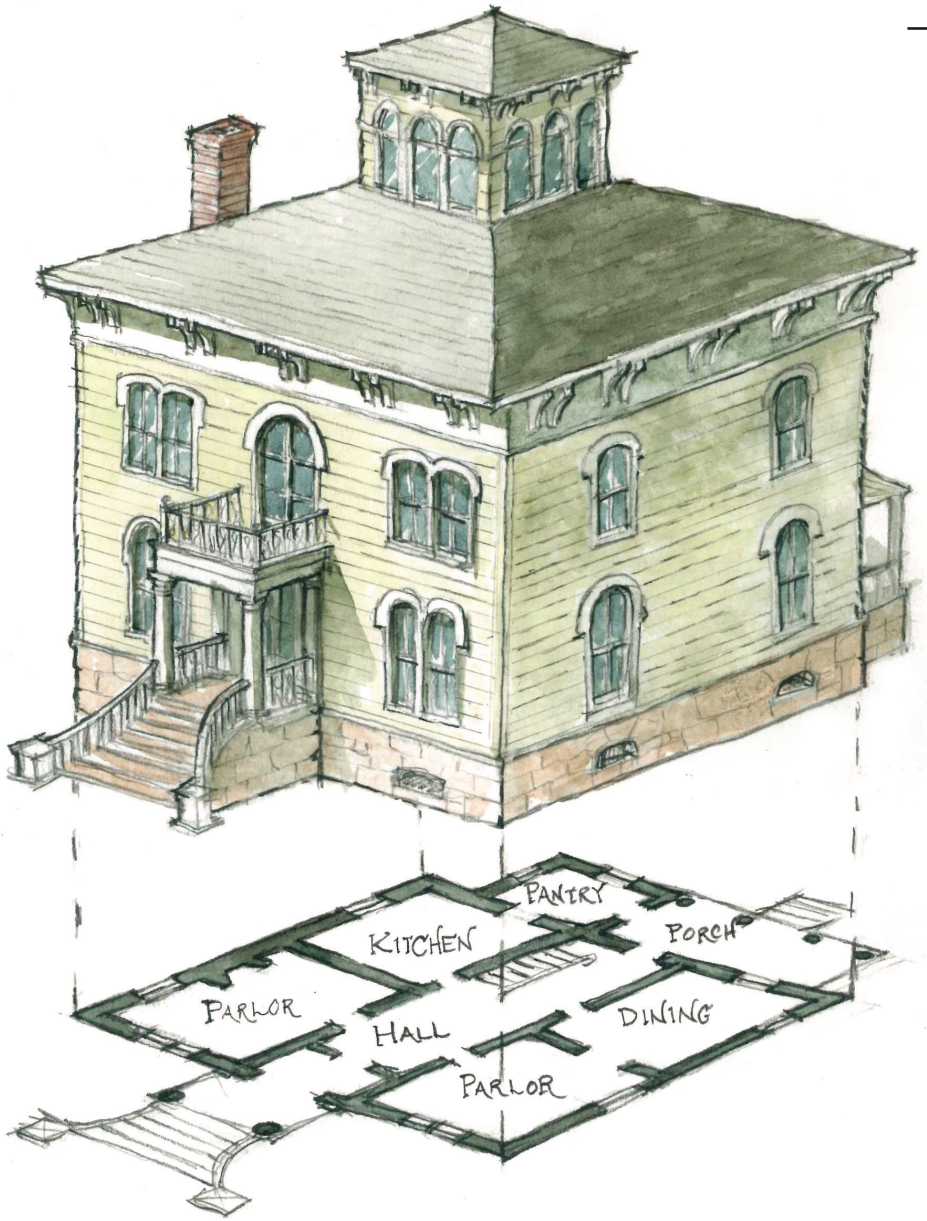
# Italianate

Historic Resources • Santa Barbara, California

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## Introduction

As a city, Santa Barbara underwent massive growth during the 1870's when Italianate architecture was extremely fashionable on the West Coast. Nearly always built of wood, Santa Barbara's Italianates portray their strong tie to fellow Victorian styles, while showing their Italian reference through their low sloped roofs, large eave extensions and bold, expressive brackets. Italianate continues to command a prominent place in the look and feel of Santa Barbara's streetscape.

*Constructed in 1871-72, this Italianate house on Chapala Street, designed by Architect and Mayor Peter Barber, features paired brackets under the eaves, elongated one-over-one, double hung windows, square porch posts with beveled corners and an ornate front door.*

*One of Santa Barbara's largest Italianate buildings at 925 De La Vina was constructed in 1874-75 as Saint Vincent's School and Orphanage. The building's Italianate features include tall, narrow arched windows and wide overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets.*

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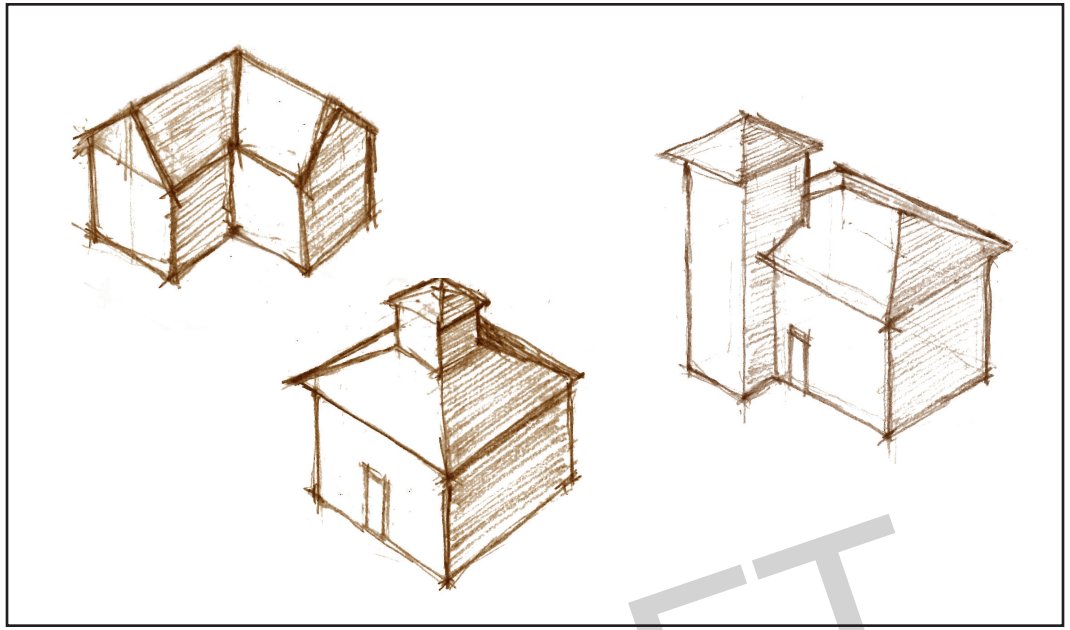
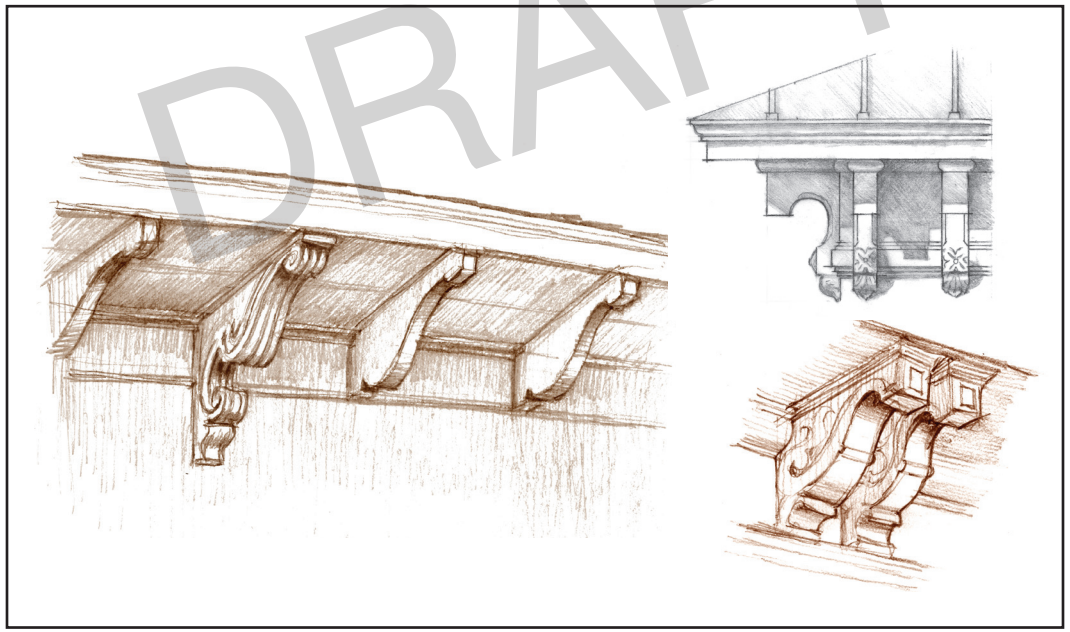
# HISTORY

In the United States, thanks in part to landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing's pattern books, Italianate architecture was popular in California from 1870 to 1890. Nationwide, Italianate overshadowed Gothic Revival by 1860, but was curtailed by the financial panic of 1873. By the time the economy had stabilized, Italianate was supplanted by the new Queen Anne style.

Like most of California, architectural styles took a while to travel from the eastern United States to Santa Barbara. For this reason, Santa Barbara's Italianate was at its peak from 1870 to 1880. In Santa Barbara the Italianate houses nearly always had wood siding as their main wall surface, in part due to an abundance of lumber on the west coast. The earlier versions of Italianate usually had very large weatherboards for siding because until 1872, Stearns Wharf had not been built, and all wood had to be floated ashore. One of the chief champions of Santa Barbara's Italianate was the influential mayor and architect, Peter Barber (see the photograph at the top left of this page of an Italianate building he designed in Santa Barbara.)

Several examples of Italianate architecture can be found in the Brinkerhoff Avenue Landmark District as well as dotted throughout upper west side of downtown along Chapala and De La Vina Streets.





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## MASSING & OVERALL FORM

Referencing the Italian farmhouse and villa, Italianate architecture often has an asymmetrical plan and square tower of the late medieval type. Long porches, which sometimes wrap around the building, protruding balconies and tall windows extend the living area outside. The center of the roof of Italianates often has a tower or belvedere, which means "beautiful view", that provides a place to look-out over picturesque vistas. Italianate architecture is blocky with no curved walls and comes in both asymmetrical arrangements as well as simple, symmetrical layouts.

Roofs are typically hipped, although there are a number of gabled or hipped-with-cross-gable examples. The shallow roof-pitch (around 4:12) helps to set apart the Italianate from the other Victorian styles. The low roof-slope is also conducive to Santa Barbara's mild climate, where there is no need to shed snow.

## CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES

**Cornice and Eave Details:** The most universal feature of the Italianate is the cornice line dominated by strong, decorative brackets. The brackets are typically spaced at regular intervals either individually, or in pairs. Usually, the cornice has both brackets and ornamental moldings that are derived

from the classical moldings of the entablature, which is the top portion of traditional buildings.

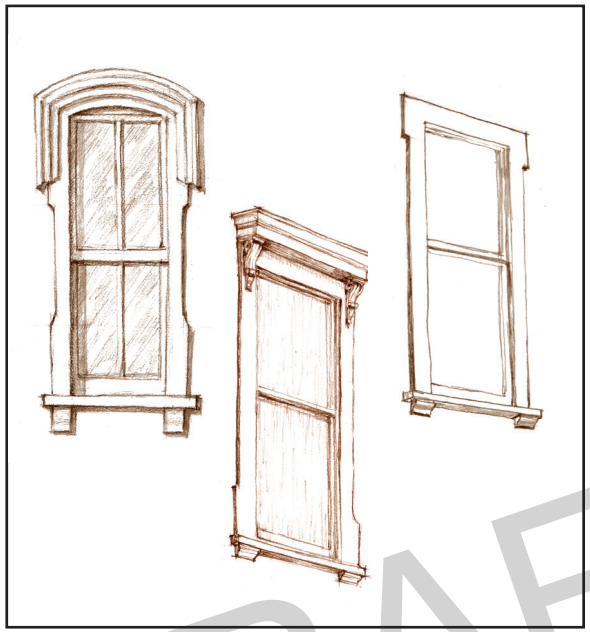
**Porch Columns:** Porches are usually comprised of single or paired square posts with beveled corners, are one story tall, and are topped with a band of moldings.

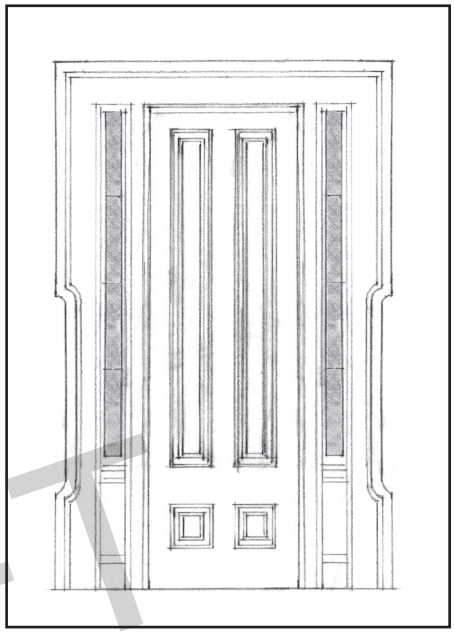
**Doors:** The main entrance often features double doors that are lavishly enriched with framing details, making a dramatic entry statement that is often accompanied by balconies and arcaded single story porches.

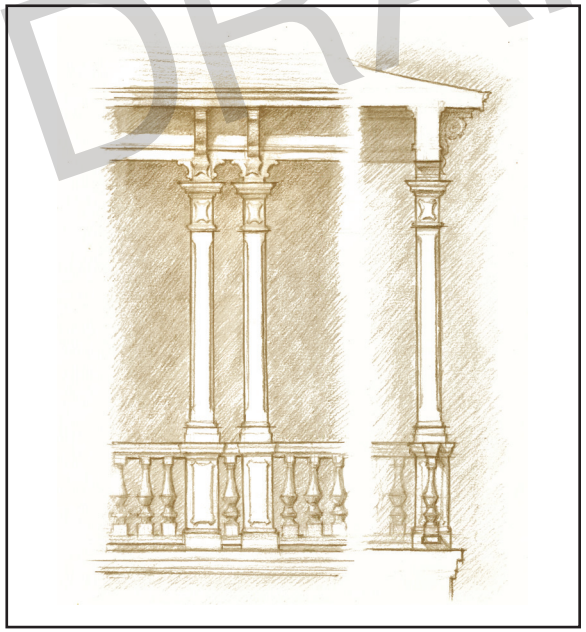
**Windows:** Italianate windows are known for their elongated proportions and are usually either one or two panes per sash. They are often paired together and sometimes even grouped in threes. Italianate is the first style to regularly use curve-topped windows (full arch, segmental arch, or flattened arch), although rectangular windows were common as well. Three types of window adornment are typical: 1. The hooded version (curved windows); 2. The bracketed with entablature (rectangular windows); 3. Framed with trim molding (either curved or rectangular).

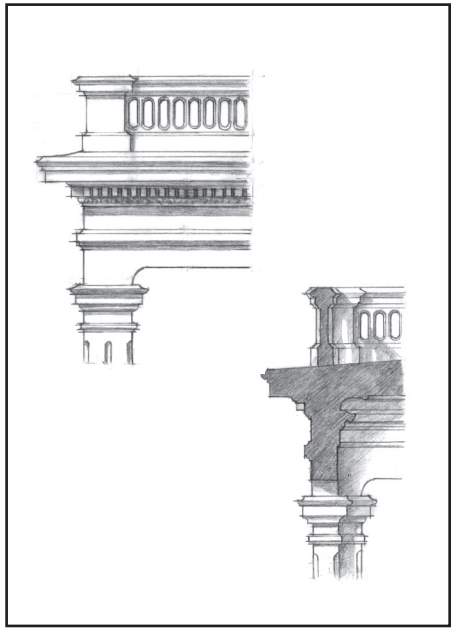
**Dormers:** Italianate buildings rarely had dormers, but sometimes had a square cupola, tower or belvedere.

**Wall Material:** Santa Barbara's Italianate buildings were often made of brick or shiplap wood siding (see Exterior Woodwork chapter of guidelines for an illustration).









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