

American Architecture
History 4404-W and Art 4240
Fall 2008, Tuesdays 6:00 to 8:30 p.m.

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Course Objectives

The primary objectives of this course are:

1. to provide an introduction to the field of American architecture;
2. to examine the various methods one can use to study architecture;
3. to develop skills in documenting and interpreting historic buildings; and
4. to explore how architecture can shed light on broader issues and questions in American history and culture.

This course will trace the evolution of American architecture with a particular emphasis on the "home" from the earliest European housing in the seventeenth century to the post-World War II ranch house and the modern pre-fabricated housing. Through the lens of domestic architecture, we will examine the various elements of architecture—including style, floor plan, interior decoration and design, furnishings, and building technologies and construction. A background in architectural styles is *not* required. Students will develop a working knowledge of styles and architectural terminology in this course.

We will focus on "vernacular," or ordinary, architecture, although we will also talk about major architects and designers and significant architectural influences and trends. Our study will reflect the interdisciplinary character of this field, drawing upon methodologies from art history, anthropology, archaeology, cultural geography, folklore and folklife, the history of technology, women's history, and American social and cultural history. The readings will reflect this variety of perspectives.

This course will require that students attend two fieldtrips. These fieldwork experiences will teach students to apply their knowledge from readings and class discussions to dating and interpreting historic buildings. Each student will also complete a final project that documents a building or building complex or interprets primary sources on American architecture.

WAC Designation

A AW@ designation means that this course is a "Writing across the Curriculum" (WAC) course. WAC accepts as its guiding principle the idea that writing is a valuable tool for learning and communication. The writing components of a course so designated are designed to communicate what you have learned. Students are required to take two AW@ courses for an undergraduate degree in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to document and analyze a historical building by writing an architectural description of the building, identifying its style and/or period based on architectural features, drawing a floor plan, interpreting the changes to the building over time, and assessing the meaning of the building.
2. Students will be able to conduct historical research in written records to date the building, trace a chain of title, and document the building's history and to write analytically about the results of that research.
3. Students will be able to describe and interpret, in writing, the evolution of American architecture from the colonial period through the late twentieth century from an interdisciplinary perspective.

4. Students will be able to use buildings to examine broader historical questions in U.S. history and to write about how buildings reflect the social, cultural, architectural, and political context in which they were created.
5. Students will be able to identify the methods that different scholars use to study architecture and the contributions that these scholars make to the field of architectural studies, including historians, architectural historians, cultural geographers, anthropologists, women=s historians, and historic archaeologists.

Course Readings

Required readings:

Dell Upton and John Vlach, *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*. University of Georgia Press.

Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of American Housing*. MIT Press.

Clifford Clark, *The American Family Home, 1800-1960*. University of North Carolina Press.

Dell Upton, *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America*. National Trust for Historic Preservation

Recommended:

Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. Alfred A. Knopf. This book provides a good glossary of terms and definitions of architectural styles.

Course Requirements

Examinations (40% of final grade)

The course includes a midterm and a final examination, both drawn on readings and class discussions. The final exam will not be cumulative but will be based on materials from the second half of the class. Both exams will incorporate three major written components: an essay, interpretations of buildings shown in slides, and identifications of key terms, people, or concepts in the field. Each exam will be worth 20% of the final course grade.

Fieldwork Experiences (15%)

One of the best ways to learn about how to study architecture is to visit buildings. Each student will be expected to attend two field trip excursions and write, for each excursion, a two-page, word-processed summary of what he/she learned from the building. Each report must include a floor plan and any relevant field notes recorded at the time of the visit. These fieldwork assignments must be turned in within two weeks of the field trip. Field reports turned in late will be marked down one grade (10 points) for each day late. Only hard copies of these papers will be accepted.

Class project or paper (30%)

The class paper or project offers students an opportunity to apply the knowledge gained in class to analyzing and interpreting some aspect of American architecture. Students will have two choices for this project/paper:

1. A thorough study of a building or building complex, including a written narrative of its history, an architectural description and analysis, floor plans, photographs, and an analysis of the building that places it in historical and architectural context. The contours of this study will vary with the building that the student chooses. The requirements of this assignment are similar to what you would include in a National Register nomination, but this assignment requires that you present what you have learned in an interpretive essay rather than report format. Please note that you may *not* select a building that is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places or one that has already been extensively documented. You must select a building that needs research and analysis! If you

would like to pursue this option and need help in selecting a building, please let me know.

2. A research paper on an issue or topic related to the course using *primary sources*, not simply secondary source material. This paper could be an analysis of local buildings from tax records, probate records, or other courthouse documents; a study of mill workers housing or the development of a mill town; or an examination of sharecroppers housing based on historical photographs. There is also a wealth of advice literature on housing that provides an excellent source for research projects, including advice directed at women in popular magazines and other contemporary literature and a wide range of pattern books and catalogs on housing beginning in the early nineteenth century and continuing through to the present. Again, I would be happy to provide some suggestions based on your interests.

All papers must be eight to ten pages of word-processed text, double-spaced, with appropriate footnotes and bibliography. In addition, students must include visual documentation appropriate to their topic, such as photographs, illustrations, site plans, floor plans, etc. A more detailed description for both paper options will be provided. Project topics need to be submitted to me in writing on **February 3**. Additional updates for your research paper may be required. Each student will submit a full draft of the paper to me on **April 7**. I will provide comments and suggestions for your revision, due on the last day of class. Final papers turned in late will be marked down one full grade (10 points) for each day late.

Class participation and attendance (15%)

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings *before* each class and to be prepared to discuss these readings at the class meeting. Class attendance is important because we will discuss the readings and view slides that are essential to your understanding of the material. Please note that many of these slides will not be available in your readings. Because this class meets only once a week, we will move quickly through the course material. Regular class attendance will also help you perform better on the exams and class assignments.

More than two unexcused absences will lower your final course grade one letter grade (10 points); more than four unexcused absences will lower it at least two grades, depending on the number of absences.

Class Policies

1. Plagiarism is a serious offense and any example of plagiarism (even just one sentence) or other acts of academic dishonesty will be punished with an automatic "F" in the class. Claiming ignorance of what plagiarism is will not constitute a valid excuse. The History Department's definition of plagiarism is available on-line at <http://www.westga.edu/~history/statementonplagiarism.pdf>
2. Cell phone and other electronic devices will not be tolerated during class. Please turn off your cell phone when you come to class. If I see cell phones in use, including text-messaging, or on your desk during class, I will remove them for the remainder of the class. Similarly, laptops are suitable for taking notes but not for accessing the internet or other uses during the class.

Tentative Schedule

Please note that this schedule is subject to change, based on how we are progressing through the class topics. All students are responsible for keeping up with any changes in topics and/or readings.

The field trip schedule will be announced, as will the due dates for each field trip assignment.

January 13: Course introduction; Looking at architecture

January 20: Architecture, Housing, and Society in Early New England

Readings: *Upton/Vlach*: (Isham/Brown) 149-158, (Cummings) 219-239, (St. George) 336-

365, *Wright*: chapter 1

January 27: Architecture, Housing, and Society in Early Virginia
Readings *Upton/Vlach*: (Upton) 315-35; (Neiman) 292-314. *Wright*, chapter 3; *Roots*, "The English," 55-61.

February 3: Georgian ideals and cultural diffusion
Readings: *Upton/Vlach*: (Kniffen) 3-26; (Glassie and Kniffen) 159-181; (Gowans) 367-393; (Price); 124-148; (Glassie), 394-432

Due: Research proposal

February 10: The Mid-Atlantic, the Upper South, and the Lower South Regions
Readings *Roots*: "Introduction," 7-15, and "Germans" and "Scots-Irish," 68-79.
Upton/Vlach: (Chappell) 27-57; (Vlach) 58-78.

February 17: Documenting historic buildings
Readings to be announced

February 24: Ethnic Architecture across America
Readings: Finish reading *America's Architectural Roots*.

March 3: Midterm Exam

March 10: Early Nineteenth Urban Architecture and Landscapes and the Development of Architectural Pattern Books
Readings: *Upton/Vlach*: (Bishir) 447-481. *Wright*, chapters 2, 4. *Clark*, chapter 1.

March 17: No class, spring break

March 24: The Cult of Domesticity, Mid-Nineteenth Century Pattern Book Architecture, and Architectural Revivals
Readings: *Upton/Vlach*: (Ames) 240-260; (Peterson) 433-446; *Wright*, chapters 5-6 6; *Clark*, chapters 2-3.

March 31: Turn-of-the-Century Architecture in the City: Industrialization, the Suburbs, and the Working Class Family
Readings *Upton/Vlach*: (Cohen) 261-279; (Borechert) 281-291; *Wright*, chapters 7-8; *Clark*, chapter 4.

April 7: Architectural Reform: Bungalows, Home Economics, and the Progressive Housewife
Readings *Upton/Vlach*: (Lancaster), 79-106; *Wright*, chapter 9; *Clark*, chapters 5-6.

Due: Research paper draft

April 14: Planned Housing: Company Towns, Planned Communities, and Public Housing
Readings *Wright*, chapters 10-12; other readings to be announced

April 21: Post-World War II Suburban Housing, the Ranch House, and the Middle-Class

Family Ideal

Readings *Wright*, chapter 13. *Clark*, chapter 7-8.

April 28: **Contemporary American Architecture and Housing**

Readings *Wright*, chapter 14; *Clark*, chapter 9.

Due: Final class project

May 5: **Final exam, 6-8 p.m.**