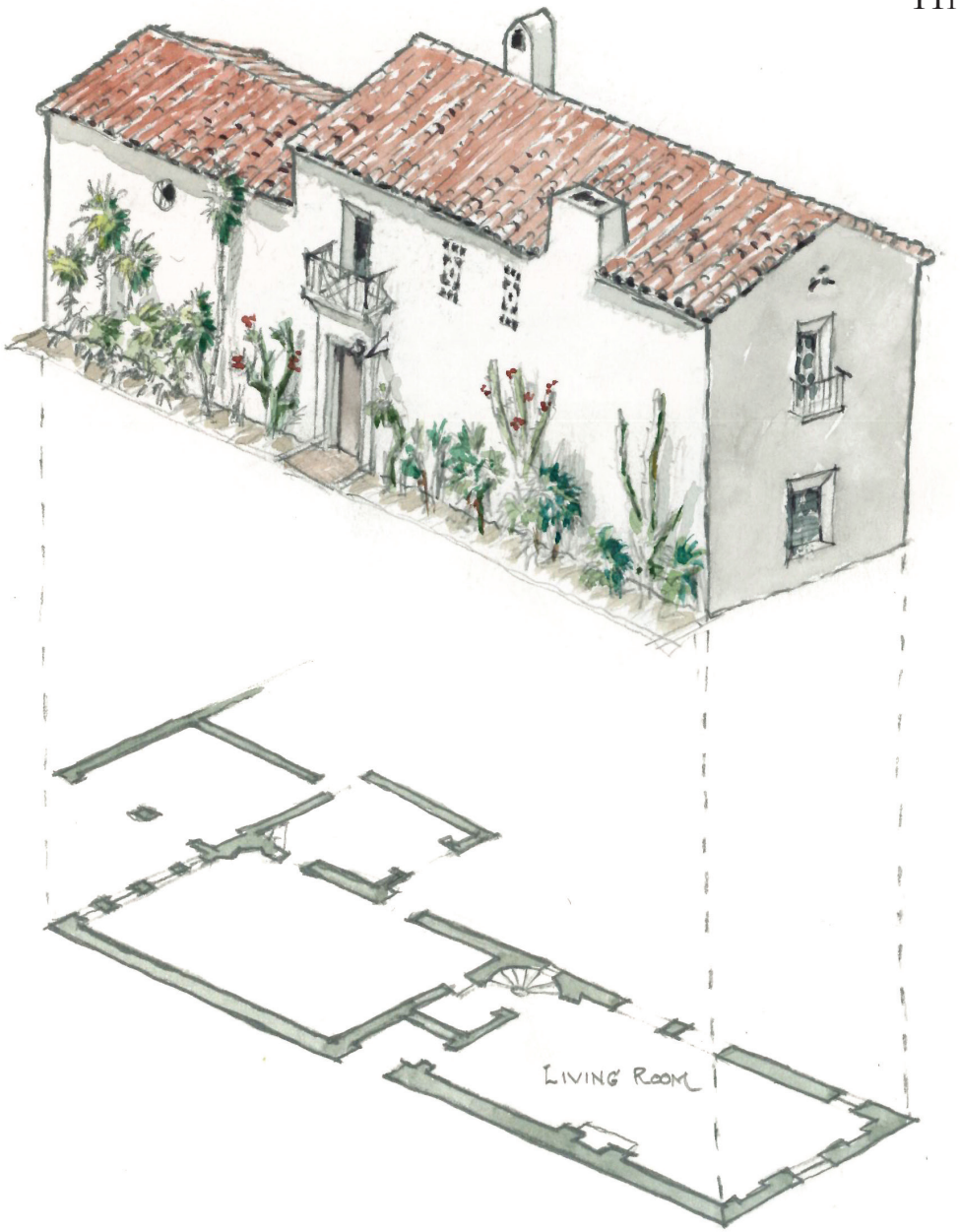
Spanish Colonial Revival

Historic Resources • Santa Barbara, California



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Introduction

Known for its Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, Santa Barbara owes much of its charm to the many thick plaster walls and clay tile roofs of this style. The various subtle details carved in wood or crafted in iron add to the quality of the architecture and character of the city. Spanish Colonial Revival architecture will always be key to Santa Barbara's identity.

See the El Puelo Viejo Design Guidelines for more details of the style.

The 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival hotel in West Beach neighborhood features decorative tile steps and a plaster balustrade leading to the front entrance.

The 1925 Spanish Colonial Revival house across from the Mission features wood entrance doors, recessed wood windows, smooth stucco walls, and red terra-cotta roofs.

HISTORY

In 1916, Bertram Goodhue, author of a book on Spanish Colonial architecture, helped to kick-start the new Spanish style with his designs for the Panama-California Expo in San Diego. Until then, the only Spanish themed architecture was based on Mission prototypes. Soon, however, architects and patrons began to look to Spain itself for detailed examples of the Spanish style.

Throughout the territories originally settled by the Spanish in the Southwest, as well as Texas and Florida, the Spanish Colonial Revival flourished. In Santa Barbara, the style was championed by many architects including George Washington Smith, Lutah Maria Riggs, Winsor Soule, Reginald Johnson, William Edwards, and Joseph Plunkett.

Also key to the success of the Spanish Colonial Revival in Santa Barbara was the Plans and Planting Committee through which Pearl Chase and others helped to sway Santa Barbara towards a more unified architectural style based on the City's Spanish Colonial and Mexican past. After the earthquake of 1925, much of this vision was realized in the rebuilding of State Street and the Pueblo Viejo area, from which Santa Barbara has received much of its beauty and notoriety.

The details of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture vary greatly depending on which period of Spanish architecture is being referenced. In Santa Barbara, the Andalusian vernacular, (southern-Spanish farmhouse) was the key inspiration for the simplicity in detail found in much of the region's architecture. The Spanish Colonial Revival style emphasizes the interplay of cubic volumes, patios, pergolas and verandas; each interpreted and redefined by local architects or regions in their own oeuvre of the form, massing, and decorative treatments. In Santa Barbara, the Spanish Colonial Revival style was exemplified by George Washington Smith, one of Santa Barbara's noted architects from the 1920s when he was one of the most popular architects in the United States.

Santa Barbara has examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style throughout the city from the distinct commercial buildings on State Street, to large homes and estates on the Riviera, to multi-family housing and hotels in the West Beach neighborhood along the waterfront.

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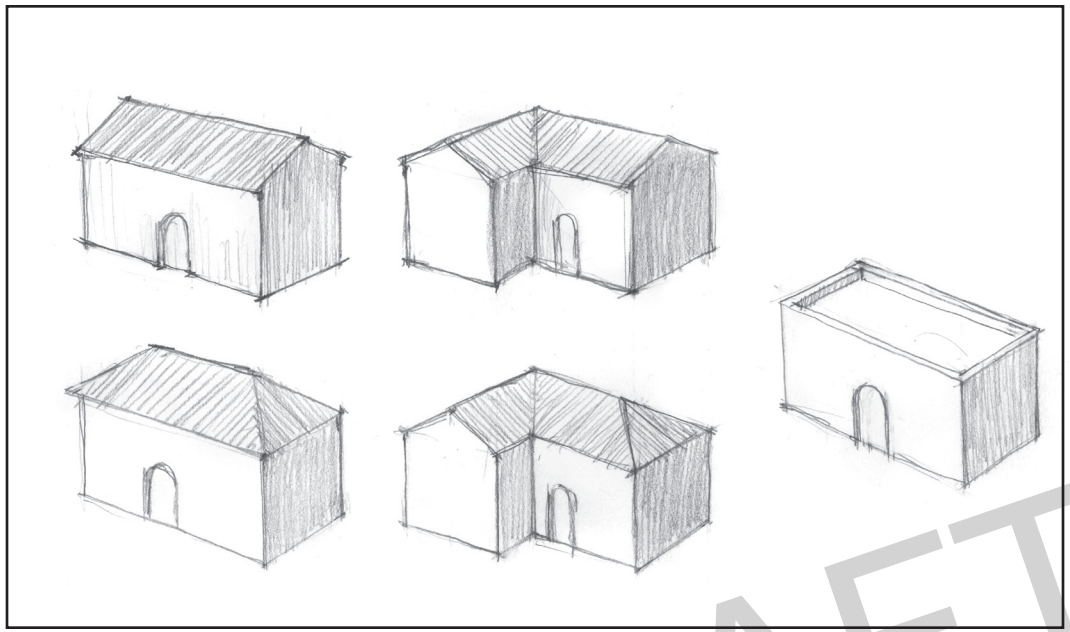
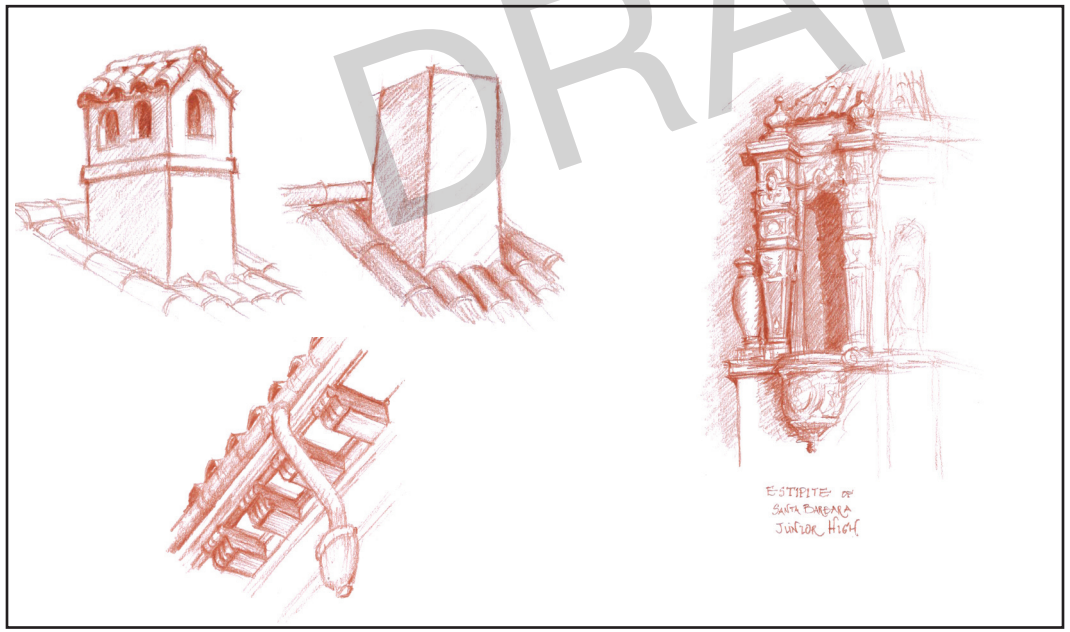


MASSING & OVERALL FORM

The massing of the Spanish Colonial Revival house takes on a wide variety of forms. In all forms, the roof pitch is low (usually 4:12 or less) and an asymmetrical plan is the norm. Five massing types include: the side-gabled type, which is rectangular in form and sometimes includes lower side-wing portions; cross-gabled roof, which typically has one front-facing gable and one side facing gable; the hipped-and-gabled roofs; the hipped roof, which tend to be simple rectangular box-shaped houses; and the flat-roof, which is a relative of the Pueblo Revival house.



CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES

Cornice and Eave Details: Simple if any ornamental detail at the cornices and eaves with the emphasis on the terra cotta tile that create a decorative edge from the roof to the wall.

Porches and Balconies: Front entries are often recessed in a deep wall opening. The emphasis is on balconies with balustrades made of wood, plaster or iron rather than elaborate porches of the Victorian styles.

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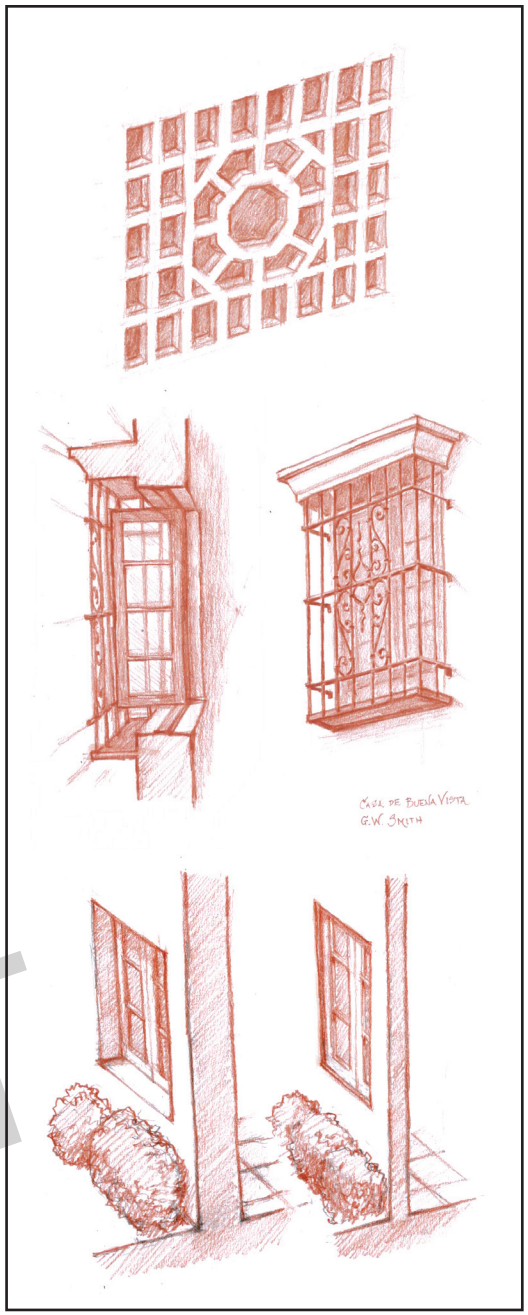
Doors: The wood entry door expresses solidity with an arched decorative plaster or stone surround that sets it apart from the other façade openings. Doors are made of wood planks or panels and recess in the wall plane with a stucco return and no trim. Colorful decorative tiles are used as baseboards, door surrounds, or other features of interest.

Windows: Deeply recessed, wood windows are generally fixed or paired casement windows with lights divided by horizontal mullions. Windows recess at the wall plane with a stucco return with no trim. Awnings are often found at windows openings. Santa Barbara has many Spanish Colonial Revival buildings with a variety of intricate to simple wood or iron grilles (rejas) over the windows, especially on the ground floor.

Vents and Chimneys: Venting in places such as gable peaks is often accomplished through decorative plaster grills. Stucco chimneys are tower-like elements with decorative openings that are both practical and ornamental.

Wall materials: The Spanish Colonial Revival style features smooth, whitewashed, planar, stucco walls, with the emphasis on broad, uninterrupted wall surfaces punctuated by a careful use of openings that are asymmetrically arranged. The thick walls help the plaster building to feel believable as it imitates buildings originally made of load-bearing masonry.



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