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> Style Matters

{ BASIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES YOU NOTICE,
BUT DON'T KNOW. }

By Dale Gardon, AIA, LEED AP



This courtyard of a Spanish Colonial home exhibits extraordinary charm and intimacy created by the inclusion of design elements such as the fountain, exterior stairs, Juliet balcony, awning, and ornamental features of the railings and decorative lights.

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BY DALE GARDON

> The most distinguishing homes have some basis and RECOGNITION TO AN ARCHITECTURAL STYLE, whether they are traditional or contemporary. In addition, even if a home has an identifiable style, THE DESIGN MUST ALSO EXHIBIT GOOD DESIGN JUDGMENT based on some basic design principles that apply to all styles. Therefore, if a home has been designed in a recognizable style and has executed the design principals well, it leads to instant recognition and appreciation by others as well as immediate and long-term enhanced value.

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Photos by Dino Tonn



So, what else is there if this is the obvious truth of design? There is no real requirement to follow the “rules of style”—and that’s why we see both beautiful expressions of architectural art created by talented architects, builders, and craftsman and inexcusable examples of architectural aesthetic disasters. The real difference between these two distinct outcomes lies in the hands of the creator of the architectural vision and his or her artistic and technical ability to decide what makes truly great and memorable architecture. This is not only about understanding architectural styles but also what the fundamental principles to creating great residential architecture are and how accurately those principles were understood and ultimately executed.

>WHAT IS STYLE?

The term *style* may invoke thoughts of fashion or trends, but that’s certainly not timeless relevance because fads come and go. Architectural styles have been identified and documented and should last through any change in fashion. Each of the defined styles have evolved for centuries, and all styles have an overlying set of design principles to interpret and follow for any home to be considered visually pleasing. Traditional styles have historic relevance, which gives the building an instant sense of reverence. This often can translate into an instant perception of increased value. Homes designed without any perceived style discipline often have much less appeal since they are really just architectural mish-mash. This is often what we see while driving from one end of the Valley to the other: structures that have no architectural style relevance or seem as if two or more styles were merged. The solution to avoid this lies in understanding architectural styles, paying careful attention to detail, and appropriately executing those details in an authentic manner.

Only the most talented architects and artisans can deviate from documented design styles and bring about a successful

design in a nondefined style. It’s true that they may create a home or building that is devoid of any past historical architectural definition. The success of this approach, like admiration of most art, is highly subjective—there are those who love it and those who hate it. My feeling is that the best design compositions are those that honor some architectural style heritage in either a contemporary or traditional style and are composed according to the basic design principles outlined in this article. This would allow them to be instantly admirable and valued as worthy architectural compositions.

>STYLE SELECTION

The selection of the architectural style is the first and most important step in creating a beautiful residence. Knowing what style you like will help your conception of how to compose your surroundings, both inside and out. The process of deciding what style you prefer starts with photographic examples from books, magazines, or places you have visited that appeal to you. It’s also about how you live and entertain, whether you feel comfortable in a formal or informal setting, and whether the site terrain and floor plan configuration can be compatible. Then, you hone in on the preferred exterior and interior character of the home and hand it all over to the architect. Clarity and simplicity of the design style from the start is the key. This makes it possible to spend your money on architectural detail or the finishes and furnishings instead of on the parts you don’t see, such as complicated structural beams required to resolve an ill-defined design idea. Without a “determine the style first” approach, the quantity, purpose, and adjacency of the rooms are typically agreed upon and become locked in. Then, the overall shape and style of the home has to be form-fitted to the defined room arrangements, and such a design solution may not yield a beautiful composition. When you see oddly configured or proportioned homes, it is usually the result of someone not determining the style first but instead trying to shoehorn a stylistic form onto a floor-plan layout. Homes will never

The 10 Principles of Design

The following list of basic design principles contains the elements that can make a home look very appealing, but if done poorly, can make it very unattractive. The most successful homes are those that artfully incorporate authentic details and successfully accomplish each of these design principles.

1 Site Integration: Each structure must be properly integrated into the natural setting. This includes proper location and orientation of the building on the site and acknowledgement of the site contours, natural landscape, and drainage patterns.

2 Scale: All homes must be appropriately scaled relative to the site and neighborhood context. In general, the appropriate scale for each home must be determined by a desire to create prominence, charm, formality, casualness, or elegance based on the selected architectural style.

3 Proportion: The goal is for every home to be well composed, with all design elements appearing in proportion to one another and to the whole composition. This includes but is not limited to windows, doors, fascia details, columns or posts, exterior walls, and site walls.

4 Rhythm: Rhythm refers to the regular recurrence of elements that include window or door openings, arches, columns, colors, and materials. Architecture should exhibit a nice rhythmic feel when viewing the organization of these elements.

5 Balance: Architectural design is measured by whether the overall composition of forms appears to be balanced as opposed to what is often referred to as “lopsided.” This doesn’t mean that everything must be symmetrical; in fact, a long horizontal element can balance a tall vertical element.

6 Color Value: The use of color as a complement to the design and the overall site is extremely important. The creative use of color can be rewarding if it is beyond simplified applications and can add immensely to the character and distinction of individual homes.

7 Texture: The harsh desert sun reflects a greater amount of light off smooth surfaces, so a rich and varied palette of complementary textures is desired to minimize the reflectivity of walls and roofs. A note of caution: Avoid multiple competing textures—such as a visually busy roof tile competing with heavily textured stucco and a multicolored exterior stone.

8 Shade/Shadow: A vital component of design in the Arizona climate is to create visual depth by recessing each window or door opening and integrating arched arcades, trellises, or covered terraces to provide adequate shade and shadow to allow the home to be more compatible with the desert context.

9 Exterior Material Integration: The selection and placement of exterior materials and textures must be complementary rather than in competition with one another or the site surroundings.

10 Environmental Sustainability: Incorporate strategic design decisions in the site planning, response to climatic conditions, material and fixture selections, and energy systems to create a home rated high in energy efficiency and low in ecosystem impact.



This Rural Mediterranean-style home demonstrates the benefit of proper site integration and good color value to blend seamlessly into the desert hillside setting.



The beauty and simplicity of the landscape and architecture create the aura of a true Spanish Colonial estate, where the provision of shade and shadow create a comfortable indoor-outdoor experience.



The elegant garden of this Formal Mediterranean-style home brings the sculpture, fountain, landscape, and architectural elements together in one coordinated design expression.



This Rural Mediterranean-style home exhibits the welcoming charm associated with proper scale and proportion with an artful use of exterior materials and texture.



be as elegant in their appearance when composed like this, since the design isn't guided by the overall style-based idea and the parts are more or less put together haphazardly. Creating great home architecture is not about copying the past but learning from it and bringing it into the present by combining the owner's stylistic desires with a specific location.

The context of the home—what the region looks like, what the rest of the neighborhood looks like—must also be taken into consideration. The more complicated the site or surroundings, the more limiting the list of appropriate styles. In Arizona, we already work with a limited list of acceptable traditional and contemporary styles that can be considered appropriate for our climate and architectural heritage. The traditional styles have evolved regionally and certainly have national and international predecessors. The Spanish styles that have relevancy in Arizona include Spanish Hacienda, Spanish Colonial, Spanish Mission, and Spanish Monterey. The Western-influenced styles include Pueblo Territorial, Ranch Hacienda, Ranch Territorial, and Craftsman/Bungalow styles that are evident in historic neighborhoods of Tempe and Phoenix. The Mediterranean-influenced styles include both Formal and Rural Mediterranean styles, which are often referred to as Tuscan, Provence, and Italianate. These are all derived from European countries with climatic zones similar to those of Arizona. Contemporary styles include minimalist and mid-century modernist homes as well as desert and western regional examples that use stone, wood, glass, metal, concrete masonry, and rammed earth.

>DESIGN STYLE, COMPOSITION AND VALUE

Ultimately, the goal of the design of a home is to have clarity and distinction in a design style. The design exploration hopefully will result in a composition that will both please the occupants and represent a contribution to the neighborhood or natural setting, no matter what style is preferred. All homes in any style should consider the environmental impact of building, occupying, and maintaining the home. They should also strive for incorporation of environmental appropriateness and energy efficiency and utilize the best practices for building in a sustainable manner.

Hopefully, by selecting an architectural style before starting the design process, authentically executing it, thinking holistically and sustainably, and implementing the principles contained in this article, you'll have a home that is composed in a visually pleasing manner. This translates to increased value for you and everyone around your home. **FI**



The exterior front facade of this Spanish Colonial-style home creates a feeling of understated elegance and demonstrates that visual balance can be achieved even in an asymmetrical facade.