

Pre-Modern American Architecture

A4341 Fall 2016 11am -1 pm

Instructor: Janet W. Foster

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Objectives of the Class

This class will explore the architecture of the United States from the first buildings erected by Europeans in the early seventeenth century through the architecture of the late 19th century. In class, we will examine the iconic architectural monuments erected during this period, ranging from surviving colonial homes to the works of architects such as Peter Harrison, Charles Bulfinch, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, John Mills, A. J. Davis, Richard Upjohn, Frank Furness, and Henry Hobson Richardson. We will also explore lesser known and vernacular buildings reflecting both folk traditions and the spread of architectural ideas from centers of innovation into small towns and rural landscapes. We will review the evolving forms and styles of architecture and the ideas behind developments in American design, discussing the impact of the ideas of such designers and theoreticians as Frederick Law Olmsted, Andrew Jackson Downing, and Richard Morris Hunt. Class lectures will be supplemented with visits to the rare books and architectural drawings collections at Avery and by walking tour in New York City.

Requirements

1. Attendance – you are expected to be present each week; the TA will take attendance. If you must miss a class due to illness, let me or the TA know via e-mail prior to the start of class. Please note that I do not share my lecture notes or slides to provide make-up material.
2. Readings - the basic text for the class will be Leland Roth, *American Architecture: A History, Second Edition*. Please get a copy and read it!
3. Additional readings will be assigned for each class. The material is available online through Avery Library. I have tried to limit the readings so that each of you have time to complete all of the assigned pages.
4. Research Papers – there are three papers required throughout the semester. They are intended to further your thinking about materials covered in class, and extend your ideas on architectural history and historic preservation. These assignments are original work, with your own ideas, supported by footnotes, illustrations, and quotes correctly attributed.

First paper: *On Authenticity and Reconstruction*

Due September 30, by 5 pm. E-mail to jf2060@columbia.edu

Each student will prepare an individual essay of *up to 6000* words analyzing a colonial (pre-1776) American building that has been reconstructed or heavily restored. Try to discern why that particular building was chosen for reconstruction. Review the work that went into re-creating it. Compare it to at least one other

building of that time, preferably one not as “restored,” and discuss the differences in their architecture. What can we learn from each individually, and together?

Second Paper: *The House Museum*

Due October 28, by 5 pm. E-mail to jf2060@columbia.edu

Students will be assigned in small groups to visit a house museum in the metropolitan area. Describe, in your own words, the architecture of the principal building and put it into context locally and even nationally. Note particular features of design, construction, materials or decoration. Are these things called out in the museum’s own interpretation or educational materials?

Prepare an assessment of the house museum’s authenticity of physical fabric. Discuss how it interprets its building and collections. How does the museum handle “unknowns” in its history? Does the emphasis in interpretation correspond with the physical forms you can see?

What is the larger context for the architecture of the building: Is it a rare form of architecture? A good example of a particular style? Or is it just a lucky survivor? Your thoughtful essay on this topic should be *no more than* 5,000 words, and should include at least one photo of your own documenting interesting elements of the building. Photos should support the text; numerous additional photos do not add to the supporting arguments unless accompanied by a pithy essay.

Third Paper: *The Influence of Pattern Books on American Architecture*

Due December 9, by 5 pm. E-mail to jf2060@columbia.edu

Write an essay of *no more than* 8,000 words on the “Ten Most Important” pattern books used in American architecture. The listing of your “top ten” is supported by your well-reasoned arguments for the merits of every publication you choose. List buildings created from or influenced by the books you cite. Discuss the books themselves – the author, the intended audience, the design value, and the innovation or tradition-carrying values of the book. Please cite not only the book but the author, publication date, and edition, if appropriate (and if there are multiple editions of a particular book, you might address this in your essay). Illustrations are welcome if they enhance the discussion, but may not be necessary for every choice.

I hope your choices are as individual as you are – please do not collaborate on your list. There is no single “right” answer that you should be seeking, but it is your reasoning and examples that are most important here in establishing your understanding of the materials.

American Architecture I Class Schedule (subject to change)

Class I: September 8

The Arrival of Europeans: Spanish, French, Swedish and Dutch Settlement in the New World

Class II: September 15

Colonial English Architecture on the Eastern Seaboard

Class III: September 22

The 18th century and Georgian Classicism

Class IV: September 29

Avery Library to review 18th century builder's books architectural folios.

First paper "On Authenticity and Reconstruction" is due at the end of the week. (See requirements section of syllabus)

Class V: October 6

Neo-Classical Architecture: The Federal Style

October 13 – No class held. Visit local museums to view 18th and 19th century buildings and interiors. (See requirements section of syllabus).

Class VI: October 20

American "Utopias": Prisons, Religious Communities, and Mill Towns

Class VII: October 27

Avery Library to review 19th century pattern books

Second paper on a House Museum is due at the end of the week. (See requirements section of syllabus)

Class VIII: November 3

Downing, Davis and the Romantic Picturesque vs New Technologies and New Forms in American Architecture

Class IX: November 10

Central Park Tour with Andrew S. Dolkart (Meet at the General Sherman statue on Fifth Avenue north of Street at 11:30).

Class X: November 17

Materials and Technology Changes in the 19th century: Cast Iron, Balloon Framing, and the Railroad

November 27 – Thanksgiving Holiday – no class

Class XI: December 1.

New Roads: Hunt, Furness, Richardson and the American Aesthetic.

Class XII: December 8: Final class

Transmission of Architectural ideas through the 19th century

The Queen Anne style: 19th century “vernacular” vs. Academic architecture

Third paper on “Top Ten Pattern Books use in America” is due at the end of the week. (See requirements section of syllabus)