



The NWX American Foursquare

History and Character

Known by a variety of names, including Edwardian, American Basic, and the Basic Box, the American Foursquare made its appearance just after the turn of the 20th Century and reached a boom period around World War I. The American Foursquare design shares the Craftsman Bungalow's virtues of practicality, simplicity and value. Many people considered it the most practical of all housing types, heralding the American Foursquare as "the typical Midwestern farmhouse." Besides being more stylish to a new market of homebuyers, the Foursquare design was cheaper to build than its Victorian counterpart. The Foursquare design had no towers, turrets, sweeping verandas or turned ornament. The box

shape took advantage of every buildable inch, taking full advantage of small city lots and tiny building budgets.

Technically, the Foursquare cannot be called a "style," it is more properly called a type. The Foursquare's basic box form can be wrapped in variety of styles—from Colonial, Craftsman, or Mission to Prairie. Even a few Tudor style details can show up in dormers and window configurations.

Cubish in shape (many designs were more narrow than deep), the American Foursquare is always a full two stories and carries a hipped roof and usually a front roof dormer. Many designs have a raised basement, giving the Foursquare at least four to six steps up the porch to the entrance door. Most include a large entry porch, which spreads across all or part of the main facade.

Essential elements include:

- Defined entrance porch or stoop
- Low-pitched hipped roof with large over-hanging eaves
- Exterior walls clad with horizontal clapboard, brick, shingle or stucco
- Use of natural, local materials for chimneys, foundations, and porch piers
- Simple massing of two to two-and-a-half stories
- Dormers on one or more sides
- One-over-one double hung windows



Exterior Colors

American Foursquare homes were painted a variety of colors and generally correspond to the buildings overall stylistic motif. Natural earth tones of brown, green, burgundy or yellow can be found on Craftsman, Prairie and Mission inspired Foursquares. Colonial inspired Foursquares can have exterior colors of yellow, blue, white and green. The main body of the house is typically the darker tone, while a lighter trim color acts as an accent. Shingled exterior walls are rarely left natural to weather over time. Instead, they are painted a lighter or darker shade of the body color. Foursquare style homes should always be painted at least two tones. Numerous accent colors may occur in small numbers. Most local paint stores have a designated Craftsman style or Colonial style palette of colors from which to choose.

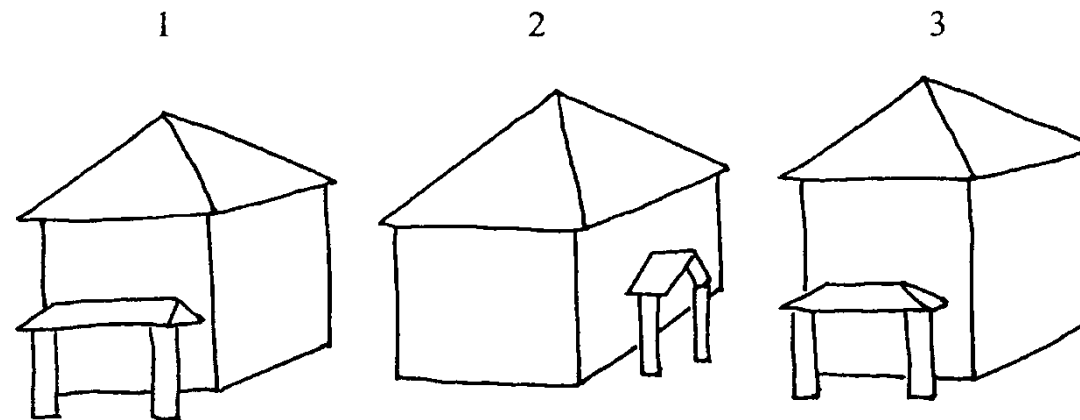
Massing and Attachments

There are three basic Foursquare massing types: (1) the simple cube Foursquare where all four sides of the home are equal in length, (2) the rectangular Foursquare where the main facade is slightly larger than the side facades, and (3) the tower Foursquare where the height of the two floors is greater than the width of the main facade. Variations on these designs can occur. Most Foursquares are not truly square in plan. Nonetheless all designs are always capped with a hipped roof.

The basic plan is commonly broken by a rear wing, a side porch, a small one-story one-room attachment, or a one story projecting bay window. These attachments to the Foursquare can have a hip, gable or shed roof.



Typical Massing



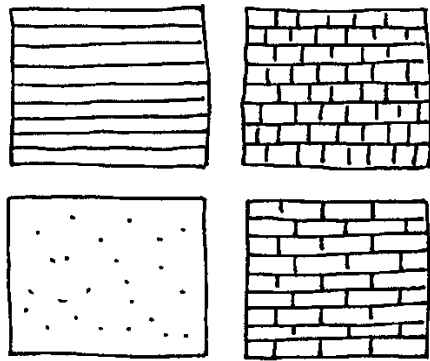
Materials

Foursquare type homes can have a variety of exterior cladding materials. Examples include exteriors of brick, stucco, clapboard, shingle, concrete block or any combination thereof. Most have a wide watertable composed of a 2"x12" board with a continuous drip-cap which separates the foundation from the upper cladding materials. Many models have an additional 2"x10" belt course or "string course" which is tucked directly under the sills of the second floors, might also signify a change in materials from clapboard to shingle or may just serve to break up the tall two-story walls. Roofing materials can be asphalt, wood shingle, or tile on Mission Style examples. Due to the use of exposed rafter tails, gutters are uncommon on Craftsman Style Foursquares. On Colonial examples, decorative wood patterns, such as swags and egg-and-dart designs, are often found above the porch area in the pediment.

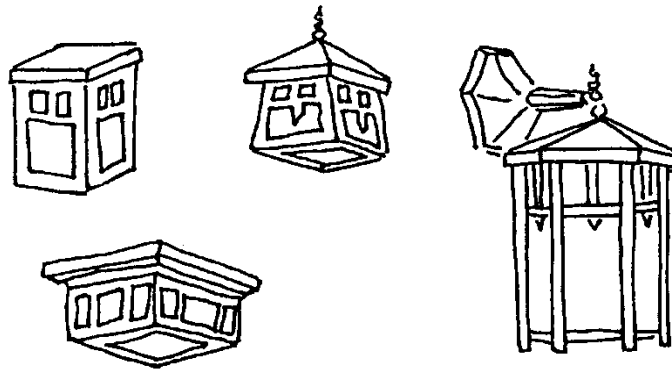
Exterior lighting should be appropriate to the style of the Foursquare. Colonial models should have Colonial type lights and Craftsman, Prairie, and Mission Style Foursquares should have Arts & Crafts inspired lights. Exterior lights can be attached directly to the wall or ceiling, or can hang down on a short chain.



Cladding Details



Lighting



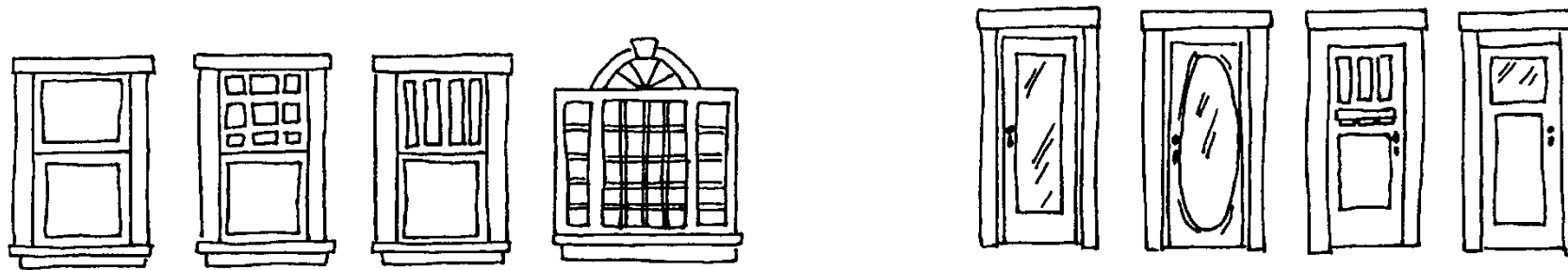
Windows and Doors

The styles of doors and windows on American Foursquare homes are usually dictated by the overall style of the house. Typical windows are double-hung with various patterns of glazing. One-over-ones, six-over-ones, four-over-ones, and three-over-ones are common. Window arrangement is fairly symmetrical on the main facade. However, on the side facades windows can be an assortment of sizes and can be scattered randomly. The windows themselves can be found individually or in groups of two or three. Dormer windows are usually short and broad, like a winking eye, and are frequently ornamental, merely serving to allow light into an attic space. Special windows may include small square windows on either side of the chimney if the outside of the home is Craftsman inspired or a Palladian style window if a Colonial look is desired. Boxed one-story bay windows and even traditional angled bay windows may also be found. Windows are always surrounded by large 2" to 4" moldings, which set them apart from the plane of the wall.

The front doors of most American Foursquare homes are in keeping with the relative plainness of the rest of the exterior. The most popular styles of doors are a half-light design with a beveled panel of plate glass in the upper portion and two or three panels of wood below. Another popular door style is an elongated oval glass, beveled and set within a delicate beaded moulding. Long rectangular panels of clear glass are also common. As a general rule, the style of the front door is generally in keeping with the overall style of the house. If the outside design of the Foursquare is Craftsman, you will of course find a Craftsman inspired door.



Typical Window and Door Styles



Porches and Dormers

Most American Foursquare designs included a large and spacious front porch, although variations of the front porch form are almost as diverse as the stylistic details on the house. A full-width front porch with a hip or shed roof is typical. Porch roof pitches are always less than the steep hip roof of the main house and some examples of flat-roofed porches or pedimented gables can also be found. Other porch designs may include those that shelter only half of the main facade, or even just small gabled stoops on Colonial models. A few unusual Foursquares have wrap-around porches, a hold-over design feature from the Victorian period. Porch columns and railing are typically reflective of the stylistic details of the house. Colonial models have unfluted Doric columns called “Tuscan” columns, while Arts & Crafts inspired columns can be found on Craftsman models. Solid railing and square baluster railing are the most common design.

A common feature of many Foursquare homes is the use of a dormer on the main facade. While many dormers are merely decorative (to allow light into a third story attic), they also serve to scale down the often, large pyramidal roof of the Foursquare. Dormers can be found on the main facade, on all four facades, or any number in between. Prairie Style Foursquares, with their very low-pitched hip roofs, typically do not have dormers. Dormers can have hip roofs, gable roofs and even shed roofs.



Typical Porches and Dormers

