

# Pyramid-roofed Bungalows

The 1922 discovery of Tut's tomb probably increased interest in pyramid roofs.

BY TK

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH ROBERSON



**Top:** *The Great pyramid of Khufu, built around 2560 B.C., was the tallest man-made structure until 1889 when the Eiffel Tower was completed.*

**Above:** *This Practical Homes plan from 1925 has a pure pyramid roof – one that forms a point. Note the concrete block foundation which was quick and cheap to build.*

WALKING DOWN A STREET OF HOMES BUILT IN AMERICA DURING the early 1920s, one quickly notices that many are bungalows. What one also notices is the diversity of types and sizes of these simple homes. Unlike the modern cookie cutter subdivisions of the 1950s and '60s, bungalows came in a wide assortment of footprints, architectural details and roof shapes. One type that is easy to identify is the pyramid bungalow. As the name implies, the roof of the house reminds us of the structure at Giza Egypt known as the Pyramid of Khufu or the Pyramid of Cheops.

Standing slightly over 481-feet tall and 775-feet wide, and built around 2560 B.C., Khufu was the tallest man-made structure until 1889 when the Eiffel Tower was completed. A king or Pharaoh's tomb, a pyramid was built to provide a device that helped move the departed through the wall of the dead to find happiness with the gods. Americans became fascinated with pyramids beginning in the latter part of the 19th century when they began to



travel internationally on "Grand Tours" to Europe and Africa. As household incomes rose, and travel became easier in the 20th century, more people became familiar with these massive structures along with their legends and myths. In 1922 archeologist Howard Carter uncovered the intact tomb of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun and set off an enormous wave of interest in Egypt and its pyramids.


## A Hip Idea

The idea of having a hipped or pyramid-style roof was not entirely new to bungalow architecture. Examples can be seen in the tops of Italianate villa towers, as well as the mansard roofs of the Second Empire homes built in the post Civil War era. In the 1880s, architects such as Shoppell and Woodward designed Victorian Queen Anne-style homes with pointed towers and roofs.

Unlike the Egyptian tombs, pyramid bungalows are very short, mainly one story with a distinguishing characteristic of a roof that resembles its pointed Khufu brother. Not all of these bungalow roofs came to a point; some were cut off just short of the tip. They were made possible by the development of ready-made trusses that could easily be set in place on the side walls to form unique shapes. Roofs were then covered with an assortment of materials ranging from metal, used mainly in the south, to wood shingles and the newly-developed composite shingles in a variety of brighter colors such as red and green. Some bungalow designers added dormers to the front and sides of the roof allowing for limited use of the second story for bedrooms. Unlike earlier bungalows that featured massive chimneys, the pyramid types generally have a less dramatic, more functional chimney.

## Elements of Style


The use of a wide façade allowed for a full-width porch on many of these homes. Typically one entered the house directly into the living room, the largest room in the house, which was flanked on one side by a bedroom. Pyramid bungalows were generally not square in plan; they tended to be longer than wider. Most contained two or three bedrooms, a din-



### THE MIRACLE

ALL the appealing features of that most popular type of home, the bungalow, are included in the MIRACLE. "I must say this house attracts a lot of people here, who want to look through it," writes an Akron owner. Because it is different from nine-tenths of the bungalows you see and is comfortable and convenient inside. A MIRACLE home is always worth several hundred dollars more than it costs. The front porch is large and sunny. The ventilation, light and cheer secured by the excellent window arrangement can easily be imagined. The cut below shows the interior of one of the bedrooms, while the cut at the bottom of the page is a photograph of a MIRACLE "C" erected at Green Bay, Wis. For charm and convenience, inside and out, the MIRACLE has no equal.

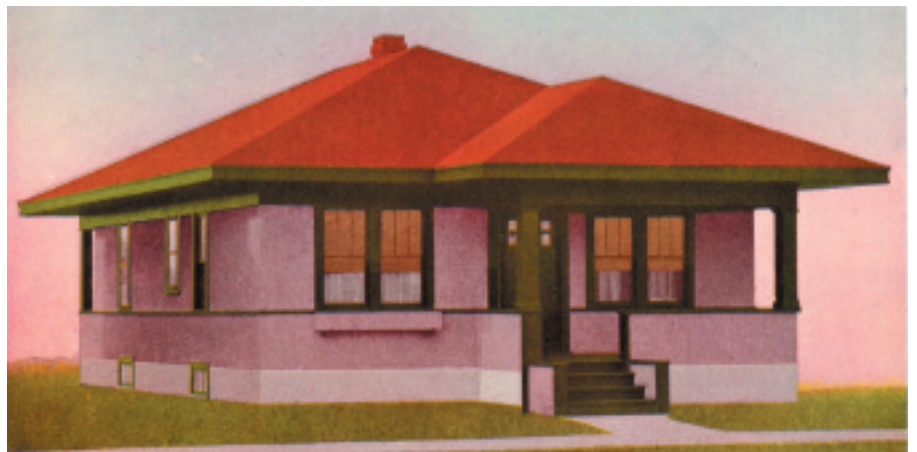
**SPECIFICATIONS:** Color scheme suggested. As shown shown. Exterior: Siding. Joists: Porch 2 x 6, floor 2 x 8, ceiling 2 x 6. Rafters: 2 x 6. Additional features: Kitchen cupboard, linen closet.



SEE PRICE LIST IN FRONT OF BOOK  
See specifications page 72

**Above:** A kit home, colored in a twenties modern yellow and off-white color scheme, is only 26- x 24-feet but contains three bedrooms including a bowling alley style 9-x 21-foot attic room.

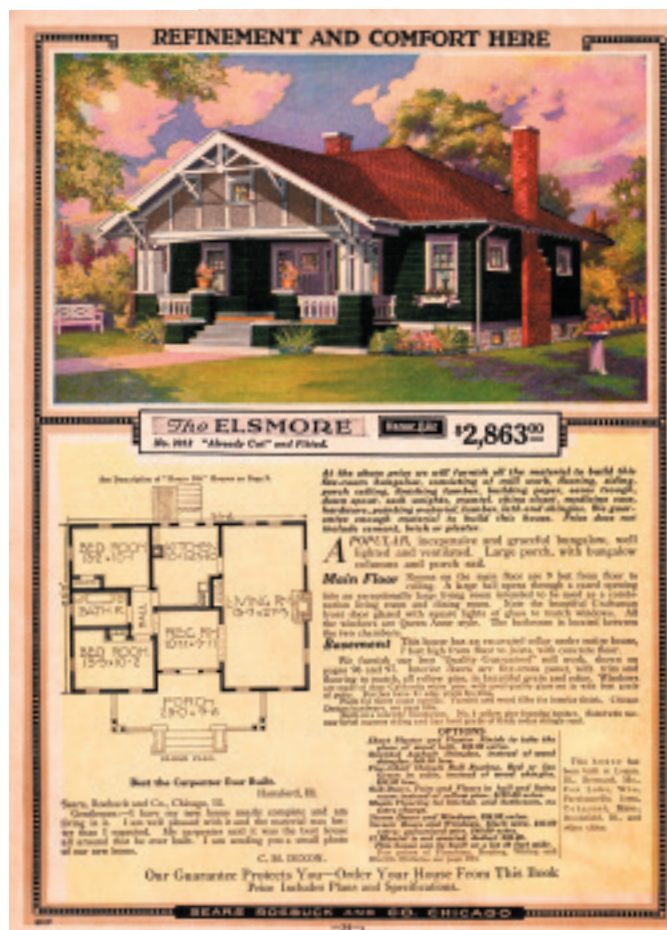
**Below:** This house is made of concrete and has a pyramid-style roof on the main house and an attempted pyramid on the porch roof. Note the lack of familiar bungalow detailing such as exposed eave rafters.







**Above:** Compared to the Sears Elsmore, this house from 1920 is plain in the extreme. It contains no exposed rafters or brackets; even the trim around the windows is kept to a simple thin board.



**Right:** This Sears pyramid bungalow is unusual for several reasons. Its high price of nearly \$2,900 in 1920 is vastly above the average bungalow price and it contains a small entry hallway placed between the living room and front bedroom. It also contains much detailing such as exposed eave rafters, knee brackets and clustered porch piers.

ing room, kitchen and small bath. The rooms were well lit, and with cross ventilation when possible. The front rooms contained either paired or grouped double-hung windows. The vast majority of these homes had simple window and door trim.

Built in large numbers beginning in the 1920s, the pyramid bungalow took advantage of new materials on its foundations. Many earlier bungalows employed stone on the foundations, where as these homes were more likely to make use of stylized concrete blocks, cement or bricks. The siding materials as well varied widely with cement, stucco and wood shingle being the main surface materials as well as the standard clap-

**Right:** This plate from an 1868 architectural plans book shows a pyramid roof on the tower of this Italianate-style villa.



**Below:** *A street scene in Alton, Illinois, photographed in 1919, illustrates the variety of bungalows under construction at the time.*







**Above:** A Queen Anne Victorian house plan from 1897 by Shoppell has a pyramid roof on the home's front section.

**Below:** The Winsom model kit house by Sterling Homes of Bay City, Michigan, used an elongated version of the pyramid roof which contained dormers to make the second floor usable for bedrooms.

**THE WINSOM**

HERE is an unsurpassed bungalow! Study the floor plans carefully. Could any family want a more effective, brighter living room than the one shown below? Write for detailed information.

Dimensions: Color scheme suggested. As shown above. Exterior: Shingles. Siding: Paint. 2 to 4, floor 2 to 4, ceiling 2 to 4. Railings 2 to 4. Additional features: Kitchen cupboard, window.

SEE PRICE LIST IN FRONT OF BOOK  
For specifications page 72


## Archeological Tour

Dig up these books for more  
on bungalow styles.

- *500 Small Houses of the Twenties*, Henry Atterbury Smith, Dover Publications. Visit Barnes & Noble, [bn.com](http://bn.com).
- *The Bungalow Book: Floor Plans and Photos of 112 Houses, 1910*, Henry L. Wilson, Dover Publications. Visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
- *California Bungalows of the Twenties*, Henry L. Wilson, Dover Publications. Visit Barnes & Noble, [bn.com](http://bn.com).
- *West Coast Bungalows of the 1920s: With Photographs and Floor Plans*, E.W. Stillwell & Company, Dover Publications. Visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
- *The Bungalow Book: Floor Plans and Photos of 112 Houses, 1910 (Paperback)* Henry L. Wilson Dover Publications 2006 ISBN-10: 0486451046
- *West Coast Bungalows of the 1920s: With Photographs and Floor Plans (Paperback)* E. W. Stillwell & Co. Dover Publications, 2006 ISBN-10: 0486447189
- *California Bungalows of the Twenties (Paperback)* Henry L. Wilson Dover Publications 1993 ISBN-10: 0486275078
- *500 Small Houses of the Twenties (Paperback)* Henry Atterbury Smith Dover Publications, 1990 ISBN-10: 0486263002

boards. Exterior colors were becoming lighter at this time and many original sources show these homes in light tans, yellows and greens. With the increased use of automobiles many Pyramid bungalows were constructed in suburban areas with wider lots that contained a garage or auto house.

Whether or not the travel habits or historical events of the period had any effect on the desire to own a pyramid bungalow is unclear, but this type of plan was vastly popular appearing in house plan books, magazines and kit house catalogs through the early 1920s. [[end bug]]

[[itals]] Robert Schweitzer has taught architectural history and historic preservation for more than 25 years. He performs exterior color consulting for a wide range of historical and modern buildings. E-mail him at [robs@umich.edu](mailto:robs@umich.edu) or visit his Web site at [historichousecolors.com](http://historichousecolors.com). 

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR