

## **American Architecture**

History 5404 and Art 5285  
Fall 2006, Mondays 5:30-8:00 p.m.

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### **Course Objectives**

The primary objectives of this course are to provide an introduction to the field of American architecture; to examine the various methods one can use to study architecture; to develop skills in documenting and interpreting history buildings; to explore how architecture can shed light on broader issues and questions in such fields as family history, women's history, ethnicity and acculturation, art history, and popular culture. A background in American architectural styles is *not* required. Students will develop a working knowledge of styles and architectural terminology in this course.

This course will trace the evolution of American architecture with a particular emphasis on the "home" from the first European housing at Jamestown to the post-World War II ranch and the modern double-wide. Through the lens of domestic architecture, we will examine the various approaches to studying architecture--including architectural style, floor plans, interior decoration and design, furnishings, and building technologies and construction.

We will focus particularly 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 art history, anthropology, archaeology, cultural geography, folklife studies, history of technology, women's history, and American social and cultural history. The readings will reflect this variety of perspectives.

This course will require field trips and fieldwork experiences so that students will be able to apply their knowledge to analyzing and dating buildings using architectural style, technology, and floor plans as well as historical records. Each student will be required to attend two field trips and to complete a final project documenting a building or building complex.

### **Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will be able to document and analyze historical buildings and, to write a narrative describing its history and an architectural analysis and description, and to identify the architectural characteristics one uses to date a historic 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.

3. Students will be able to interpret a historic building and identify its style and building period, demonstrated through the preparation of two analysis of historic buildings documented in field trips and through the final class project.
4. Students will be able to describe and analyze, in writing, the evolution of American architecture from the colonial period through the ranch house from an interdisciplinary perspective.
5. Students will be able to use buildings to examine broader historical questions in U.S. history.
6. 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:***

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

Barbara Howe et al, *Houses and Homes: Exploring their History*. Alta Vista Press.

#### ***Recommended:***

Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. Alfred A. Knopf.

This book provides a good glossary of terms, definitions, and architectural styles.

### **Course Requirements**

#### ***Examinations (30% of final grade)***

The course includes a midterm and final examination, both drawn on readings and class discussions. Examinations will feature different essay questions for graduate students, focusing on some of the methodological and historiographical issues of American architectural history and requiring more sophisticated analysis and writing. The final exam will not be cumulative, but will be based on materials from the second half of the class. Each exam will be worth 15% of the final course grade.

### ***Fieldwork experiences (10%)***

One of the best ways to learn about how to study architecture is to conduct fieldwork and visit buildings. Each student will be expected to attend two of these excursions and write up a two-page, word-processed summary of what he/she learned. Each report must include a floor plan and the fieldnotes that you took during the visit. These fieldwork assignments must be turned in within two weeks of the field trip if you want to receive credit for this work. The grade will be dropped 10 points for every day these assignments are late.

### ***Methodology essay: (15%)***

Throughout the class, we will be talking about how scholars of different disciplines study architecture. Graduate students will be required to examine one building or building complex and analyze it from at least three different disciplinary perspectives, showing how practitioners of that discipline would approach and study the building. These approaches **MUST** include an art historical perspective and two others (e.g. cultural geography, anthropology, history, etc). This assignment should be three to five pages in length and must be word-processed. Be sure to attach at least one photograph of the building. This paper will be due on **October 16**.

### ***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 an architectural description and analysis, floor plans, photographs, historical research, and a contextual examination of the building placing it in historical and architectural context. The contours of this study will vary with the building that the student chooses.
2. An original research paper on an issue or topic related to the course. This might be an analysis of local buildings from tax records or other historical resources; a study of mill workers housing or the development of a mill town; sharecroppers housing based on historical photographs and existing buildings; housing advice in popular magazines; prescriptions for housing provided through catalogs or women's etiquette books; an analysis of architectural pattern books; regional church styles; etc. Your research project must include at least five secondary sources on your topic as well as primary sources.

Papers should be approximately 12-15 pages of text, with additional visual documentation (site plans, floor plans, photographs, illustrations, examples of historical research, etc) as is pertinent to the topic. Papers must be word-processed and include footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography of sources utilized. Please follow Kate Turabian or the *Chicago Manual of Style* for format and technical issues. Graduate students are expected to develop a more sophisticated final paper than the undergraduates, drawing upon the insights gained from *Houses and Homes*, course readings, and class discussions.

Project topics need to be submitted to me by **August 28** If you need help in selecting a topic, please see me as soon as possible.

***Class participation, oral presentations, discussion, and attendance (15%)***

The class will be taught in a seminar fashion, meaning that while I will provide some lecture, it will also involve discussion of the readings and of slides shown in class. Please do the reading before each class and be prepared to discuss this at the class meeting. More than two unexcused absences can lower your final course grade one letter grade (10 points); more than four unexcused absences will lower your final grade by 20 points.

Graduate students will be assigned a chapter or chapters from *Houses and Homes* to present to the class. Since the undergraduates are not reading this book, these presentations are an opportunity to 'teach' them the information available in this book. Presentations should be approximately ten minutes. You may include handouts, if these would be helpful, and I will be happy to xerox them for the class as long as they are not too long and provided to me by 1 p.m. on the scheduled date. Dates and chapters will be assigned by the third week of class.

On selected Thursday class meetings, graduate students will stay after class for additional discussion related to the readings. These dates and topics to be discussed will be announced at least one week in advance.

**Tentative Schedule**

***Please note:*** graduate students will also be required to read all of *Houses and Homes: Exploring their History* and to present these chapters in the class. A schedule for reading and class presentations from this book will be developed by the third week of class.

**August 14: Course introduction; Looking at architecture**

**August 21: 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

**August 28: Architecture, Housing, and Society in Early Virginia**

***Readings*** Upton/Vlach: (Upton) 315-35; (Neiman) 292-314. Wright, chapter 3. Roots, "The English," 55-61.

**Due:** Research proposal, at least one page.

**September 4: Labor Day, no class.**

### **September 11: Folk Housing, Cultural Geography, and Cultural Diffusion**

**Readings** *Upton/Vlach*: (Kniffen) 3-26; (Glassie and Kniffen) 159-181; (Price) 124-148; (Vlach) 58-78. *Roots*, 42-47.

### **September 18: Ethnicity and Architecture**

**Readings** *Roots*: "Introduction" 7-15, and "Germans" and "Scots-Irish," 68-79. *Upton/Vlach*: (Chappell) 27-57; (Glassie) 394-432.

### **September 25: Ethnic Architecture across America**

**Readings** Finish reading *America's Architectural Roots* and read (Gowans) 367-393; (McHenry) 107-123.

### **October 2: Midterm Exam**

**October 9: No class, fall break.**

### **October 16: Early Nineteenth Urban Architecture and Landscapes and the Development of Architectural Pattern Books**

**Readings** *Upton/Vlach*: (Bishir) 447-481. *Wright*, chapters 2 and 4. *Clark*, chapter 1.

### **Due: Methodology Essay**

### **October 23: 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 and 6. *Clark*, chapters 2 and 3.

### **October 30: 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.

### **November 6: Architectural Reform: Bungalows, Home Economics, and the Progressive Housewife**

**Readings** *Upton/Vlach*: (Lancaster), 79-106. *Wright*, chapter 9. *Clark*, chapters 5 and 6.

### **November 13: Planned Housing: Company Towns, Planned Communities, and Public Housing**

*Readings* Wright, chapters 10 through 12

**November 20: Post-World War II Suburban Housing, the Ranch House, and the Middle-Class Family Ideal**

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

**November 27: Contemporary American Architecture and Housing**

*Readings* Wright, chapter 14. Clark, chapter 9. Additional readings on electronic reserve.

**Due: Class project/paper**

**December 4: Final exam, 5:30-7:30.**