    3. Fretwork spandrels occur over entries and porches, fancy woodwork in the space between an arch and the roof above, or a more rectangular shape under the roof with no arch, between columns.
    4. Eastlake has ornamental turned rimmed tapering wood cylinders

5. Finials: round stick up pieces on top of anything: tower tops, gable tops, gable corners, newel caps
6. Newel post caps of various kinds

XII. Surface decorative elements and motifs

- A. On gables, panels and friezes below cornices and above and below windows
  1. Wreaths, bulls eyes, rosettes, buttons, bullets, chevrons (V shapes), crocket (small curling leaf pattern), foil, leaf.
  2. Sunburst (full, half, quarter) are very common. A half sunburst may be under the gable shape of a segmented cornice and horizontally elongated to fit the flat triangular space. A triangle sunburst may occur in the top of a gable.
  3. Beading or fluting can occur on window trim to create a column effect.
  4. Rinceaux (finely branched ivy decoration) on a decorative panel or frieze, featuring stylized vines with leaves and often with fruit or flowers in a loop, which is repeated.
  5. Floral decorative; an extensive continuous garland of fruits or flowers and ribbons, often dropped between two points, called a swag or festoon.
- B. On siding especially at top: Vertical sticks
- C. Bracket extensions, smaller extensions of brackets
- D. Colors were initially earth tones: red, green, yellow, brown. There was a phase of white, and from the 1960s on a new colorist movement using brighter colors.

XIII. Alameda: tree shaded promenade in a park. Arbor: a latticework in a garden on which plants grow, providing a shady spot. Bower: a shady leafy recess. Pergola: a kind of arbor with columns supporting a trellis with climbing plants covering a walkway in a garden. Gazebo: small open sided, roofed structure in a garden with seating inside. Belvedere: a gazebo on a high point commanding a view.