

Floral Park Architecture:

Colonial Revival Architecture

The historic Russell House built in 1928 at 2009 Victoria Drive is a classic example of Colonial Revival architecture.

C by David Ko

olonial Revival is the single most popular architectural style in the United States, in great part due to its richly varied vocabulary and inherent eloquence. Colonial Revival is essentially a mixture of styles, all uniquely American and reflects the late-19th-century fascination with homes built by the early settlers, an affection that intensified through the war years.

By the late 1930s, The Great Depression wiped the residential architectural precedent of whimsical styles to a clean slate. Out-of-work architects had to humble themselves to start over and learn a new methodology. Those unwilling to do so and who continued to practice the “outdated” styles faced dwindling job prospects. Most resil-

ient residential architects cross overed over to government-funded WPA institutional and commercial projects. Most never returned to residential architecture. Firms changed their names to “Architects and Engineers.” to offer design services to a broader scope of civic projects.

Residential talent evaporated overnight. In Floral Park, Allison Honer and others built Streamline Moderne and Hollywood Regency homes during this “transitional” period. However, these modern vernaculars were not sustainable. By the mid- to late-1930s, design standards had filtered down to the basics of American life. While Americans seemed to embrace contemporary design movements in everything from their commercial buildings to their cars and diners, when it

came to their homes, they didn’t go for it. Instead, they went searching for elements of the country’s past.

Colonial Revival first entered the architectural scene of America at the turn of the 20th century, spurred on by the 1876 Centennial Exposition, which celebrated 100 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. For the first time in the country’s history, an increasing importance was being placed on documenting and preserving buildings of architectural interest.

During the Depression, a visionary philanthropist lamented the erosion of historic colonial style architecture and historic townships. In the mid-1920s, John D Rockefeller Jr. began anonymously acquiring properties in Williamsburg, Virginia with a plan



Early travel ad for Colonial Williamsburg.

to restore and preserve them authentically. Researchers studied hundreds of thousands of old photos and drawings for details, buildings, and their initial planning. Newer-built homes were also acquired and then demolished to reinstate farms and gardens, once a fabric of a 1700s working residential village. He created a time capsule where America's future generations could learn and experience the history and this bygone-era environment absent of all modernities. Educational demonstrations of colonial trades, techniques and crafts are still performed by artisans dressed in historic period attire. Rockefeller put in place a financial infrastructure to sustain this venture eternally. He enlisted Ansel Adams, among others, to document the preservation process, their photos appearing in marketing materials and publications.

The turning point occurred in the summer of 1936 when a resurgence of a residential renaissance prevailed and all trade periodicals dedicated their entire year's issues to follow the progress of America's first historic preservation project. Rockefeller restored the township accurately and authentically. Colonial Williamsburg opened to the public, a single event that inspired the entire nation and the



This home at 2445 North Park, built in 1927, is a classic example of Colonial Revival architecture.

resurgence of Colonial architecture on the west coast.

Colonial Williamsburg was a huge success and later galvanized Disney's design approach to the authenticity of New Orleans Square in 1956. Similarly, Allison Honer and his team relied on a vast photographic research library to build Colonial Revival houses with authentic crafted details in Floral Park. He continued this genre with some

ranch-style variations for many decades in both Floral and West Floral Park. Today, most of Honer's Colonial Revival homes feature entries that are a close facsimile to homes found in Williamsburg except for the addition of mail slot, of course.

The nation learned its history: Colonial architecture in the 1930s was coming from several fronts. Architecture as a profession had gained an



Classic Colonial Revival home built in 1930 at 2467 Riverside Drive

appreciation of the nation's design heritage and many trade journals were dedicated to thoroughly analyzing the proportions and details of the various kinds of Colonial design--the Federal, the Georgian, and the Cape Cod. By 1941, the amount of architectural information about the Colonial period had roughly doubled.

Builders' catalogs were full of tiny homes for the working and middle-class American family and plans with variations were readily available and made possible by FDR's Emergency Committee that hired a team of architects to design many Colonial Revival prototypes. Jigsaw exteriors, overdone bungalows, and false gabled English were among many fads which quickly went out of fashion while good colonial, early American, and Georgian have stood the test of time.

Colonial exterior composition is all about symmetry, based on mathematical proportions created by the renaissance architect, Andrea Palladio (1508-1580). As lifestyle advanced, the demand to include indoor bathrooms, larger kitchens, and more living areas led to floor plan alterations that seriously challenged the once well-balanced and symmetrically pro-



*Southern versions of Colonial Revival architecture were featured in *Gone With The Wind*.*

portioned exterior.

In Floral Park, single-story Colonial Revival houses with an attic coexist with two-story versions as inspired by Colonial Williamsburg. Historically, colonists built single-story homes intentionally tiny and hid cramped sleeping quarters into the attic. This “lack of space” appearance discouraged British soldiers from seeking lodging in private

homes (The Quartering Act of 1765 required the colonies to house British soldiers).

Colonial houses are a genre consisting of many regional variations built to suit the local climates. Their aesthetics and characteristics would differ depending on the region. The most noticeable were steep roofs found in the north and low pitch in the South.

In 1935 came the immensely popular film, *Gone with the Wind*, for which elaborate movie sets were built of Southern Colonial homes. Although these sets and homes were mainly in the Greek and Federal Revival style, their prominence in the film led to the popularity of two-story pillar homes.

Builders built variations of the Colonial Revival for the middle-class in Floral Park. During the decade of the Great Depression, great public projects and wealthy private clients with unlimited funds for mansions disappeared, and architects turned to the bread and butter of residential homes to make their money. To make themselves a name in this market, they had to satisfy their clients—working and middle-class families. During this time, people had smaller families. And when they had the money to build a home,

The American Colonial Revival style emerged in the late 1930s in response to a renewed interest in the architecture of 18th-century colonial America. Below are some of the defining characteristics:



DECORATIVE ENTRANCE

Colonial Revivals frequently present a notable entrance with pediment and/or columns.



TRANSOM AND SIDELIGHT WINDOWS.

Paneled front doors flanked by sidelights and transom window.



MULTI-STORY

Many Colonial Revival homes are two or even three stories tall with steep roofs.



BRICK OR WOOD

Clapboard and shingle are often found in the Colonial Revival, but brick is the preferred material.



GABLE ROOFED DORMER

Gable roofs are the typical roof form found in Colonial revival homes.



MULTIPAYNE WINDOWS

Most windows in Colonial Revival homes are rectangular with double-hung sashes and shutters.



2038 North Ross Street

it was often with much fewer dollars than previous generations. They were looking for economical, modest-sized homes. Cape Cod fit the bill, and many architects worked to popularize and modernize Cape Cod to an age that now expected electricity, indoor plumbing, and modern kitchens. Builders built these modest Colonial Style homes throughout the neighborhood on narrower lots.

This English (Anglo) Colonial Revival resulted in an architectural vocabulary that went national. The “revival” encompassed every replica and accessible adaptation of styles from the Colonial, Federal, and Greek Revival periods; neoclassical and Federal-era elements decorated large houses that retained Victorian-era massing and extensive verandahs.

Houses built in the 1930s were not replicas, nor were they intended to be. Floor plans adapted new functions and innovations. They were often more significant than the originals and not symmetrical. Builders used Greek columns, Roman pilasters, and Palladian windows significantly



2002 North Victoria Drive

as they had been during the Georgian and Federal periods. Other details of real Colonial houses came back into vogue, including multi-light window sash, heavy shutters, hipped roofs, fanlights, Adamesque mantels, and graceful staircases with turned balusters. The center hall plan returned.

The Colonial Revival picked up steam with a return to classical motifs such as pediments and columns. Academically correct examples of Colonial Revival eventually replaced the transitional, neo-Colonial forms of the early years. Although they could not be mistaken for a Colonial-era original, many houses built in the 1930s are more academically correct. Emphasis was placed not only on classical details but also on the rectilinear, symmetrical forms of the 18th century.

One of the characteristics of Colonial Revival homes are a rectangular profile exterior with steep roof and gables. Homes were traditionally constructed with bricks, wood, or stone. The interior floor plan of a colonial-style home is also symmetrical in design with a central hallway on all floors with rooms on



1920 North Victoria Drive

either side. The formal living and dining rooms are typically in the front of the home, with a kitchen and family room in the rear. Bedrooms are usually on the second and third floors.

One interior feature common to this architectural style is placing a large fireplace centrally or at the end of the home. Another distinction in Floral Park is a combination of plaster and wood sidings. Both famous architects Gerard Colcord (who built the stately Colonial home at 2002 Victoria Drive) and Paul Williams designed quite a few of these “Southern California” twists of Colonial Revival style.

Colonial architecture is often recognizable for having steeply pitched roofs that allow heavy snow loads to slide off in cold weather locations. This roof design creates an illusion, as the triangle shape is only visible from the sides. From the front, only shingles are visible. Gabled roofing systems can provide additional attic space and better ventilation.

The entryways of colonial homes have several stand-out features designed



2360 North Park Boulevard



2109 North Heliotrope Drive



2115 North Heliotrope Drive



2450 North Riverside Drive



2440 North Riverside Drive



2002 N. Heliotrope Drive

to catch the eye and add a bit of pizzazz to the minimalist exterior. Most have graceful classical columns and pediment adornments that form a charming ‘crown,’ sometimes extending to create a covered porch. Architects centered paneled doors traditionally flowing with the home’s symmetrical geometry. Transom windows were often placed above the entryway door to add charm and a bit of drama: designs to enhance higher floors and side windows.

Colonial homes also have multiple windows placed symmetrically across the home’s front facade. The windows often have numerous small panes to create a larger window with a grid-like appearance. Typically, windows are on each side of the front door, and three of five windows across the second floor, again intending to stay symmetrical. Commonly, the windows are double-hung and boast shutters or planter boxes as modest adornments. Bay windows are another popular option for colonial homes and they work in harmony

with the architectural theme of simple lines and symmetry. An abundance of windows allows colonial homes to revel in natural daylight and they are perfect for those with stunning garden views surrounding them, often designed originally by Florence Yoch, a landscape architect.

Yoch, who designed classic gardens for homes in Pasadena and Floral Park, also implemented many classic movie sets. When producer David O. Selznick started production on *Gone With The Wind*, he had only one person in mind: Yoch, (she had recently completed the landscaping of his estate in Beverly Hills.) She successfully created the look of the Old South on 40 acres of the RKO backlot in Culver City.

The history of Floral Park begins at the end of a decade that saw genuine interest in all things constructed during a defining period of history. Our country emerged from one of its worst trials, the Great Depression. And while finally growing and working free from that terrible moment in

history, it was turning to face another one yet to come, World War II. Years before the War, America started rationing steel and heavy timber beams in home construction, leaving light-frame, e.g., bearing wall construction inherent in Colonial Revival houses the style of choice instead of post and beam in Spanish style homes. The 1930s saw something of value in the life of their colonial forebears. They saw the dignity of work and industry as a key to the nation’s success; they held dear the country’s founding ideals of independence and democracy. They were looking for a comforting and familiar foundation from which to face the tribulations of the first half of the 20th Century.

Colonial-Revival homes peaked in the 1940s, tapering off in popularity after World War II. However, most would agree that the style is one of the most enduring examples of American architecture. Throughout the decades, Colonial-Revival homes have continued to offer a tried-and-true traditional approach to residential architecture.



2012 North Heliotrope Drive



2013 North Heliotrope Drive



2346 North Park Boulevard