

Old House Guide
Glossary/Index of Terms

-A-

abutment- a solid piece of masonry used to support a projecting part of a structure

acanthus- a common plant of the Mediterranean, whose leaves, stylized form the characteristic decoration of capitals of Corinthian and Composite orders. In scroll form it appears on friezes, panels, etc.

adobe- mud brick dried in the sun; unburned brick of earth and straw; a structure made of such

adaptive use- modifying a building for a use different from that for which it was originally designed. Old houses, for example are often adaptively used as professional offices.

adobe- a sun-dried, unburned brick of earth and straw; a structure made of such bricks

anthemion- a common Greek ornament based upon the honeysuckle or palmette; used singly or as a running ornament in friezes, cornices, iron work, etc; very adaptable decoration

apron- "a decorative, raised panel immediately below a window sill. Particularly to be seen in Renaissance architecture"

arcade- a series of arches supported by columns or piers; a building or part of a building with a series of arches often forming a covered passageway

arch- "a structure of wedge-shaped blocks of material over an opening which support one another by mutual pressure

basket- arch constructed with arcs from 3 centers resembling the handle of a basket

compound, recessed- doorway, where a number of concentric arches are set within and behind each other; a series of arches, one on top of another, growing smaller as they move away from the surface and into the interior of the structure, a form of décor detailing used for the enhancement of the main portal or window.

diminished- round arch of segmental type

discharging, relieving- round or triangular arch built into wall above a lintel or arched opening to relieve weight from above

drop, obtuse- low, pointed arch with span greater than radius

elliptical- arch shaped like half-ellipse rising above the springing line

equilateral- pointed arch with radii equal to span.

foil- varied groupings, trefoil, cinquefoil, multifoil

four-centred- depressed arch with four arches, the inner and upper two from centres well below the springing line and two outer from centres on the line

horseshoe- centre is above the springing line and curve is prolonged to narrow the arch at impost level giving a horseshoe shape

interlacing- semicircular arches which cross and overlap

inverted- arch built upside-down in foundation work

lancet- pointed arch of tall, narrow shape, its radii larger than the span

ogee- four-centered arch; two of the centres of the arches are outside the arch and two within so to produce a compound curve, one part concave and the other convex

rampant- arch where the springing is at a differ level on one side to other

rear- arched opening on the inner face of wall

segmental- round arch forming segmented circle, center below the springing line

shouldered- false arch with horizontal lintel joined to the doorway jambs by corbels which give concave or convex forms

stilted- tall, round arch with springing line raised above impost level

straight- rectangular opening with lintel made up from radiating voussoirs using the arch principle

strainer- arch inserted across an aisle or nave to prevent walls from leaning

triangular, mitre- triangular-headed arch formed by two slabs joined in a mitre at the top

tudor- four-centred arch where the upper curves are almost flat

architect- specialize in commercial buildings, schools, new homes, restoring/rehabing historic houses. Architects can provide a number of services. They can inspect the house to determine existing conditions of materials and finishes. They can develop the architectural program for the house to determine the best uses for the existing rooms and if an addition is necessary. Can provide conceptual designs, design development drawings, preliminary cost estimates, and contract documents. Able to assist a homeowner to obtain and review bids from contractors, subcontractors, and craftspeople to undertake the construction. Develop the construction schedule and budget and oversee the work as it is being done to ensure it is consistent with the contract documents. Can also sometimes provide historical research and complete local, state, and National Register nomination forms. Will usually charge between 10-15% of the construction value of project for services. Can also provide standard contracts between the homeowner and contractors, subcontractors, craftspeople, and others involved with the project.

architectural design- develop final design drawings for the project, including site plans, floor plans, elevation, sections, and significant preservation details; special materials & construction techniques should be included

architrave- the lowest part of an entablature resting on the capital of a column; the moldings around a doorway

archaeological research- investigates below-ground project area particularly on historically important sites to recover, protect, and evaluate artifacts and earlier periods of occupation and use

ashlar- stones hewn and squared for use in building, as distinguished from rough stones

astylar- "describes a classical façade w/o columns or pilasters

asymmetric- an irregular arrangement of parts

atrium- open courtyard surrounded by covered rooms

-B-

baluster/balustrade- short pillars or posts in series supporting handrail and standing upon base or string

barge couple- roof beams, mortised and tenoned together to strengthen roof

bargeboard- the decorative board attached to the projecting portion of the gable roof; the same as a vergeboard; during the late part of the 19th century, frequently extremely ornate

barge course- roof tiles carried forward to project at the gable end and made good with mortar to keep out rain/snow

base- part of column between shaft and pedestal or pavement

batten- long piece of timber of small, rectangular section, used as a fixing for laths in plasterwork or roofing slates

battlement- indented parapet at top of wall. indents called *embrasures* or *crenelles*, and raised portions are *merlons* or *cops*

bay- vertical division of exterior/interior of structure; element that protrudes from the façade, usually defined by windows; rises from the ground one or more storeys

Beaux Arts- by exact definition, a school of architecture and art in Paris; by extension the term refers to more conservative design of a Classicist French Baroque style

bellcote, bell gable- turret, gable, or framework on a roof where bells are hung

blank window/door- false door/window

board & batten- vertical siding composed of wide boards that do not overlap, and narrow strips, or battens, nailed over the spaces between the boards

bonding- the various methods of laying bricks, or stones in courses

bracket- member projecting from a wall, plain or ornamental, to act as support

building chronology- traces the development of the structure through its construction periods, ownership, and uses. Conclusions are based on information gathered in fabric analysis and the archival/literature search. Takes the form of text and a series of chronological plan overlays
buttress- reinforcement to and projection from a wall, so as to allow walls to be thinner, increase to aesthetic appeal

-C-

caliduct- a pipe or channel for conveying hot air, water, or steam for heat

cantilever- specialty shaped beam supported securely at one end and carrying load at the other end or distributed uniformly along beam. ex. stairs; construction which projects from the main mass of a building, anchored firmly in that mass; from below it appears structurally to be free-standing since its extension has no support; used particularly for balcony construction and wherever a “floating” effect is desired

capital- crowing feature of a column or pilaster, ornaments junction between arch and column. Top member of capital is a flat slab called the *abacus*

cartouche- an elaborate frame with scrolled and decorated parts, resembling curled paper

casement- a window with two upright sections opening in the center and hinged at the sides; in American architecture it was the invariable type of pre-Georgian building after which it was replaced with the double hung window; this form persisted into the 20th century; the casement window was revived in the later 19th century

1. a hollow molding

2. type of window frame opening on hinges affixed to the vertical side of the outer frame

cast iron- an iron alloy which is shaped by pouring it while in a molten state, into a mold

castellated- constructed in the style of a castle, having battlements

CCDC- Center City Development Corporation, tasked to plan and monitor the redevelopment of downtown San Diego

CEQA- California Environmental Qualities Act, state ordinance that outlines the protection of natural, cultural and historic sites and mandates the requirements for completing an EIR.

Chicago School- a general term to group architects and progressive building tendencies of the late 19th century in Chicago, where skyscraper construction of a metal skeleton with a sheathing of protective surface was first developed; the group included engineers like Jenney, early-modern architects like Sullivan, the young Frank Lloyd Wright, and its forms ranged from monumental commercial and civic building to houses

CPF- California Preservation Foundation, a statewide non-profit group acting as a coalition of community preservation groups and city and state authorities

certified local government- a local government whose historic preservation program has been certified pursuant to Section 101 (c) (1) of the National Historic Preservation Act

chair rail- molding applied to walls of a room at suitable height to prevent chairs from damaging walls

chambranle- decorative border on the top and sides of doors, windows, and chimneypieces

chimney pot- a pipe placed on top of a chimney, usually of earthenware, that functions as a continuation of the flue and improves the draft

churrigueresque- of or relating to a style of baroque architecture of Spain and its Latin-American colonies, characterized by elaborate and extravagant decoration

clapboard- a long narrow board, originally of cleft oak in New England but often of sawn woods of various types today; used for covering the exterior of timber-framed buildings

clerestory- part of an interior rising above adjacent rooftops, permitting the passage of light

code profile- identifies all applicable codes and regulations and describes how the codes apply to the building and site; profile includes recommendations for life safety, access for people w/disabilities, and regulatory compliance

coffered- deep, regular geometric panels or coffers, sunk in the surface of a ceiling, vault, or dome

column- a vertical structural support that is round in shape and is often decorated with a capital and a base

colonnade- a row of columns, usually equidistant

colonete- a small column, usually very tall and slender in proportion, approaching a “pipe’s stem” in appearance

colonnade- a row of columns

condition survey- utilizes the record drawings and photographs; describes and maps the condition of the structure; and identifies the types, locations, and probable causes of problems

conservation- arresting the physical deterioration of building materials by some type of intervention or corrective measure. Deteriorated stone is often conserved by injecting a consolidant into the surface or deteriorated wood conserved by applying an epoxy mixture.

conservation analysis- investigates and monitors the structure in relation to its behavior and composition; recommends procedures for stabilizing the building, controlling the interior environment, minimizing further deterioration, and repairing damaged parts

console- a support of pseudo-support, often used decoratively, with a scrolled top curbing down into a reverse scroll, the scrolls are generally called volutes

coping- the top covering of an exterior masonry wall

corbel- a bracket of block projecting from the face of a wall that generally supports a cornice, beam or arch

“corbelling out”- refers to the building of one or more courses of masonry out from the face of a wall to support timbers or a chimney

cornice- projecting ornamental molding along the top of a building or wall

course- continuous layer of masonry of equal thickness, in a wall

cresting- a line of ornament finishing a roof; Victorians especially Second Empire and Eastlake styles often feature a small cast iron railing with decorative points on roofs and balconies

cupola- a small dome or similar structure on a roof; Italian Villa windowed cupola was used from which to enjoy the view and was called a belvedere, also called a lantern

-D-

dado- lower part of an interior wall when paneled or painted separately from the main part

dentil- toothlike ornaments, in a row or “course” originally associated especially with the Ionic order

district- a district possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development. A district can also be a grouping of archeological sites related primarily by their common components, cultural affiliation, period of use, or site type.

documentation- prepares measured drawings, collects field notes, and takes photographs that will provide a record of the property as found

dome- a roof formed by a series of arches, roughly forming a semicircle

dormer- vertically set window on a sloping roof; also the roofed structure housing such a window

-E-

eaves- the projecting overhang at the lower edge of a roof

EIR- Environmental Impact Report, a detailed report generated to address the impact of a new construction or redevelopment project on an area

embodied energy- all of the energy invested in bringing a material to its final product, including transportation

entablature- the horizontal bar above columns or pilasters; in classical architecture and its derivatives, the entablature is divided into three sections from bottom to top; the architrave, the frieze characteristics entablature

-F-

fabric analysis- analyzes the materials, workmanship, and equipment of the structure in relation to their physical nature, sources, and dates of construction

façade- the front of a building

façade easements- a tool used to maintain the historic material of a building. Easements of exterior walls and or sight corridors are given, in perpetuity, to a non-profit organization in order to achieve certain tax benefits. The organization ensures the building owner maintains/preserves the facades.

fanlight- semi-circular window over a door or window with radiating bars or tracery in the form of an open fan

fenestration- the arrangement of windows in a wall

finial- a terminal part, usually on a high vertical building element such as a church spire or decorative roof feature

flat arch- an arch whose intrados (soffit) is a horizontal line

fluting- vertical channeling of a columnar or pilaster shaft

folly- purely decorative building, without function, such as the Gothic ruins built to romanticise parks and gardens

fret work- intersecting decorative patterns, particularly those made possible by fret saws working in wood

frieze- the middle part of the entablature in Classical architecture; between the architrave and the cornice

-G-

gable- the portion of a building enclosed by the end or masking the end of a pitched roof

curvilinear gable- decorative gable treatment

gambrel- a roof of double slope, like a flexed leg

gazebo- an outdoor pavilion or summer house popular for lawns and gardens of rural houses in the Victorian era

-H-

half-timbered- descriptive of 16th & 17th century houses built with timber framing with the spaces filled in with plaster or masonry; initiated with the Tudor Revival

Historic Structure Report- coordinating and assembling all of the necessary studies into a single document constitutes a comprehensive Historic Structures Report (HSR); should be a dynamic process for decision making rather than a fixed product

Historical Researcher- typically provides the homeowner with a written report detailing the history and architecture of the house, along with biographical sketches of former owners or inhabitants, particularly if they were important figures. A researcher traces the development of a house over time, focusing on important periods or dates to consider in its restoration or rehabilitation. Researchers can also complete nomination forms to list properties in the National or state register or local list of historic buildings.

hood mold- a projecting molding over an opening to throw off rain water, often used in a purely decorative manner in the Victorian Gothic

-I-

interior designer- specializes in interior finishes, including wall, floor and ceiling surfaces, fixtures such as lighting, kitchen, and bathroom and furnishings.

-J-

jamb- the side of a window or door opening against which the sash or the door abuts

-K-

keystone- the central stone of an arch

-L-

lancet window- a narrow window with a sharp, pointed arch; it was a feature of the Gothic Revival house

landscape architect/designer- analyze the design and condition of an existing landscape, design one that is appropriate to your house, and prepare drawings

lattice- open work produced by interlacing of laths or other thin strips used as screening, especially in the base of the porch

leaded glass window- a window composed of pieces of glass that are held in place with lead strips; the glass can be clear, colored or stained; often called stained glass

lintel- the piece of timber or stone that covers an opening and supports the weight above it

loggia- a rostrum developed in medieval Italian towns, roofed, slightly elevated, and open on three sides, from which orators could address crowds

louver/louvre- one of a series of horizontal slats, tilted to exclude rain and snow but to pass air, a ventilating panel

-M-

maintenance- cleaning, repairing a building on an ongoing basis. Maintenance can be as simple as sweeping the floors or as extensive as repainting the exterior.

mansard- the classic mansard roof has steep sides broken by dormer windows; prominent feature of the Second Empire style in mid-19th century, named after French architect, Francois Mansart

medallion- a circular or oval plaque fixed to a surface

mezzanine- low story introduced between two loftier ones, usually the ground and first floors

modillion- an ornamental horizontal block or bracket placed under the overhand of the cornice

mullions- the strips inside the sash that divide a multi-paned window; also called "muntins"

-N-

-O-

orders- in architecture, the basic or columnar or pilaster types of the Classical world: the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian of the Greeks and the Doric, Tuscan, Ionic, Corinthian and composite of the Roman, Renaissance & later eras

oriel window- a bay window that projects from the wall of an upper story and is carried on brackets, corbels, or a cantilever; is often confused with bay window; difference is that a bay starts at the ground, while the oriel begins above the first story

-P-

Palladian window- window composed of a main window having an arched head and on each side a long, narrow window with a square head; also called a Venetian window

parapet- a low, solid, protective wall or railing along the edge of a roof or balcony

pavilion- the projecting subdivision of a large building, forming an angle with the main facade

pediment- a wide, low pitched gable surmounting the façade of a building in a classical style; any similar triangular crowning element used over doors, windows, niches, usually triangular but may be curved

pendant- a hanging ornament, on roofs and ceilings, used extensively as a decorative feature in Gothic Revival architecture

pendentive- a curved support shaped like an inverted triangle used to support a dome

piers- a support for masonry of rectilinear shape

pilaster- a shallow pier attached to a wall; commonly used around doors and windows; often decorated to resemble classical columns and are generally fluted with grooves and channels or reeded, the opposite of fluted; a series of convexities like a bundle of reeds

plinth- the base block of a column, pedestal, or other isolated object; or the base block at the juncture of baseboard and trim around an opening

portal- the principal entry of a structure or wall of a city

portico- a porch, entrance way, or walk consisting of a roof supported by columns

post & lintel- a method of construction in which vertical beams (posts) are used to support a horizontal beam (lintel)

preliminary survey- describes the property in general terms and evaluates its level of integrity, physical condition and probable historical significance. Recommends historic preservation work plan, professional services that will be needed and preliminary cost estimates for continuing work.

preservation- applying the measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property; generally focuses on the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic fabric rather than replacement or new construction

preservation- maintaining a house, its yard, and history for future generations to enjoy. Most people are engaged in some form of preservation whether they consider themselves preservationists or not.

program- determines how the property will be used in the future; the program for use should be appropriate for the significance of the property and should describe new physical requirements in substantial detail. Functional needs will have an impact on code compliance, preserving the historical integrity of the structure, and the preservation treatments that will be needed to protect the building fabric.

-Q-

quadrant- by definition, a quarter circle by extension a more generalized curved shape or area

quatrefoil window- a window shaped in a leaf pattern composed of four leaflets of the same shape

Queen Anne window- small glass window pane, but arranged in a different form and usually only on the upper sash

quoin- stones or bricks which form the corner of a building, often distinguished decoratively from the adjacent masonry

-R-

reconstruction- depicting by means of new construction the form, materials, features, and character of a historic property that no longer exists, as it appeared at a particular period of time, in concordance with the restoration period

reconstruction- rebuilding a destroyed building exactly as it was. After a fire or natural disaster, many homeowners choose to reconstruct their home rather than buy a new one.

rehabilitation- adapting a property for continuing or new compatible use through repair, alteration, and additions, while preserving those portions or features that convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values

rehabilitation- returning a building to a state of usefulness while preserving architecturally significant features and materials. The rehabilitation of a house may involve creating a modern kitchen within the existing building or adding a new garage while preserving the house's original exterior materials and details

relief- moldings and ornamentation projecting from the surfaces of a wall

relocation- moving a building from its original site. Most preservation professionals do not advocate the relocation of a historic building, since relocation divorces a building from its historic setting. Sometimes relocation is the only way to save a building from destruction.

remodeling- modernizing a building with attempting to retain or preserve its significant features. It often involves removal of important architectural features or material and the installation of new ones, for example, replacing wood clapboard with vinyl siding. Remodeling a historic home, therefore is usually considered inappropriate

renewable- when a resource comes into being through a relatively fast-acting natural processes

restoration- accurately depicting the form, materials, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time; retains as much of the historic period fabric as possible; inconsistent features may need to be removed and missing features faithfully reconstructed in accordance with the restoration period

restoration- returning a house to some particular date or period. In the strictest sense, restoring a 1810 Federal townhouse to its date of construction would involve removing all subsequent changes, including central heating and air-conditioning systems, plumbing, and other features necessary to make the house livable today. Since this almost never occurs, the term restoration has come to mean returning the exterior and interior appearance of a house to some selected date while carefully incorporating modern technologies.

retrofitting- British term for adaptive reuse. In this country the terms are often used interchangeably

rinseau- a foliate ornament, often in garland form

rose window- a round window, usually with tracery

rustication- stone construction in which the joints are emphasized or rusticated, usually in a regular pattern of beveled edges

-S-

salvage- saving parts of a historic house from destruction by removing them prior to demolishing the building. As with relocation, most preservation professionals do not advocate salvage except as a last resort

sawn wood ornament- ornamental woodwork, popular in the Victorian era for trim on porches, eaves, fences, often called gingerbread, scrollwork, and fretwork

segmental arch- a round arch whose intrados includes less than a semicircle

sill- the lower horizontal closure of a door or window frame; the heavy foundation of a building which supports the posts and studs of the walls above

soffit- the underside of any subordinate member of a building, such as the under surface of an arch, cornice, eave, beam or stairway

spire- an elongated point on top of a tower

stabilization- halting further deterioration of a building. The term frequently applied to a building's structural elements

stained glass window- window with painted scene or words on the glass that is then fired onto the glass; just colored glass windows are often called stained glass, but a true stained glass window is more the product of the art of the painter than the glazier

sustainable- a resource or system that meets present needs without compromising those of future generations

swag- a festive decoration of semi-loops with loose ends, similar to a swag of fabric; also called festoons, and when composed of flowers, called garland; swags in stone, wood, or stamped metal were popular ornaments for the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival houses

symmetric- the correspondence in size, form, and arrangement of parts on opposite sides of a plane; balance in design and proportion; the same on each side

-T-

tiles- baked earthenware tiles of a curved shape arranged in an interlocking manner to act as the primary roofing material

mission tiles- half cylindrical tiles, one variation is the tapered Mission tile

Spanish tiles- an S-shaped tile

tracery- delicate ornamental work consisting of interlacing lines, the intersecting of ribs and bars, as in rose windows and the upper part of Gothic windows

transom window- any small window over a door or another window, often containing stained or leaded glass

turret- a small tower, usually starting at some distance from the ground, attached to a building

-V-

vault- an arched brick or stone ceiling or roof; the simplest form is the barrel vault, a single continuous arch; the groined vault consists of two barrel vaults joined at right angles, a ribbed vault has diagonal arches projecting from the surface

verandah- a roofed open gallery or porch; important feature of the mid-19th century romantic, picturesque houses

Victorian- term used to cover all the various kinds of houses and public buildings built during the reign of Queen Victoria—1837-1901; “Edwardian” is used in England to describe buildings in the first decades of the 20th century, in America they are generally known as “turn of the century”

volute- a spiral

-W-

wheel window- round windows with mullions radiating from the center, as in the spokes of a wheel; also called Catherine-wheel; those with tracery are generally known as Rose windows, while the round window without tracery or mullions is known as an “oculus” or “oeil-de-boeuf” Bull’s Eye window

widow’s walk- a narrow platform on a roof, usually with a wooden balustrade, originally a feature of the early New England house with a view of the sea; today often used to denote any small roof top with a balustrade or cresting