Craftsman Homes

The Arts and Crafts Movement in American Domestic Architecture

WRITTEN BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER

The great variety and splendor of late 19th-century American domestic architecture was due in large part to the Industrial Revolution. The giant increase in productivity created technological advances that allowed for all the fine wood detailing and bric-a-brac on Victorian Queen Anne homes. It also created the personal fortunes that were able to purchase these fine homes. Another, not so pleasant byproduct, was assembly line factory work complete with long hours and repetitive tasks. This American social problem was foreshadowed by similar events that had occurred in England's Industrial Revolution in the early years of the century. Strikes and labor unrest rocked rural Britain in the 1830s as laborers reacted against machines taking away their jobs in the famous "Swing Riots."

British intellectuals began to see the darker side of industrial change and were committed to righting its social ills. One group nominally headed by William Morris called for the end of the dehumanization of labor and a return to

Note the rough stucco finish, side pergola, and stick brackets at the entry in Aladdin Homes' Lamberton model from 1920. Eleven windows and a three-part glass entryway flood the interior with sunlight. The porch is a wrap-around style that combines a covered stoop and a side pergola both connected by a terrace. This four bedroom home was available from 1916 to 1922.

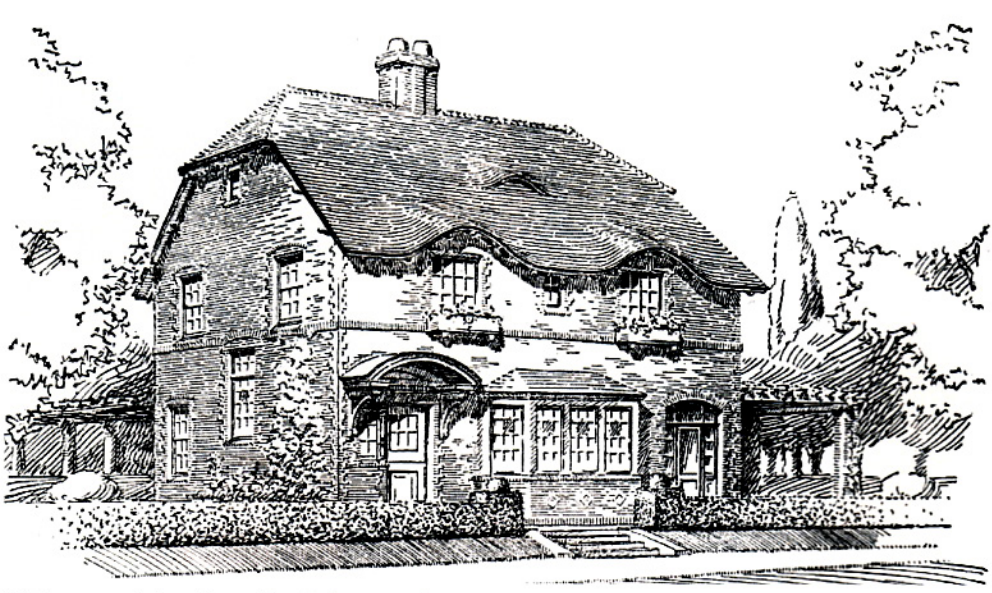
Model No. 154 from the June, 1916 issue of *The Craftsman* magazine is another gable-front type Craftsman-style home. Its grouped windows and clean surface materials speak of an age of simple, economical yet architecturally satisfying homes. The major bands of windows light the living room and the dining room.

the values of the medieval craft guilds. Morris was a poet, an artist, a writer, and lecturer who wanted to see an end to machine ornament in home decoration. His belief was that mass production cheapened a man's work and removed the dignity from creating a product. He felt a return to a more simple mode of hand crafting items would return pride to the worker. There were many groups of artistic social reformers in England in the 1870s and 1880s. They were not against the use of machinery and new technology but they wanted its use limited in order to relieve tedium and repetition.

In America, reaction to ornate machine-made Queen Anne architecture began with attempts to simplify buildings in the 1880s. The Shingle and Colonial Revival styles both used many of the same house forms as the Queen Anne, but they covered them with simple shingles or thin clapboards. Porches became less cluttered and smaller. Overall decoration was decreasing by the turn of the century.

The Arts and Crafts Movement, the name given to the Morris philosophy, was introduced in America in the latter part of the 19th century. Its architectural flowering occurred in the first two decades of the new century. One of its leaders was Gustav Stickley, a Wisconsin-born stone mason who preferred to work in wood. Stickley visited Britain and became familiar with the Arts and Crafts Movement there. Back home, he began to publish a magazine, *The Craftsman*, in 1910. It contained many articles that dealt with simplifying one's life and increasing the awareness of handicrafts (bookbinding, leather working, needlework, etc.) The magazine continued to be published until 1916.

Stickley was best known for his Mission-style furniture, but his influence on domestic architecture was also great. Because, like the English reformers, he was interested in the entire environment of the family, the house became an important component of both his and the Arts and Crafts Movement's philosophy. Stickley applied the same principles that gave his furniture a distinctive look to



This house was designed by architect Robert Frost of Paterson, New Jersey, for the Building Brick Association of America in 1910. Its most notable feature is the pseudo-thatch English-style roof that flows over the cut-roof dormers. The end gables are likewise "clipped-off" in a British cottage style. The plan calls for a brick exterior with quoins. The living room in this plan is the central feature of the house and sports a large fireplace and wide bay window visible on the front facade.

shape his house designs. He removed much of the ornament and made the house honest and functional. *The Craftsman* magazine published house plans in many of its issues. A Craftsman Home Owners Club was established in 1903 with Harvey Ellis as its house designer. Interested parties could buy plans and specifications direct and save architects' fees. So successful was the venture that two more books of plans were assembled (*Craftsman Homes* [1909] and *More Craftsman Homes* [1912]). Both are available in reprint form today. These house plans were popular because they featured designs fitted to a more modern life style. Gone were the parlors and maids' quarters. Replacing them were large "living rooms" with fireplaces for the family to gather around. Built-in bookcases held the vast amount of newly published magazines, biographies and novels coming off newly improved printing presses. A large part of the Arts and Crafts Movement's philosophy dealt with re-establishing the soundness of the family and its virtues. Thus, the "living room," a place where a family could come together and read, was of primary importance. The large entry hall was reduced in Craftsman homes to an area that was no longer large enough to hold furniture—it only had space for a coat closet.

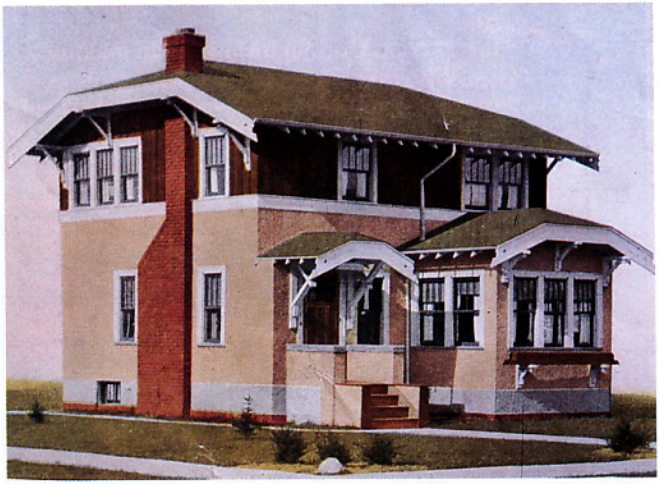
Craftsman homes are identified today in a different fashion than they were some 80 years ago. At that time the small, one and one-and-a-half-story homes that today we label as Bungalows were also known as Craftsman homes. Modern research has separated the larger variety (two story) into its own classification. These larger homes were popular in America from the turn of the century until just after World War I. Examples were built as late as the early 1920s, but by then the popular style had changed to Modern Tudor Revival and Modern Colonial Revival.

One of the most noticeable difference between Craftsman homes and the earlier Victorians styles was their exterior color. While Queen Anne homes might contain five contrasting colors, Craftsman houses were finished in earthy tones with very little contrast. Light browns and green were the most popular colors in use. Exterior surfaces were also more modest. Simple shingles, brick, stones, thin clapboards, and stucco were combined into a smoothly flowing exterior. Door and window openings carried simple, plain surrounds. Chimneys gained prominence and were constructed of rubble stone, brick, or mixtures of both. Exterior detailing was reduced, but not eliminated in Craftsman homes. Brackets still appeared under the eaves but they were very simple, often looking like unpretentious sticks of lumber nailed together. Extensive carving on brackets was eliminated. Roof rafter ends were exposed in overhanging eaves and the roofs themselves could be covered in slate, wood shingle, or a composition shingle that resembled thatch (similar

to types used on English rural cottages). The multi-gabled roof lines of the Queen Anne gave way to simpler designs featuring straight ridges of only one set of crossing gables. The pitch of the roof in many cases was reduced creating a more horizontal "look." The house footprint became more "regular" like a square or a rectangle. Porches were reduced in size and ornamentation. Gone were the hundreds of spindles, replaced by simple columns (possibly concrete). Railing areas began to be filled with solid surfaces of wood or stone. Some plans reduced the porch to a portico or stoop, as entertaining moved to side covered porches or sun rooms and to rear terraces. Craftsman porches could be protected with a combination of large columns holding up beams with an open lattice work, called a pergola.

As the population shifted from rural farm life to office employment in cities, people spent more time indoors. Craftsman architecture sought to bring sunlight into homes through groups or bands of windows in the major rooms. Colored glass faded from favor as did the multitude of window sizes used in late Victorian homes. Double-hung style sashes with multiple panes on the top of a single pane became the most popular window type. Some plans used the newly perfected casement sashes as well.

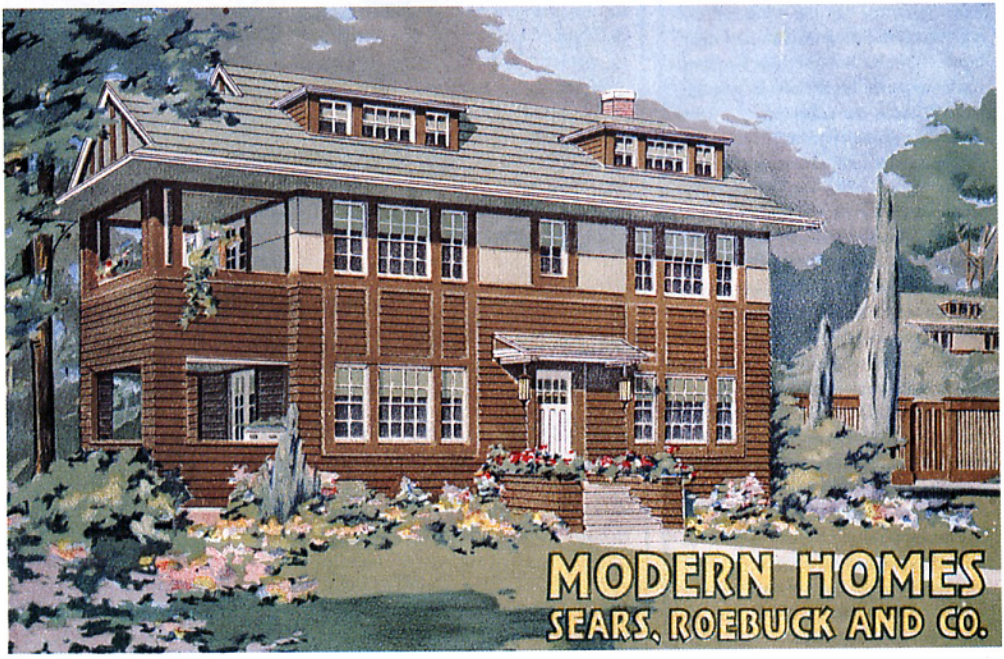
Stickley's books and magazines were not the only sources for information on Craftsman-style homes. All the popular shelter magazines of the day offered articles and plans. From *Ladies Homes Journal* to *Better Homes and Gardens*, eager home buyers had a wide assortment of choices. Ready-cut kit house companies such as Sears, Lewis, and Aladdin also offered attractive models. Plan book companies such as Standard Homes and Keith's sold Craftsman plans through lumber dealers and spec builders. Individual architects published plan books of their designs and sold them through ads in popular magazines. These tended to be more upscale ornate designs. Because of the wide variety of



The Portland Cement Association offered this house, Design No. 233 in c. 1915. It shows commonplace Craftsman coloration: tan and medium brown siding and a green roof. The trim is off white. Note the exposed rafter ends on the main roof and on the sun porch roof.

Featured on this Sears Roebuck's *Modern Homes* house catalog cover for 1912, the *Ivanhoe* model was a popular "kit house" from 1912 to 1918. The house illustrates many of the features of a modern Craftsman home: small stoop porch, grouped windows, earth tone colors, open side porches, and dormers. In 1912 the kit cost $1,564 for about 1,600 square feet of floor space that included four bedrooms and a 22-foot-long living room with fireplace.

sources available for house plans, the spread of the Craftsman style was fairly quick and even across all of American in the first two decades of this century. The rural free delivery system provided a ready medium to ship magazines that contained house plans and pages of ads for those selling plan books and related design services.

While the Arts and Crafts Movement in England had a distinct political and social component to it, the American manifestation could be seen most clearly in its reshaping of domestic architecture. **VH**

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