

(Library ebook) A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture

# A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture

*Virginia Savage McAlester*  
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"Magisterial . . . The illustrated story of why our houses—great and humble and everything in between—look the way they do." —*The New York Times*

# A Field Guide to American Houses

*The best-selling classic by Virginia and Lee McAlester now revised and expanded to include homes built after 1940 and a new section on how to "read" a neighborhood*

The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture



## Virginia Savage McAlester

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**Virginia Savage McAlester : A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Truly a MasterpieceBy TOmarI always wanted to renovate an old house and purchased a beautiful Colonial Revival home built in 1915. My architect referred to the previous edition of this guide often during the renovation of my home. The new version proves without a doubt that the author is one of the nation's foremost authorities on architecture. There are so many beautiful illustrations that help people who learn

visually like me, link terms with the actual architectural elements. The new guide has been updated to include all styles up to the present day. Not only is this book a must for students of architecture, but anyone who owns a house, is interested in buying a house, or is in the industry. Truly a masterpiece. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. For Anyone Curious about Houses By Marjie, Mother of 9 My dearly beloved is a big fan of houses. He loves to study the architecture and details of housing everywhere we go. So, when I saw this book reviewed in the Wall Street Journal, I knew it would be perfect for him. At the beginning of the book, there are charts with diagrams to help the reader identify the type of house he/she is looking at. For example, a sketch of a roof with a 2 or 3 word description, and the book recommends looking at one or more type of house to see which it is. However, it's also very good for reading, with chapters on the layouts of early towns and so forth. There is also a section on the housing used by various Native American groups. Each chapter about a style of houses includes a few pages of history, etc, before sketches, details about characteristics of the type, and photos of actual houses of each style from various parts of the country. Good for a long reading session, but it's also a fast and easy reference for when you just want to know what you've just seen. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding reference book By Miss V. I love old houses so this review is based on that fact only (not an architectural student). This book is wonderful. It discusses and illustrates the styles of houses in the early days of our country to the present. There are detailed descriptions along with a plethora of photographs of all types of houses, my favorites being the Queen Anne, Tudor, and Gothic Revival (just a personal preference.) I think this is an amazing reference book, I would recommend it to anyone that loves old houses. In my case, because I was unfamiliar with a lot of the technical terms in McAlester's book, I also bought "Old House Dictionary", which helped immensely. Love this book.

For the house lover and the curious tourist, for the house buyer and the weekend stroller, for neighborhood preservation groups and for all who want to know more about their community -- here, at last, is a book that makes it both easy and pleasurable to identify the various styles and periods of American domestic architecture. Concentrating not on rare landmarks but on typical dwellings in ordinary neighborhoods all across the United States -- houses built over the past three hundred years and lived in by Americans of every social and economic background -- the book provides you with the facts (and frame of reference) that will enable you to look in a fresh way at the houses you constantly see around you. It tells you -- and shows you in more than 1,200 illustrations -- what you need to know in order to be able to recognize the several distinct architectural styles and to understand their historical significance. What does that cornice mean? Or that porch? That door? When was this house built? What does its style say about the people who built it? You'll find the answers to such questions here. This is how the book works: Each of thirty-nine chapters focuses on a particular style (and its variants). Each begins with a large schematic drawing that highlights the style's most important identifying features. Additional drawings and photographs depict the most common shapes and the principal subtypes, allowing you to see at a glance a wide range of examples of each style. Still more drawings offer close-up views of typical small details -- windows, doors, cornices, etc. -- that might be difficult to see in full-house pictures. The accompanying text is rich in information about each style -- describing in detail its identifying features, telling you where (and in what quantity) you're likely to find examples of it, discussing all of its notable variants, and revealing its origin and tracing its history. In the book's introductory chapters you'll find invaluable general discussions of house-building materials and techniques ("Structure"), house shapes ("Form"), and the many traditions of architectural fashion ("Style") that have influenced American house design through the past three centuries. A pictorial key and glossary help lead you from simple, easily recognized architectural features -- the presence of a tile roof, for example -- to the styles in which that feature is likely to be found. This eBook edition has been optimized for screen.

From Booklist\* Starred \* This outstanding volume covers more than 50 styles of American residential architecture, from early settlement homes of the seventeenth century to the modern "Millennium Mansions" of the present day. Expanded and completely revised from the 1984 edition, this edition includes American house design from the last three decades and adds more than 600 new photographs and illustrations. The introductory section, "Looking at American Homes," is broken down into distinct narratives. "Style: The Fashions of American Houses" distills the majority of houses into one of four principal architectural traditions; "Form: The Shapes of American Houses" features copious line drawings that show ground plans and proportions; "Structure: The Anatomy of American Houses" details the walls, roofs, and structural elements of a house; and "Neighborhoods: The Groupings of American Houses" highlights the different types of neighborhoods, including a discussion of plans, density, streets and sidewalks, and development influences. Each section that follows covers a specific style (e.g., "Dutch Colonial," "Italianate," "Queen Anne," "Tudor," "Mission," "Prairie," "Ranch"), with notes on identifying features, principal subtypes, variants and details, and geographic occurrence. Numerous black-and-white photographs illustrate the wide variety of houses found within each style, and line drawings express both fine and broad details. The appendix "Approaches to Construction in the 20th and 21st Centuries" discusses prefabricated structures and "green" construction. Copious notes and a bibliography for further reference round out the work. Both scholars and average readers will find much to enjoy in

this volume. Highly recommended for most public and academic libraries—and the price point may allow for a circulating copies. --Rebecca Vnuk "The most authoritative dictionary of the language spoken by the built environment . . . McAlester's book is excellent for the layperson who wants to wander about the neighborhood with a bit more authority, or perhaps for the homeowner who can't decide what kind of windows might look best. It's also useful to those of us who study preservation professionally, to bring our insistence that buildings are just as alive as plants—and just as worthy of careful, affectionate attention—into the broader cultural conversation about urban spaces. That conversation, in which the most mundane elements of building design are cast as characters in the story of a city, turns the streetscape into something greater than the brick and limestone it's made of. It's alive, noisy—and demands our close attention." —Angela Serratore, *The New York Times Magazine* "Magisterial . . . The illustrated story of why our houses—great and humble and everything in between—look the way they do." —Michael Tortorello, *The New York Times* "Once you've pored through Virginia McAlester's photo-packed bible of American home design, you'll be able to identify the saltboxes, Dutch colonials, and brownstones lining your own street, and you'll understand the historical significance of each one." —Tina Jordan, *Entertainment Weekly* "The go-to resource for architecture spotters." —Peter Terzian, *Elle Décor* "Chronicles the past 400 years of American styles, from wigwam to mobile to modern." —Alexandra Wolfe, *The Wall Street Journal* "A classic." —Pilar Viladas, *House Beautiful* "Encyclopedic . . . For lovers of historic homes, this is a rich trove of not just details, but reasons for them." —Susan Clotfelter, *The Denver Post* "880 pages of scholarly wonder." —D Magazine "The definitive guide to American housing styles." —Jim Weiker, *The Columbus Dispatch* "Outstanding . . . Expanded and completely revised . . . Both scholars and average readers will find much to enjoy in this volume." —Rebecca Vnuk, *Booklist* (starred review)

**About the Author** VIRGINIA McALESTER, was educated at Radcliffe and attended the Harvard Graduate School of Design. She is a founding member and past president of Preservation Dallas and also of Friends of Fair Park, the support group for a National Historic Landmark. She serves as an advisor emeritus for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. She is the author of *The Making of a Historic District: Swiss Avenue, Dallas, Texas*, a 40-page booklet "how-to" published by the National Trust in 1975 that historic groups across the country have used as a guide in creating their historic districts. She is coauthor of *The Homes of the Park Cities, Dallas: Great American Suburbs*.