



The Bigger Bungalow

Foursquare homes provided welcome space for early 20th-century extended families.

BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER



IN THE LAST YEARS OF THE 19TH CENTURY, HOUSING STYLES IN NORTH AMERICA WERE undergoing a radical change. Raw-material market conditions had driven up the cost of building supplies, and the elaborate, highly decorated, rambling Queen Anne and Colonial Revival homes of the period were becoming too expensive.

At the same time, the growth in corporate jobs increased the middle-class, white-collar workforce, creating a need for inexpensive single-family homes. Some of this need was filled by the bungalow, with its small, efficient floor plan. However, many Americans in the early 20th century

above

This newly restored Foursquare has all the classic features: roof dormer, wide porch and period color scheme.

lived with extended families or relatives newly arrived from Europe, making these families too large for a two- or even three-bedroom house. These households required a home with not only more living space but more bedrooms as well. That niche was filled by what we have come to call the Foursquare house.

Traces of what were to become hallmark Foursquare architectural features can be seen on earlier Victorian homes. The use of small roof dormers and a generally flat, unadorned façade appeared in the late 19th century as sides of homes that are essentially Queen Anne style. As the century ended, those features made their way onto the front façade, providing a new look to the American streetscape. Widely seen throughout the United States and Canada in cities, suburbs and as farmhouses, the Foursquare became an upgrade to the bungalow and in many areas a replacement for the traditional two-story Colonial.

As the name implies, this house looks square, although it is usually longer than it is wide. This shape was necessary for it to fit onto narrow city and streetcar suburb lots. The Foursquare is two stories tall with a pyramid-style roof. Dormers are found on one or all sides of the pyramid. This style continues the Victorian tradition of generally having a full-width front porch. To save on cost, some models have one-half or two-thirds width porches. In many cases, the porch looked like one that would be found on a Craftsman home. Variations include round Colonial columns or large, square piers. A wide variety of exterior siding types were employed as well. Many models carried a divided façade with a stucco top and clapboard bottom. Wood

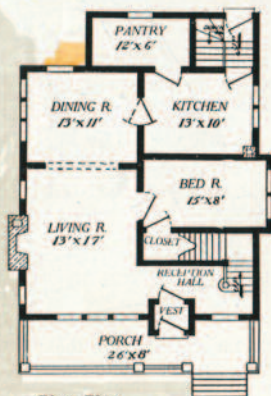
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above

Foursquare details came from a number of sources, from Spanish to Colonial. Larger, more upscale Foursquare homes were built, too, and often were covered in brick. This grand example, currently for sale in Lewisville, Indiana, shows Prairie-style influence. Lavish elements include the home's original striking green tile roof and double-leaded glass windows.

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First Floor
The Rochester



Second Floor—The Rochester

The Rochester

See prices on inside of front cover.

THIS is an interesting square house. In design the Rochester is truly American—simple, strong and substantial. Conservative lines bespeak dignity and personality of which this design is a good representative. Its features are not composed of novelties that come and go, but are made up of the careful touches that have stood the test with home builders for many years. The Rochester has the added advantage in point of design of being square in shape, which always expresses massiveness and strength. While the exterior is simple in design, yet it is not commonplace nor uninviting. The scrolled rafter ends studding the eaves of the house, dormer and porch roofs, add an artistic touch without giving it an overburdening of trimmings. Still another distinction noted in the Rochester is the window arrangement. Grouped in pairs in most cases they add strength to the design of the exterior and provide an abundance of light to all rooms. In planning a home, the housewife, besides giving deep thought to the exterior appearance, takes a greater interest still in

shingles, brick and concrete blocks were also popular siding choices.

Foursquare eaves were wide, with both simple knee brackets and exposed roof rafters under them. Windows were generally the double-hung type. While the top floor usually had windows spaced equally across the front of the house, the first floor displayed them in a number of configurations, from large panes to clusters of two or three sashes. Bay windows, similar to those seen on bungalows, were located on the house adjacent to the dining room.

This home was practical and efficient, with generally four first-floor rooms—an entry hall, living room, dining room and kitchen—many with Craftsman-style built-ins, such as bookcases and china cabinets. The kitchen could have a full set of built-in cabinets. The upper story contained three or four bedrooms with newly popular built-in closets. The bathroom was most often located on the second level. As

left

A typical Foursquare from Aladdin Homes of Bay City, Michigan, c. 1920. Note the simple paint scheme. Gone were the lavish Victorian colors, replaced with calm, earthy tones.

opposite top

This home in Brunswick, Georgia, has roof dormers on three sides and many brackets adorning the eaves.

opposite bottom

An inset roof dormer, square porch columns and a side-bay or dining-room bay window are elements typically found in a Foursquare.



compared to their Victorian predecessors, Foursquares were simply decorated, perhaps even stark by 19th-century standards. Gone was the wide entry hall with ornate staircase sporting elaborately turned spindles. It was replaced with an efficient, compact stair that had square spindles and a very simple newel post.

The Foursquare was popular from the end of the 19th century up until the Great Depression of the 1930s. It fulfilled a housing need for a large number of middle-class families and provides today's homeowner with a handsome, sturdy, efficient home that serves the 21st century well. **CB**

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SEE RESOURCES, PAGE 94.





left

Stucco and sculptured concrete blocks were used in this Sears home from 1909. Sears sold a machine so people could make their own concrete blocks.

bottom left

This isometric view of an Aladdin Foursquare from 1920 illustrates the atypical floor plan, complete with furniture placement.



FOURSQUARE FOLLOW-UP

Further resources for information on this classic style.

Books:

- *A Field Guide to American Houses*, by Virginia and Lee McAlester, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984. Visit amazon.com.
- *Aladdin "Built in a Day" House Catalog*, Dover Books on Architecture, 1995 (Reprint 1917). Visit amazon.com.
- *America's Favorite Homes: Mail-Order Catalogues as a Guide to Popular Early 20th-Century Houses*, by Robert Schweitzer & Michael W.R. Davis, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan, 1990. Visit <http://wsupress.wayne.edu>.
- *American Vernacular Design, 1870-1940: An Illustrated Glossary*, by Herbert Gottfried and Jan Jennings, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1988. Visit amazon.com.
- *Bennett's Small House Catalog 1920*, by Ray H. Lumber Co., Inc., Bennett, Inc., Dover Publishing, February 1994, Paperback (Reprint edition). Visit amazon.com.
- northwestcrossing.com/.docs/pg/400/rid/10012/f/Guides_FourSquare_04.pdf.
- http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4155/is_20050501/ai_n14622217.
- http://blog.oregonlive.com/homesandgardens/2007/11/the_american_foursquare.html
- <http://web.mac.com/tikimac/iWeb/House/Foursquares/Foursquares.html>.

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