

# City of Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission SPRING 2012 NEWSLETTER

## Garage Sale! Compatible Choices for Historic Homes

Early garage doors took inspiration from stables and carriage houses with panels, cross-bracing, and divided glass panes. They opened by either swinging outward or sliding on a track. Sectional overhead doors appeared in the early 1920s and the electric garage-door opener came out in 1926.

Now, the old stable/carriage look is available in roll-up doors with near-invisible section breaks and custom wood doors with tongue-and groove joints, raised/inset panels, and other architectural relief come in swing-out, bi-fold, or roll-up styles.

Unlike steel, wood is naturally insulating. Finished surfaces both inside and out can be specified in wood species including Western red cedar, vertical-grain Douglas fir, redwood, white oak, and mahogany; the finish may be paint, stain, or a varnish.

Most wood garage doors have hardwood veneer over an insulating core like polystyrene, but custom can be solid wood. Finish moldings can emulate a variety of styles, even on steel and weatherproof composite doors, mimicking carriage-house styles. All can be thermally efficient and accommodate automatic garage door openers.

Styling and detailing of the garage is the key in making it work with the house. Appropriate hardware is also helpful in achieving a cohesive look.

**Garage History:** With the automobile's gaining popularity, the garage (from the French "garer" or the act of docking) was a new kind of building described as "part of every modern home" by 1923. Directly descending from carriage houses and stables, garages became key in protecting cars but there was no consensus on what the "auto house" should look like or where it should be located.

Early garages were 12' x 18' shed-like boxes with no real architectural relationship to the house at the front of the lot. Since installment loans for cars were unavailable in the early 1920s, many owners had little money left for the garage, opting for flimsy portable garages shipped in sections and assembled on-site.

The "pergola garage" came in response to disdain for the other options. The one or two car shelter featured corner columns and trellis framework across the roof. By 1914, kits for pergola garages could be ordered from Sears or Aladdin, who recommended covering it with vines to hide it and create a more garden-like appearance. Some garages were designed into the side of a hill, clad in cobblestone or thatched roofs, while

others were connected with a vine-covered breezeway to emulate the garden look.

In the 1920s, garages were getting architectural cues from the house, with roof lines, timbers, trim, and cornices similar to the home features. Features were applied boldly so to be seen from the street. Some began to boast dormers to ventilate gases and some incorporated guest houses or apartments, growing in size and often built before the house. Materials often included ornamental concrete block, hollow tile, or stucco over wooden frames.

As early as 1907, desire to have the garage near the house was expressed and architects began incorporating the garage in the house walls, either under a porch or often in the basement. This was a common move when space was limited. Some had a mechanical turntable installed to make maneuvering out of the garage easier.

Attached garages grew more popular in the 1920s than built-in or free-standing styles, providing all the advantages without the need to slope the lot or excavate. The attached garage also made the house appear larger.

Attached garages were typically one-story, two-bay designs with gable roofs that contrasted with the main house on one side. Sometimes garages were oriented sideways to blend the roof in with the main roof. Both styles put the garage in close proximity to the kitchen door for unloading groceries.

To avoid looking like an after-thought, some styles (like Colonial Revival) actually balanced the attached garage with a sunroom on the opposite side of the house. Horizontal Ranch homes were perfect for attached garages, while Four Square styles never seemed to get the look right.

By 1945, the garage was also used for extra storage, with the half-story over the double-bay becoming added unheated attic space for garden implements and storm windows. In new slab-construction houses, the second garage bay became workshops or laundry areas.

Since 1945 through today, garages have grown in size and prominence, often seen as the primary feature on the street-facing side of the house, and commonly with three bays, making the house fade into the background. In fact, little effort is made to minimize its visual impact.



# What Style is Your House?

## Modern Style (1935+)

We refer to buildings whose designs largely abandon traditional forms and details as "Modern Style." Modern is a general term that can describe many different house styles. When we describe a house as Modern, we are saying that the design is *not* based primarily on history or traditions. In contrast, a Neo-eclectic or Neo-traditional home incorporates decorative details borrowed from the past. A Neo-eclectic or Postmodern home might have features such as dentil moldings or Palladian windows. A modern home is not likely to have these types of details, but Modern homes do borrow some details from the past, often exaggerating or distorting them. Common elements include flat or low-pitched roofs, exposed structural members, contrasting wall materials and textures, and unusual window shapes and placements.

The concept of modernism would be a central theme in these efforts. Gaining popularity after the Second World War, architectural modernism was adopted by many influential architects and architectural educators, and continues as a dominant architectural style for institutional and corporate buildings into the 21st century.

Modern architecture is a term with a wide varied scope applied to an overarching movement that is generally characterized by simplified form and creation of ornament from the structure and theme of the building. In a broader sense, early modern architecture began with efforts to reconcile the principles underlying architectural design with rapidly advancing technologies and the modernization of society. It takes in numerous movements, schools of design, and architectural styles, some in tension with one another, and often

Common themes of modern architecture include:

- the notion that "form follows function", an ideal originally expressed by Frank Lloyd Wright's early mentor Louis Sullivan, meaning that the result of design should derive directly from its purpose
- simplicity and clarity of forms and elimination of "unnecessary detail"
- visual expression of structure (as opposed to the hiding of structural elements)
- the related concept of "truth to materials," in that the true nature or natural appearance of a material should be seen and not concealed or altered to represent something else
- use of industrially-produced materials; adoption of the machine aesthetic particularly in International Style modernism, a visual emphasis on horizontal and vertical lines

The evolution of modern architecture can be seen several ways. Some historians view it as a social matter, tied closely to projects of Modernity and Enlightenment, thus developed as a result of social and political revolutions. Others see this style as primarily driven by technological and engineering developments while

still others see Modernism as a matter of taste, reacting against eclecticism and the stylistic excess of Victorian and Edwardian styles.



With the Industrial Revolution, newly-available building materials such as iron, steel, and sheet glass drove the invention of new building techniques. Additional experimentation

equally defying such classification.

In the later half of the twentieth century, architects and builders turned away from historic housing styles. These modern homes took on a wide variety of shapes. architectural historians Virginia & Lee McAlester identified a few of the most popular categories:

- Minimal Traditional (1935-1950): Small, one-story homes with low-pitched roofs
- Ranch (1935-1975): One-story homes with a long, linear shape
- Split-Level (1955-1975): A two-story variation of the Ranch shape
- Contemporary (1940-1980) Low, one-story home with flat or almost-flat roof or with a tall, exaggerated gable
- Shed (1960-Present): Angular homes with oddly-shaped roofs and trapezoid windows (shown above)

and ideas came following the First World War, with experiments in Art Nouveau and related movements around the world. The Modern designs grew out of stylistic threads from throughout world. In time, Modernism generated reactions, most notably Post-modernism which sought to preserve pre-modern elements (while Neo-modernism emerged as a reaction to Post-modernism). In the 1930s, Frank Lloyd Wright experimented with his Usonian ideas for a uniquely U.S. American (ergo "US-onian") take on modernism.

*"What Style is Your House?" was a regular feature of early HPC Newsletters; some information in these articles may have already been published or compiled from other sources like Old House Journal online, Wikipedia, and about.com as well as from our recent Historic Resources Survey of the Jacksonville Historic.*