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# SAN FRANCISCO'S ITALIANATES:

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## *Development of a Residential Style*

by William Kostura

*Note: Unless otherwise attributed, all photographs in this article were taken and printed by the author in the early 1990s.*

In terms of longevity, the Italianate has been the most successful architectural style in San Francisco's history. Fine examples were built in the city during the 1850s, and the style persisted well into the 1880s. For fifteen years, during the latter half of the 1860s and through the 1870s, almost every house built in San Francisco was designed in the Italianate style. By the end of the latter decade, San Francisco was an Italianate city. If one examines the famous Muybridge panorama of 1878, one can pick out a few Gothic Revival houses, a few Greek Revival residences, and the turrets of the new High Victorian Mark Hopkins mansion (from which the photographs were taken); but the rest is a sea of Italianates.

The style was adaptable to a variety of house forms—large and small houses; houses with, or without, bay windows; rectangular houses on narrow lots; and sprawling houses on spacious lots. Italianates were equally common in working-class and upper-class neighborhoods. Architects used the style for their most prestigious commissions, carpenter-builders employed it for speculative rowhouses, and laborers used it for their flat-front cottages. Everywhere in San Francisco, one saw the same architectural elements used in similar ways.

The style enjoyed overwhelming popularity because it offered an aesthetic that had something for almost everyone. That aesthetic was a blend of

formality and informality, of restraint and exuberance, of classicism and romanticism. To understand how the Italianate style managed to incorporate these opposite qualities, it is useful to look at what was happening in architecture in the United States during the early to mid-nineteenth century. In essence, the Italianate style developed as a reaction against the Greek Revival style which preceded it.

From the 1820s through the 1840s, the Greek Revival style enjoyed tremendous popularity in the eastern United States. With philosophical overtones of Greek democracy, the Greek Revival style was the symbol of our fledgling nation. Like the later Italianate, the Greek Revival was used for everything from cottages to mansions, not to mention churches and banks. Being a classically-derived style, it strove for symmetry. Large houses might employ a full range of classical vocabulary such as pediments, entablatures, columns or pilasters, and delicately molded door surrounds. Small residences usually took the form of a front-gabled house, with the gable expressed as a broken pediment; shallow pediments could be found over the central door and flanking windows. Whether simple or grand, the Greek Revival house was essentially formal in character. However fine the details might be, the ornament was restrained, in order that the viewer might not be distracted from appreciating the carefully-proportioned form of the house. The style persisted



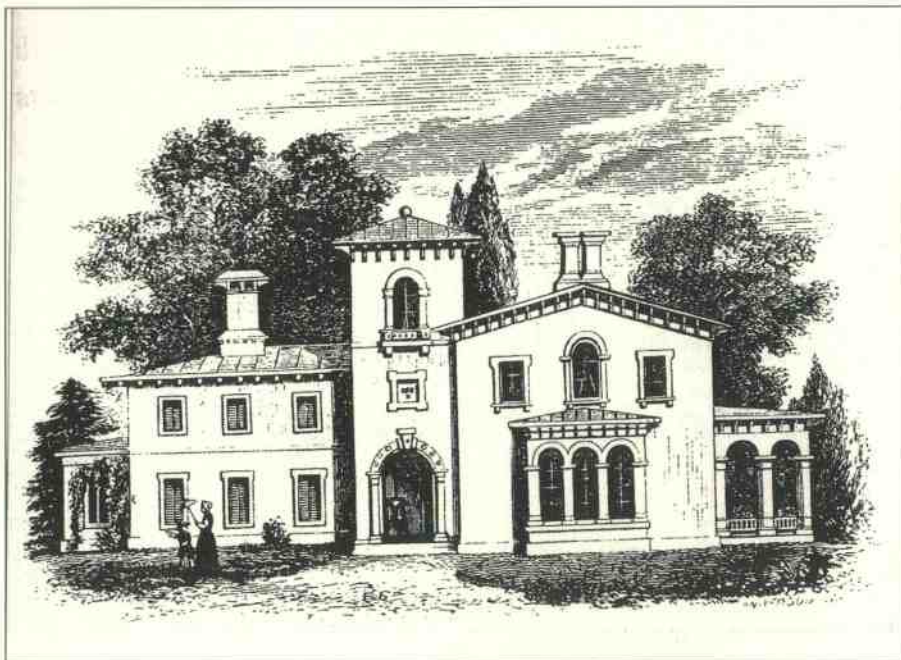


*Milton Latham house, Rincon Hill, 1864. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, Main Library.*

well into the 1850s. In California, modest Greek Revival houses can still be seen in Gold Rush towns, especially Weaverville.

By the 1840s, however, the restrained formalism of the Greek Revival began to wear thin. One man in particular, Andrew Jackson Downing, felt that it made little sense to fashion a national architecture out of archaeological studies of ancient Greece. He observed that America was very much a rural nation, and he thought that a residential style, or, more accurately, many styles, should be developed that responded to the rural and suburban environment. Downing was primarily a landscape architect, and the house plans he published in his books (notably, *Cottage*

*Residences*, 1842; and *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 1850) show houses in rustic settings verging on wilderness. The Greek Revival, being a formal style, did not respond well to such informal surroundings, and so Downing offered substitutes. Generally, these were historic styles adapted by Downing and his colleagues for their own purposes. Gothic, Swiss chalet, Italian villa, Romanesque, and other revivals were suggested. All were asymmetric in plan, and were meant to respond to informal garden settings. While Downing did not invent these revivals—most had debuted in England—he, more than anyone, was responsible for introducing them to Americans. Collectively, these styles became the source of a



Andrew Jackson Downing, "Villa in the Italian Style."

great romantic movement in American architecture, one that would last into the 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

In San Francisco during the 1850s, houses were built in a wide variety of styles.<sup>2</sup> Most early houses, especially those for blue-collar workers, were inexpensive, simple gabled houses that were all but devoid of ornament. Small Greek Revival houses were also common. Of the Romantic styles that Downing promoted, the Gothic Revival was the most common in early San Francisco. Its popularity was fairly brief, however, for few examples were built after the mid-1860s.<sup>3</sup>

San Francisco architects turned their attention instead to the Italianate style. Downing had written in *The Architecture of Country Houses*: "...the Italian style is one that expresses not wholly the spirit of country life nor of town life, but something between both," indicating he thought it would work best in the suburbs. The style nevertheless proved adaptable for an urban setting. It employed classical ornament, as the Greek Revival style had done, but the plan and composition of the façade were usually asymmetric, which lessened the formal feeling of the house. Some elements, such as colonnettes, were derived

from classical architecture but departed from classical proportions. Non-classical ornament, such as incised curvilinear brackets in the cornice, added a lively feeling, and a sense of lightness, to the composition.

Perhaps the oldest Italianates still standing in San Francisco are the Tanforan cottages, at 214 and 220 Dolores Street. At least one of these is shown on the 1852 U.S. Coast Survey map of San Francisco; both seem to appear on the 1857 map.<sup>4</sup> They were among the cluster of houses and other buildings that were built around Mission Dolores and the resort called the Mansion House early in the 1850s, when that area

was still a separate community. These two cottages are near twins to each other, one story in height, with asymmetric window and door arrangements, full-width front porches, simple bracketed cornices with paneled friezes, and false fronts with pedimented parapets. They vary slightly in their siding and details. They are now rare examples of what was once a common house type in San Francisco. In panoramic views of early blue-collar neighborhoods, one can see many similar false-front houses, some with covered porches. One cannot usually make out the details in these photographs, but in the Tanforan cottages Italianate elements such as the pedimented parapet and the cornice brackets, though very simple, are clearly present.

The earliest known architect-designed Italianate to be built in San Francisco was the Joseph H. Atkinson house, which still stands at 1032 Broadway on Russian Hill. It was built in 1853 and was almost certainly designed by Atkinson's business partner, an architect named William H. Ranlett. Before coming to San Francisco in the Gold Rush, Ranlett had been an architect in New York City and was also the publisher of an architectural journal, *The Architect*.



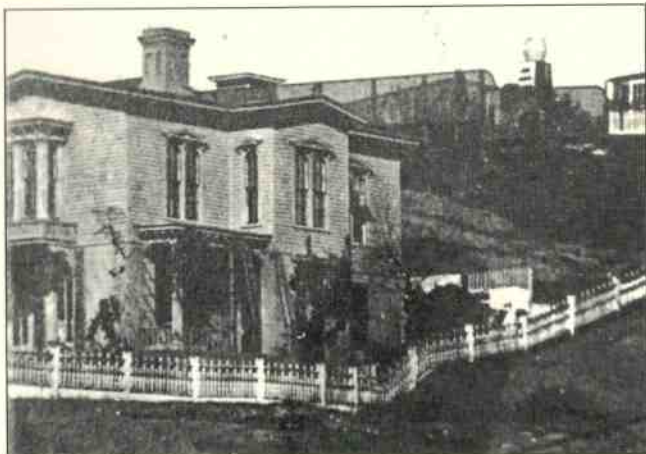


*Tanforan cottage, 214 Dolores Street, early 1850s.*

Like Downing's books, this journal exhibited a wide variety of Romantic house styles. One of them was an "Italian Villa," which Ranlett followed closely in his design of the Atkinson house.<sup>5</sup> The house is asymmetrical, with two wings, the main one running north-south and the other east-west. The main wing has a projecting pavilion on its east side, and an entrance porch filling the angle formed by the pavilion. A rectangular bay window facing Broadway projects from the second story of the house.<sup>6</sup> It was probably this asymmetrical massing of volumes that, in Ranlett's mind, made the house a villa. The use of classical ornament, such as paired arched windows surmounted by triangular pediments, in an asymmetric house is one reason the Atkinson house qualifies as an Italianate. In addition, curvi-

linear brackets found in the roofline, at the top of the bay window, and in the porch were distinctly non-classical, romantic touches. "Romanticized Classicism" is perhaps as useful a definition of the Italianate style as any.

The Italian villa did not become common in San Francisco, for with its wings or pavilions, and occasional towers, this form was generally reserved for larger houses on spacious lots. One such was the residence of U. S. Senator Milton Latham, at 656 Folsom Street, on Rincon Hill. It may, in fact, have been the largest Italianate house ever built in San Francisco (1864). A slightly projecting entrance bay rose to a second-story bay window and a third-story tower topped by a mansard roof. A colonnaded porch with balusters stretched across the front. The windows



*Atkinson house, 1032 Broadway, 1853.  
Historic photo mid-1850s, courtesy of Mrs. A.A. Moore.  
William H. Ranlett, architect.*

in the upper floors were full-arched, with floral ornament in the keystone position. Quoins lined every corner and projection, dividing the façade into distinct bays. A formal garden set the architecture off to fine advantage.

The Italian villa had a final moment of expression in the mid-1870s, when The Real Estate Associates (TREA) built a number of them in the Western Addition and the Mission district. These two-story houses were built for the middle or upper-middle class, on thirty-five-foot-wide lots. An asymmetric massing of two wings, with an entrance in the angle, gave these houses their villa form. The roof of the front wing was expressed as a pedimented gable, and a bay window projected from the first story of this wing. Anne Bloomfield, the late architectural historian, who wrote the definitive treatise on TREA, estimates that the firm built fewer than forty of these villas, out of approximately 1,000 houses that they constructed during

the 1870s.<sup>7</sup> Three of the villas survive, of which the most intact stands at 2373 California Street (1876). A fourth, very similar house (apparently moved here) can be found at 3126 Twenty-second Street, near South Van Ness, in the Mission district.

As mentioned above, examples of the villa form, with its projecting wings, were not numerous in San Francisco, even in the 1850s and 1860s when land was inexpensive and lot sizes were large. Among large houses, squarish forms were more common. Most were two stories in height, had full-width or wrap-around porches, and were spare in ornamentation. Most of these homes vanished in 1906. Fortunately, three good examples of the large, squarish Italianate house still stand elsewhere in San Francisco. All of them are symmetrical, and thus are not pure examples of the Italianate style, but they possess the bracketed cornices and moldings common to almost all Italianates in the city.

The oldest of these is the Milo Hoadley house, at 2908-10 Bush Street (built between 1854-58). It was built for the City Surveyor at the western edge of a vast tract of land that he claimed in the



*Milo Hoadley house, 2908-10 Bush Street, mid-1850s.*





*Sylvester house, 1556 Revere Street, late 1860s.*

location a little later. In style it is as much a Florentine palazzo built of wood, with milled ornament, as it is an Italianate. The full-width front porch, with columns, turned balusters, and a cornice, is quite fine, but it is the window treatment that commands attention. All of the windows are round-headed, almost full-arched in shape. Those in the second story are surmounted by rounded pediments supported by brackets. These windows form quite a stately procession across the main façade. A cornice with elaborate brackets tops the composition.

Western Addition. It has a bracketed cornice, quoins at the corners, shelf moldings with brackets over the windows, and a full-width front porch. At 301 Pennsylvania Street on Potrero Hill is the Charles Adams house #1, built ca. 1865. Shelf moldings over the paired windows and entrance dominate the façade of this restrained Italianate house. It once had a narrow porch and a cupola on the roof, both long removed.

By far the finest house of this type is the Sylvester house, at 1556 Revere Street in the Bayview district. It was apparently built for contractor Stephen L. Piper in the late 1860s, and was moved a few blocks to this

Completely different in form was the octagon house. Five octagons were built in San Francisco



*Charles Adams house #1, 301 Pennsylvania Street, ca. 1865.*

during the 1850s and 1860s, and three of them—at Lombard and Leavenworth (1859), at Green and Jones (1859), and at Union and Gough (1861)—could be classified as Italianates. The walls of each house were made of a primitive concrete covered with stucco, and quoins were outlined in the corners of each of the eight sides. Only the house at Union and Gough still survives, and it was altered with new exterior siding in the 1950s.

A form of Italianate called the Second Empire house became popular in San Francisco in about 1870. The Second Empire is often classed as a separate style, but in fact it was just an Italianate house with a mansard roof piled on top. Several of

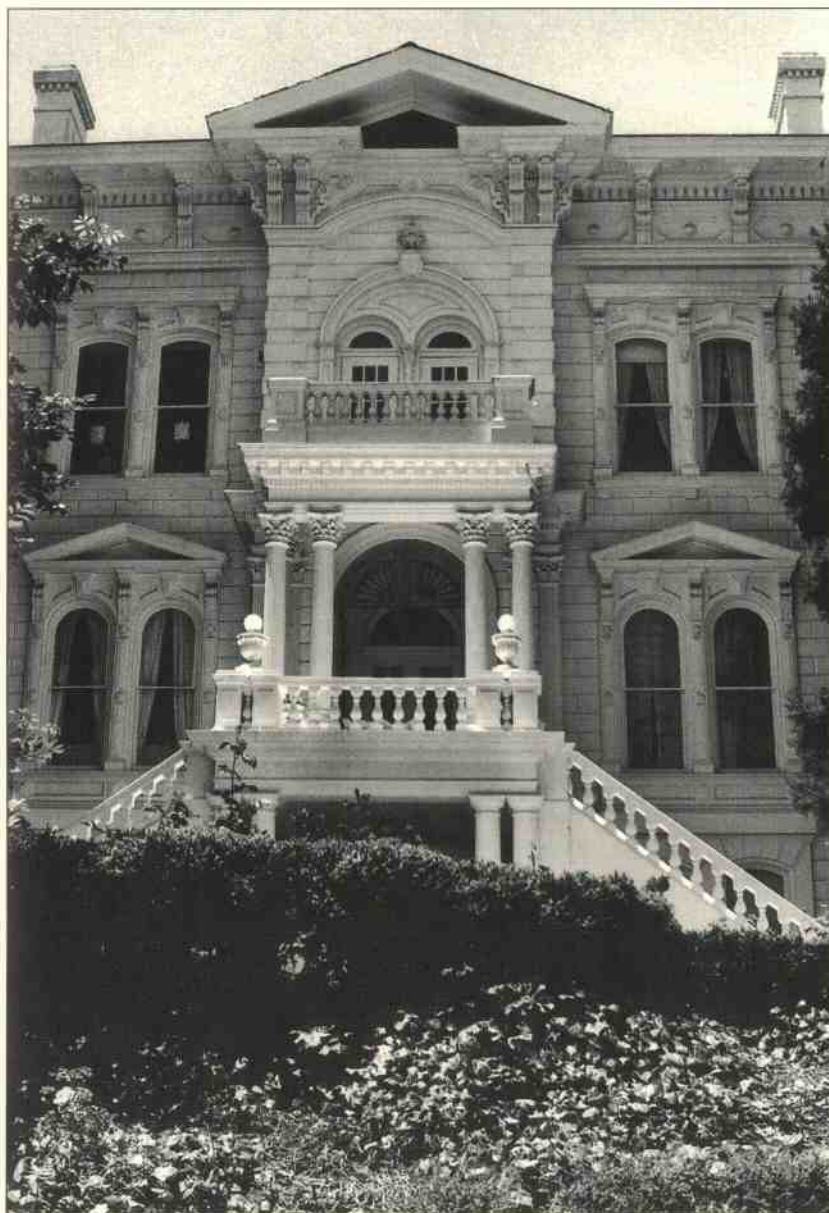
these are visible in the Muybridge panorama of 1877, in the vicinity of Sutter, Bush, Powell, and Mason streets. They are remarkably similar, with full-arched dormers projecting from the concave sides of the mansards. The effect of these rounded forms was quite elegant. One house from this cluster still stands. It was built in 1870 at the northeast corner of Sutter and Mason streets and was moved to its current location, at 2355 Washington, in 1900. It is the oldest of a small number of Italianate Second Empire houses still standing in the city.

A few Italianates were large enough to be classified as mansions. The earliest of this class that is known was the Milton Latham house, discussed above. The next oldest was the Henry Casebolt residence, built in 1868, and still standing at 2727 Pierce Street. Its dominant feature is a slightly projecting, central entrance bay with a double staircase leading up to a columned porch that is topped by a cornice and balustrades. This porch is very classical in feeling, and would not be out of place on houses built forty years later. The rest of the façade is rather thickly encrusted with Italianate detailing. Above the entrance porch are paired arched windows within a larger arched frame. To either side of this window composition, along the corners of the bay, are quoins that pick up the faux-masonry rustication of the wall surface. Pediments top the paired and arched first-story windows, and a commanding broken pediment of the same pitch tops the entrance bay. The architects were William C. Hoagland and John J. Newsom<sup>8</sup>, who also designed the Pardee mansion in Oakland, which was also built in 1868 and also survives. The central entrance bay of that house is strikingly similar to the one in the Casebolt house, and is flanked by similar windows.



2355 Washington Street, 1870.





*Henry Casebolt house, 2727 Pierce Street,  
Hoagland and Newsom, architects, 1868.*

Several Italianate mansions that were built on Nob Hill were among the best-known houses in nineteenth-century San Francisco. Three of them were designed by the same architectural firm, S. C. Bugbee and Son, in the 1870s, but far from looking similar to each other, they illustrate the changes that the Italianate style went through during the decade. The David Colton mansion, at the northeast corner of California and Taylor (1872), was a chaste box with a narrow porch and

restrained window treatment. A delicate balustrade ran along the perimeter of the roof. This exercise in restraint was voted, by a wide margin, to be the most beautiful house in San Francisco in 1892.<sup>9</sup> Rather fancier was the Leland Stanford mansion at the southwest corner of California and Powell streets (1875). It had a wider porch, an elaborate arched window in the second story over the porch, and a bay window projecting from the east wing. The Charles Crocker mansion, at the northwest corner of California and Taylor (1876-77) was the antithesis of restraint. A grand, two-story columned porch was almost lost amid the great bulk of the house, which rose to two stories over a rusticated basement, and was crowned by a mansard roof rising to a fourth-story tower. Wings sprouted to the east and west, and projecting bay windows expanded the footprint further. Each of the hundred-plus windows was surrounded by elaborate trim. It was the house that nineteenth-century San Franciscans most loved to hate, and that gave Nob Hill mansions generally a bad name.

A fourth Nob Hill mansion, at the northwest corner of California and Mason streets, was that of James C. Flood, built during 1884-86 to designs by Augustus Laver. It was, along with the Colton mansion, the most dignified on Nob Hill, and in its own way it was also the most pretentious. It took the form of an Italian palazzo as was often adapted for New York City mansions, and was clad in reddish-brown Connecticut sandstone that was imported at enormous expense. After it was gutted in the earthquake and fire, the Pacific-Union Club meant to replace it with a white granite clubhouse, but Willis Polk's proposal to rebuild within the shell of the old building won the day, and so it

still stands, with added wings of the same sandstone material.

Villas, large squarish houses, octagons, Second Empire houses, and mansions lent variety to the Italianate form, but San Francisco was a densely urban city, a fact that restricted lot sizes even in wealthier neighborhoods. Narrow lots tended, of course, to result in houses of narrow width, and such were overwhelmingly the most numerous in the city. Even among houses of this shape one will find considerable variety, but the point is that, among the great numbers of Italianates still standing in San Francisco, narrow proportions are very much the rule.

Most of these were built in rows or tracts by developers such as The Real Estate Associates (beginning in 1870) or the various Hinkel Brothers (beginning with John Hinkel in about 1872). These tract houses were typically built on twenty-five foot-wide lots, were usually two stories in height, and were two rooms, or a room and hallway, in width. They were spacious in their fashion, with formal front parlors that opened into less formal family parlors, and they possessed modern amenities such as indoor plumbing, but

they were elongated in form, to make up for the narrowness of the lot. Sometimes the developer retained these houses for rental income, but more often they were sold upon completion to homebuyers. Houses that were custom-built for clients of greater wealth were slightly larger, and had finer interior finish, but had the general form just described.

These houses have front-gabled roofs, but the gable shape is almost never visible to the pedestrian standing immediately in front of the house because it is hidden behind a high parapet, or "false front," that gives the house an appearance of greater bulk than it really has. One usually need walk only a few steps to the right or left of center to see the roof behind the false front. In houses without bay windows, the parapet may rise to a stepped or pedimented peak to hide the tip of the gable. Most houses, however, had bay windows that rose to the top of the parapet. Because the bay window is almost synonymous with Victorian houses of all styles in San Francisco, including Italianates, the development of the bay window is discussed in some detail below.

Through the mid-1860s most large houses and



*Seven alternating flat-front and bay-windowed houses at 2637-73 Clay Street, The Real Estate Associates, developers, 1875.*



many smaller ones, whether Greek Revival, Gothic, or Italianate, were equipped not with bay windows but with porches and balconies that stretched across the full width of the house and sometimes wrapped around onto a second side. The balconies afforded an exceptional grace to the appearance of these houses. San Francisco, however, was not the Deep South; its chilly air kept people from spending much time on their balconies or in their yards. With time, balconies disappeared, and projecting bay windows began to be built in their place.<sup>10</sup>

Their advent was timid. During the transition period in the mid-1860s, such houses as had bay windows restricted them to a single story in height, frequently on the side of the house. In the late 1860s or early 1870s, it became common to put the bay window on the front of the house and extend the height to two stories.

Two early houses mentioned above, the Hoadley house at 2908-10 Bush (1850s) and the Adams house at 301 Pennsylvania (1865), have a bay window one story in height tucked away on the side of the house. Two houses on Chestnut Street near Leavenworth, on Russian Hill, also have one-story bay windows. The house at 944 Chestnut (1863-64) has a projecting bay on the front of the house, while the house next door at 930 Chestnut (1866) has a bay window on the east side (visible from Leavenworth Street). In these four houses the bay window serves more as a means to provide extra living space than as an architectural statement.

An Italianate at 1033 Green Street, built in 1868, is probably the oldest with a two-story bay window on the front of the house.<sup>11</sup> The full-arched windows within the projecting bay were an effort to convey elegance, but they were unusual for San Francisco. The window openings in most projecting bays had segmental arches, i.e., with slight curves. Builders who wanted to save on construction costs gave their windows flat tops.

By the 1870s, bay windows were being built on the great majority of houses in San Francisco. This is obvious from observation, but commentators from the time noted it also. In 1875 an article

in the *Daily Evening Bulletin* stated, repetitively, "the bay window has become universal. The bay window is everywhere."<sup>12</sup> In 1880, a *Chronicle* writer, though disdainful of bay windows on commercial buildings, thought that on residences, "the result is different. In these the bay window is really ornamental when each house is taken singly. But the great trouble is that every cottage must have its bay window. The business is overdone."<sup>13</sup> In 1881 James Wolfe, an architect and the editor of *California Architect and Building Review*, added, "It is safe to say that San Francisco has within its limits a greater number of bay windows than can be found in any other city of the world, containing an equal or comparable number of buildings. Only a small proportion of the resident buildings erected within the past twenty years are destitute of the bay window feature," save, he noted, for the "cheaper tenements."<sup>14</sup>

The light-gathering quality of the bay window appears to have been the main reason for building bay windows. Driven indoors by the chill air, people sought warmth. The *Chronicle* writer of 1880 declared that San Franciscans "have Southern tastes; they want all the sunlight they can get. These huge windows, when facing south or west, are centers of comfort. On bright days—and that means six days of the week<sup>15</sup>—they give as much warmth as a grate-fire, while adding infinitely to the cheerfulness of the room." In two houses of otherwise equal size and finish, the author thought, the one with the bay window would rent for 25 percent more than the one without.

With reasoning that seems hysterical today, James Wolfe touted the "sanitary" advantages of houses with bay windows. In houses without them, anyone—usually women and children but "sometimes men"—who wanted to enjoy a view from inside would have to open a window and lean her body out to take in a wider panorama. This was a big mistake, for the differential in temperature between inside and outside was usually "injurious," even more often so if one's system was heated from exercise or if one was ill. "It is unquestionably a fact that hundreds of thousands of people have 'caught their death from cold' by opening windows and extending their heads and



*Henry Buneman house, 155 Haight Street, 1873.*

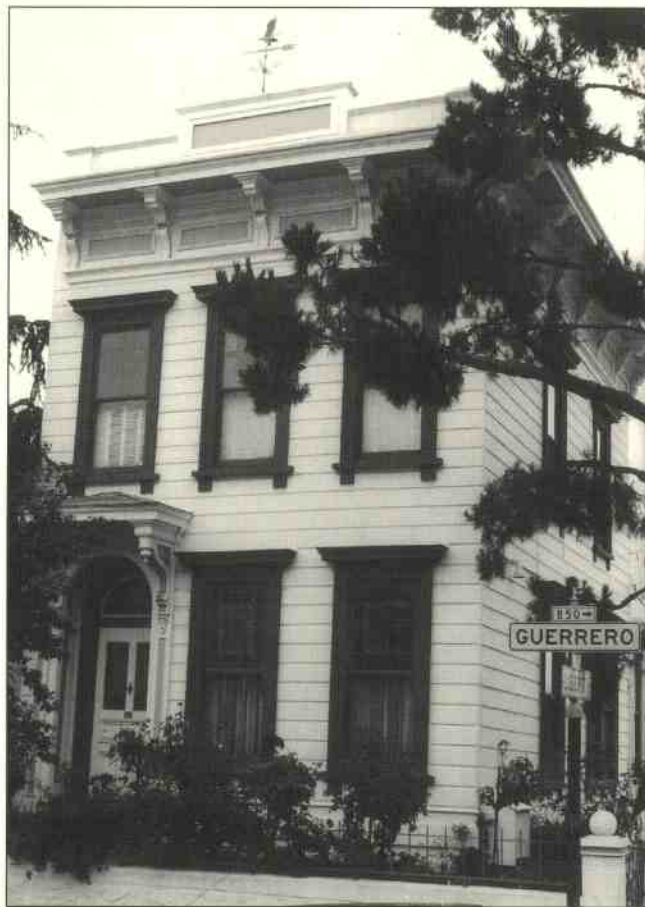
shoulders through the open apertures, sometimes remaining until 'chilled through.'" Even sitting by an open window was hazardous, Wolfe thought. The clear solution to this problem was the bay window.

The Italianate bay window has been described as semi-octagonal, or five-sided, in shape. The three main sides included a front that was parallel to the façade of the house and two adjacent sides that were at a slant to the front. These were pushed out from the main façade by several inches and were connected to it by similarly short fourth and fifth sides. This projection of several inches allowed room to attach colonnettes (extremely narrow columns with leafy capitals) to the corners of the bay. The carpentry work was thus complicated, but the improved appearance, and the slight increase in living area that was obtained, must have been considered worth the extra effort and expense.

Sometimes the bay window only rose to a level

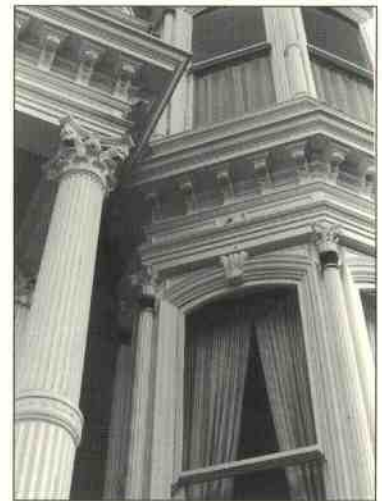
just below the cornice, but much more often it was extended to the top of the parapet. In the former case, the cornice stretched straight across the front of the house (above the bay window), but in the latter case the cornice wrapped around the bay window. Examples of the former include 1033 Green Street, mentioned above, and 58 Liberty Street (S. C. Bugbee and Son, 1876-77).<sup>16</sup> In general, bay windows that extend to the top of the parapet give a more pleasing appearance.

Regarding proportions, the Chronicle writer of 1880 felt that the bay window was somewhat too large for a one-story cottage. Its proportions, however, were perfect for the two-story house. Anne Bloomfield noted that among Italianate houses two bays in width, the ratio of the width of the projecting bay window to the overall width of the house was always the same. Slightly wider houses always had slightly wider bay windows. Builders were careful to keep the ratio constant, for the proportion was pleasing, and when a row of



*845 Guerrero Street, 1871.*





*Three detail photographs of moldings.  
Left, Sylvester house, ca. 1860s.  
Center, 1807 Octavia Street, 1877.  
Right, 2175 California Street, 1879.*

Italianates was built, the resultant rhythm was restful. This is why it is so important to preserve such rows intact, even if one or more houses have been heavily altered.

Lest this discourse on the popularity, beauty, and benefits of the bay window lead the reader to consider that all the best Italianates must possess one, it may be advisable to assert here that the “flat front” Italianate could be equally appealing. Some of the older examples, built during the late 1860s and early 1870s, are especially beautiful. They are restrained in their use of ornament, tending toward simplicity rather than animation. Their signature feature is wide, finely-molded window trim that conveys a distinct feeling of elegance. Quite often the window trim is crowned with a dollop of floral ornament, the trim swelling upward to include this carving. The trim fills just enough of the space between window openings so that the spacing of windows in the façade seems just right, showing that builders of “flat fronts” could be just as concerned with proportions as builders of bay-windowed houses were. The Henry Buneman house at 155 Haight Street (1873) is a good example of this type. The feeling of correct proportions can also be seen in many flat fronts with narrow window trim. The Marsden Kershaw house, at 845 Guerrero (1871), for instance, has as restful a composition as any Italianate in the city.

Bay windows, usually with colonnettes at the corners; elegant trim in flat-front houses; bracketed cornices, with rectangular panels in the frieze;

quoins (the chamfered blocks of wood at the corners of the house, meant to imitate stone masonry); shelf moldings over windows and doorways, often topped by triangular or segmental arched pediments; porch columns, some with elaborate texturing, and all with Corinthian capitals composed of individual leaves of cast lead; balustrades atop the porches—these were the devices that were commonly used to dress up an Italianate house. Most of them were derived from Classical architecture, but were used in Romantic rather than Classical ways. In their use they were calculated to stimulate the eye and add a lively feeling, without compromising the gravitas of the basic composition; hence the blend of those opposite qualities that the Italianate style managed to balance so well.

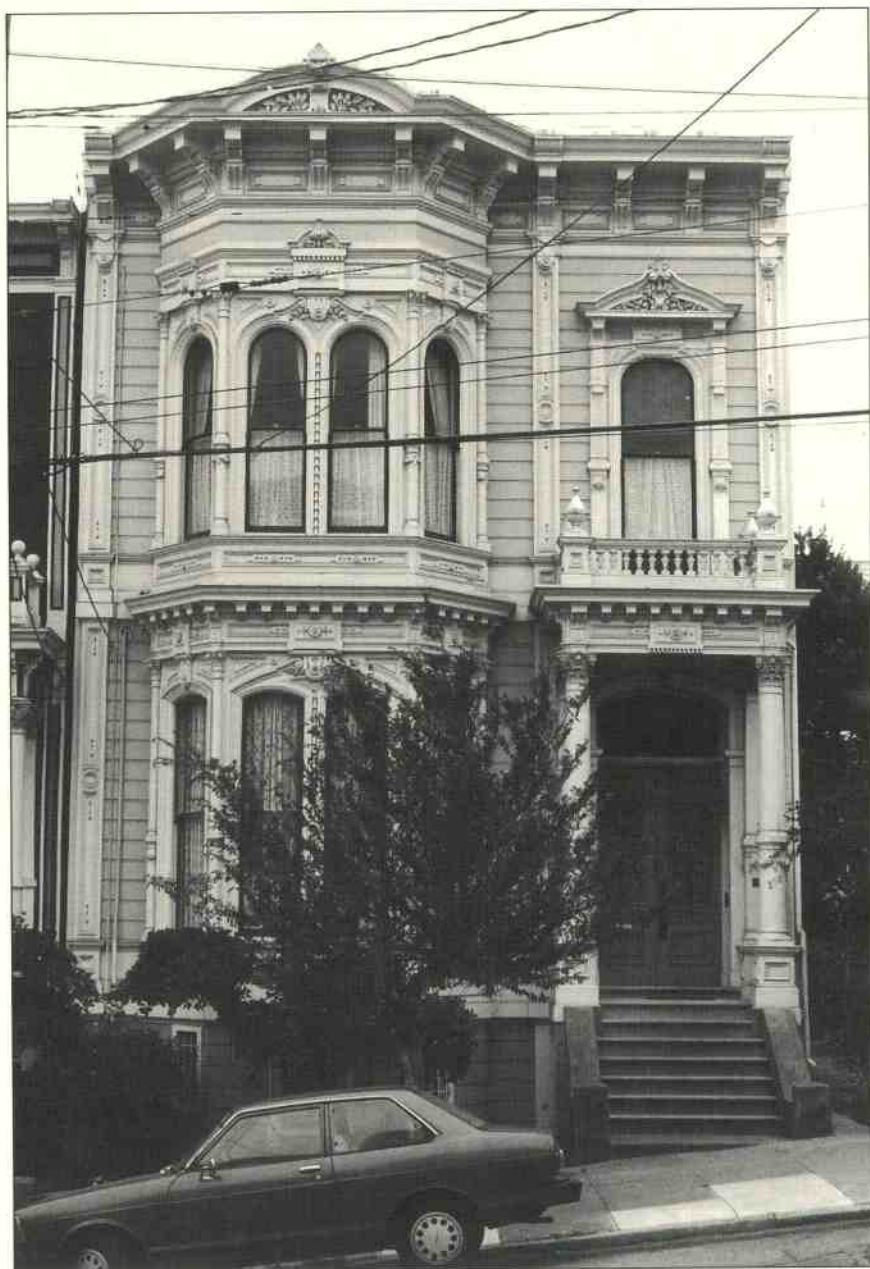
This article has focused so far on matters of proportion and style, but if there is one aspect of Italianate houses that I would most like for the reader to appreciate, it is the quality of fineness imparted by the moldings and other milled carvings. By the 1860s steam-driven mills had been developed that could carve many-layered moldings of extraordinary delicacy. These can be found in the top, leading edge of the cornices and the shelves over the windows, in the flutings of the porch columns, in the soffits of the cornice brackets, and just inside the perimeters of the pediments. One should study the number of layers in these moldings, and their varying widths and depths. The moldings are thrown into sharp relief by their crisp, sharp edges. The result is that they

arrest the eye and call attention, if only subliminally, to the composition of the whole façade. They also personalize the building, in the sense that they draw the viewer closer, into a kind of intimacy. You can pick up the details from a distance, but closer is better. Italianates may have looked similar to each other because of their standard proportions and ornamental vocabulary, but there was nothing anonymous about them. Every effect that the Italianate house conveys depends utterly on the fineness and crispness of these moldings. It is, by the way, a quality that Post-Modern buildings always lack, which is why the eye blurs over the composition of those buildings.

While the fine quality of Italianate ornament was a constant, in other ways the Italianate house evolved over time. Mention has already been made of how wide window trim of the late 1860s and early 1870s gave way to narrower trim in the mid-1870s. This was also when houses became more heavily ornamented. Floral carvings filled the pediments, leafwork or incised patterns filled the spandrels of arched windows, the texturing of porch columns was elaborated—there was a certain flair or exuberance that had not quite been present before. It is possible that this trend was influenced by the Paris Opera House that was being built at this time, and which introduced a flair to French architecture that had been decidedly absent until then. At any rate, the character of Italianate houses changed in the mid-1870s. By the late 1870s, some Italianates had taken on so much ornament that their restful, or semi-formal, character was barely discernible. The Sloss-Lilienthal house at 1818 California Street (1876), with its

elaborate second-story pediment, shows the beginning of this trend. The Richard Heney, Jr., house at 273 Page Street, designed by Edward Swain (1878), was much more decorated still.<sup>17</sup> The James B. Stetson house, at the northwest corner of Van Ness Avenue and Clay Street (1882), took this trend to its ultimate conclusion.

And then the character of Italianate houses changed again. In the late 1870s or early 1880s, bits of abstract ornament began to creep into



*Richard Heney, Jr., house, 273 Page Street, Edward Swain, architect, 1878.*





*James B. Stetson house, northwest corner Van Ness Avenue and Clay, Henry C. Macy, architect, 1882.  
Courtesy San Francisco History Center, Main Library.*

Italianate compositions. This ornament had no link to classical times but was instead derived from a new style, the Stick-Eastlake, that came to the city at this time.

Just as the Italianate style had supplanted the Greek Revival, the Stick-Eastlake style arose in reaction to the ubiquitous Italianate. The *San Francisco Real Estate Circular* wrote, in early 1885, "Almost anything is better than dull uniformity. Leaden and continuous uniformity in buildings is as unpleasant to look at as a continuous row of human countenances suggesting only utter vacuity." This was a little unfair, given the considerable variety that the Italianate was capa-

ble of, but that was how people were beginning to feel after two decades of dominance by one style. Regarding the Stick-Eastlake, the *Circular* wrote, "Some of the houses built in styles new to us are pretty, others are picturesque or interestingly quaint, and some of them are neither one nor the other; but the variety makes our residences and streets less monotonous and more interesting. Many of these dwellings, if peculiar in appearance, show more character and individuality of taste, and thus look more like homes than a long row of houses built with an identical pattern."<sup>18</sup>

With abstract ornaments such as drips, doughnuts, sunbursts, pyramidal studs, and cross-braces,

and textured strips of wood (the “sticks”) along the corners of the houses and the bay windows, Stick-Eastlake houses abandoned the last traces of formality that Italianates had preserved. Their character was instead wildly exuberant, Romantic, even outré.

There was a transitional period of approximately 1880-85 during which Italianate and Stick-Eastlake houses were built side by side. As mentioned above, some Italianates built during this period possessed bits of Eastlake ornament, or had ornamental “sticks” attached to the corners. A short row of speculative houses at 208-14 Steiner, designed by Curlett and Eisen for auctioneers Easton and Eldredge (1881), possessed such features.<sup>19</sup> Other houses were mainly Eastlake in character, but retained colonnettes on the corners and pediments on top of the bays. These houses can be considered transitions between the Italianate and Eastlake styles, rather than pure examples of either.

In working-class or blue-collar neighborhoods—i.e., the Mission district, the Eureka and Noe valleys, Bernal Heights, and more remote areas—the Italianate style persisted until as late as 1887. In such neighborhoods, homebuyers and builders were slow to adopt new styles. This date was very late, for the Queen Anne style was well under way by then. The academic revival of Classical, Shingle, and Mission styles that Albert Pissis, A. Page Brown, and other architects would bring to San Francisco was only a few years in the future.

Despite the earthquake and fire of 1906, and the wholesale demolition of Victorian houses during the 1950s-1970s, many Italianates remain in San Francisco today. The rest of this article is devoted to a photo gallery illustrating some of the oldest or most interesting examples. In particular, Italianate houses from the 1860s and 1870s for which the architects are known are included. For many years no architects of houses from before the year 1879 (the year *California Architect and Building News* commenced publication) could be



214 Steiner Street, Curlett and Eisen, architects, 1881.

identified. Some years ago this author found a previously unknown periodical, *Engineer of the Pacific*, at the Bancroft Library. It identifies the architects of several exceptional houses built during 1878-79. Architects for several earlier houses, from 1868-77, are also identified in rare newspaper articles, or can be identified by other means. Although the architects of most fine houses from the 1860s and 1870s remain unknown, these new sources fill out our knowledge of Italianate house design to a certain degree.



# PHOTO GALLERY

## Flat-front Houses



*James S. Dyer house  
1757 Union Street*

The first owner, James Dyer, farmed a large tract of land on Union Street for many years beginning in 1860. This house, with elegant window frames, could have been built for him any time during the 1860s to mid-1870s.

*Hiram Rosekrans house, 1876 Fifteenth Street  
James E. Wolfe, architect, 1869*

Elegant trim surrounds all windows in the front and east facades of this house, which was moved here from 214 Haight Street after 1906. Sources: *California Architect and Building News (CABN)*, March 1892, p. 28 (this house shows at left edge of photo); Junior League, *Here Today*, p. 104.

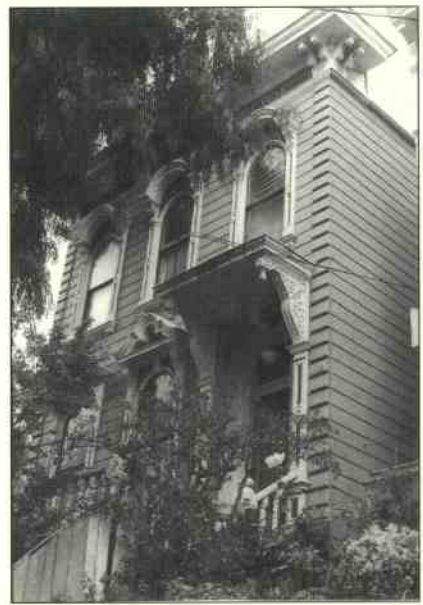


*Robert Osborn house >  
109 Liberty Street, 1869 or earlier*

Very beautifully detailed pediments crown the arched windows of this house. Architectural historian Anne Bloomfield determined that this house was built either in 1869 for Osborn, a hardware importer, or in 1865 for physician Camille Badarous.

*< James L. Meserve house  
1636 Bush Street, 1867*

An early and very restrained example, with some pleasing features: a pedimented parapet, a bracketed cornice, and shelf moldings over the evenly-spaced windows and arched entry. The first owner was a cabinetmaker.



# Flat-front Houses



*1717 Webster Street, 1870*

This is the last survivor of three duplexes, all by the same developer, that once stood on this block. It is yet another example of houses from this period with wide, elegant window trim.



*2121 Bush Street  
TREA, developers, 1874-75*

This is one in a row of six flat-front houses built by The Real Estate Associates.



*Robert C. Ogilvie house >  
2737 California Street  
Robert C. Ogilvie, builder,  
1875*

For his own house, building contractor Ogilvie chose an elaborate display of ornament, which rather crowds the narrow façade. The shingles on the side of the house are not original.

*< Michael Hyde house  
147 Precita Street, 1870*

The prominent cornice and a corresponding shelf molding over the entry lend a bold feeling to this modest house, built for a tailor. Tiny panels fill the spandrels of the segmental arched windows and entrance.







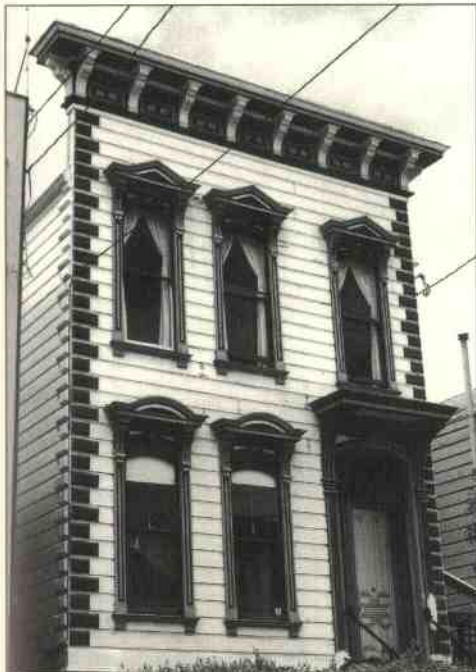
*Howard Havens house  
1911 Sacramento Street, 1875*

This is the best of a fine trio of flat-front houses on this block. The others, at #1913 and #1915, were built in 1871.



*Henry M. G. Dahler house, 559 Noe Street  
A. Miller, builder, 1887*

A very late example, with quirky peaks in the parapet and over the windows. Source: CABN, Nov. 1887.



< *Patrick Nolan house  
1408-1410  
Church Street, 1877*

The quoins, pediments, and nicely-detailed cornice in this house lend a "pride-of-place" quality to the dwelling, which was home to a wool-sorter and laborer.



*Franklin R. Smith house  
750 Persia Street, ca. 1880*

Yet another example of the exceptional detail work that was devoted even to very modest Italianate houses. All windows and the entrance are topped by pediments; setbacks result in multiple corners. This was originally the house for a dairy farm. In the 1980s it was moved a short distance to this corner.

# Italian Villas



*Gov. Frederick Low house  
SW corner Sutter and Gough  
James E. Wolfe, architect, 1866*

Though restrained in its use of ornament, this house was extravagant in form, with multiple wings, bay windows, porches, and a tower. Historic photo: author's collection.



*Alpheus Bull house  
NW corner Francisco and Leavenworth, 1863*

This was one of the few houses in San Francisco to possess both a bay window and a wrap-around porch. It was large, comfortable, and unpretentious, with a minimum of ornament and moldings. The west pavilion with a gabled roof gives this house its "villa" form. It was demolished in the 1920s. Historic photo by John B. Monaco, courtesy of Dick Monaco.



*< James Cudworth house  
2040 Union Street  
S. C. Bugbee and Son, architects, 1874*

It is hard to believe that this house still stands crowded by shops on busy Union Street. In fact, it now holds shops itself. Both bay windows have been extended to two stories in height, the porch has been extended to meet the east wall, and the house was raised to fit more shops in the basement, but the basic character of the house remains fairly intact. Source: "City Improvements," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 30, 1874, p. 1, col. 3. Historic photo courtesy of San Francisco History Center, Main Library; my thanks to Rand Richards, who called my attention to it.



# Houses with Bay Windows

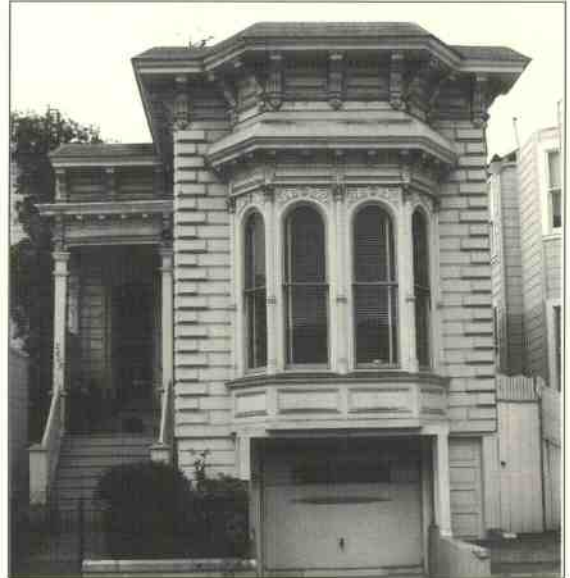


*Tuckerville house*  
2209 Jackson Street  
David Farquharson, architect, 1870

A symmetrical cottage almost devoid of ornament, save for the pediment over the central entry. Anne Bloomfield identified it as the last survivor of a square block of speculative houses erected by Farquharson and downtown jeweler J. W. Tucker, in her article "David Farquharson: Pioneer California Architect," in *California History*, Spring 1980.

*Rudolph J. Techau house*  
2609 Pine Street, 1876

The composition of this narrow cottage is dominated by the wide bay window. The first owner was owner of a famous oyster house, later known as Techau Tavern.



*Talbot-Dutton house*  
1782 Pacific Avenue, 1875

This symmetrical house, with an elaborate central porch flanked by bay windows, was William Talbot's gift to his daughter. The architects were probably S. C. Bugbee and Son, who had designed Talbot's own home one block to the south in 1872. Photo by author, 2005.

*Difley-Keane house >*  
390 Page Street,  
1877

A perfectly proportioned and beautifully detailed bay window is topped by a pediment with floral ornament in the key position.

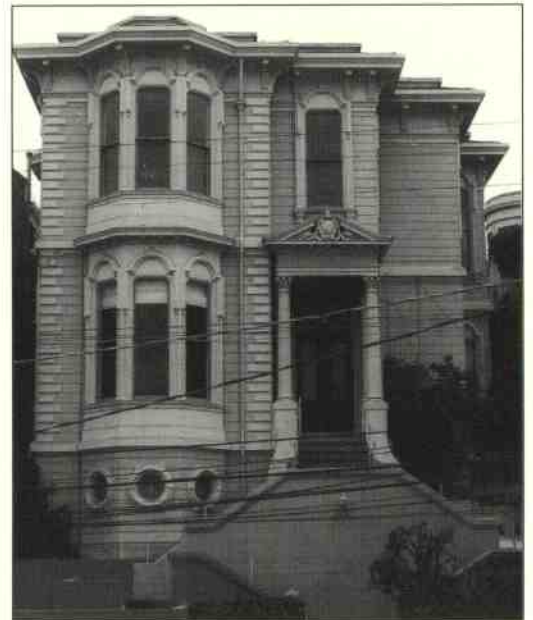


# Houses with Bay Windows



*Robert Irvine house  
2101 Divisadero Street, 1877*

Corner lots afforded an opportunity to fully finish a second side of a house, sometimes to dramatic effect.



*Judge Daniel J. Murphy house  
159 Liberty Street*

*Hoffman and Clinch, architects, 1878*

The judge and Mary Murphy hosted a reception for Susan B. Anthony here in 1896, while she was campaigning for women's suffrage. One of the architects, Victor Hoffman, had designed the memorable Globe Hotel in the 1850s; the other, Bryan J. Clinch, was an important Catholic Church architect. Source: EOP, July 1878.



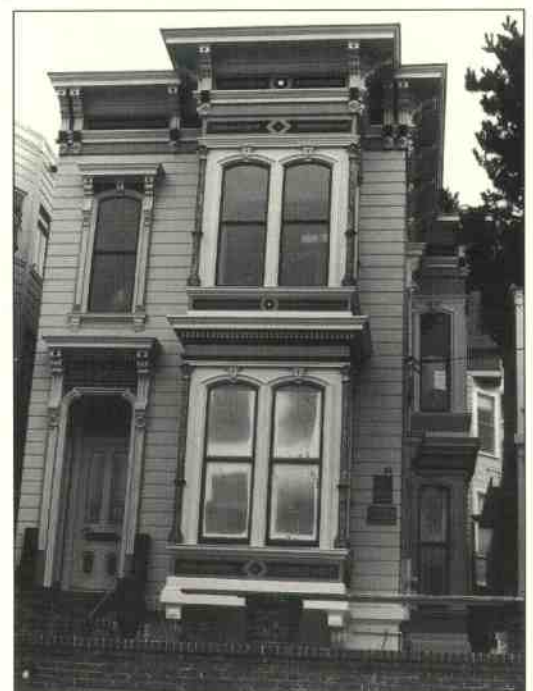
*< John H. Kelly house  
284 Page Street  
John Marquis, architect,  
1878*

This house has an exceptionally light feeling to it. It has hints of the upcoming Stick-Eastlake style, for instance the incised stickwork in the corners of the bay windows. Source: *Engineer of the Pacific* (EOP), July 1878.

*Alexander Everett house >  
1944 Webster Street  
Prosper Huerne,  
architect, 1879*

A rare Italianate with a rectangular bay window. Note the colonnettes at the corners of the bays.

The first owner's son, Oliver Everett, was a draftsman with the architect, was later his partner, and, later still, opened his own successful office. Source: EOP, March 1879.





# Houses with Bay Windows



*Max Englander house  
807 Franklin Street*

*Wildrich Winterhalter, architect, 1880*

This house represents a step back to an earlier stage in Italianate design, when windows were given wide, elegant trim and ornament was otherwise restrained.  
Source: CABN, May 1880.



*Frederick Stadtmuller house  
819 Eddy Street*

*Peter R. Schmidt, architect, 1880*

(Detail images left & right) This house, by contrast, marks the latest phase of the Italianate. The classical detail is highly elaborated, and some Eastlake motifs, such as the sawtooth notches in the porch roof at the top, have crept in as well. An original floor plan signed by Schmidt is the source for the architect attribution

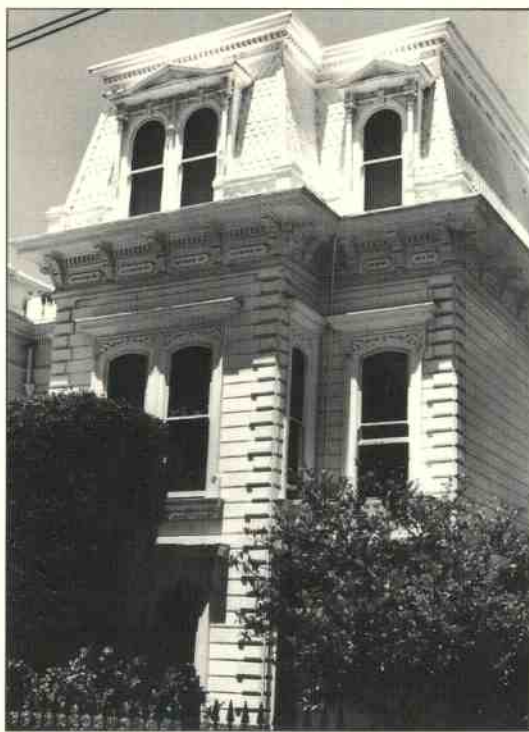
*1813 Baker Street*

*Henry Hinkel, builder, 1881*

One of many bay-windowed, one-story houses by the Hinkel brothers in this vicinity. The detailing in all of them is superb.



# Houses with Mansard Roofs



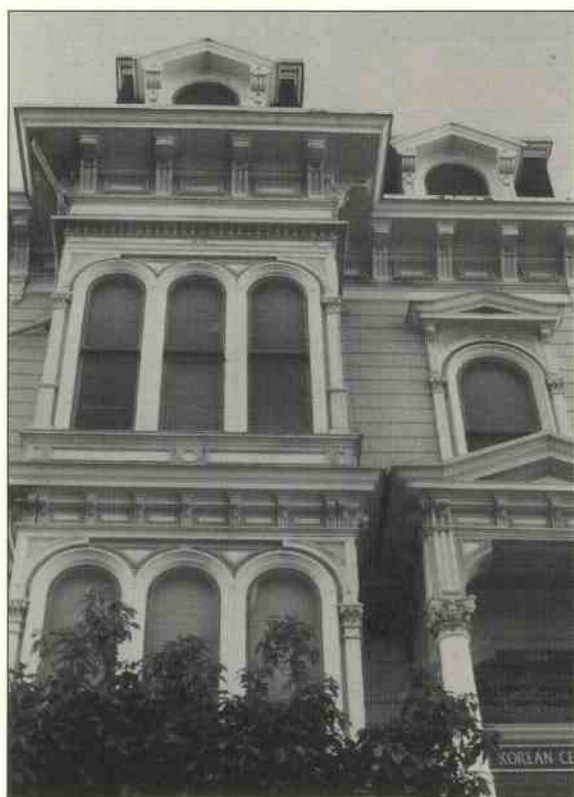
< *Leander Sherman house*  
2160 Green Street, 1876-77

Sherman was a well-known dealer in musical instruments and sheet music. He was also an indefatigable patron of the musical arts, and notable musicians were guests at many events at his house. This photo shows the original portion of the house, and omits the Classical Revival addition to the west.



*Burr family house*  
1772 Vallejo Street  
T. J. Welsh, architect, 1878

The bay windows in this house possess exceptionally fine detailing, as do the dormer windows in the mansard.  
Source: EOP, August 1878.



< *Adolphe Roos house*  
1362 Post Street, 1876  
Peter R. Schmidt, probable architect

This is one of the earliest examples in the city of an Italianate house with a rectangular bay window. It is crowded with finely molded arched windows, colonnettes, and other trim. The architect is uncertain, but was very likely Schmidt, who added the mansard roof in 1884 and made further alterations in 1891. The owner was one of the Roos Brothers, famed merchants of men's clothing. Source: CABN, June 1884.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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William Kostura is an architectural history consultant. He is the author of two books and a number of articles on historic San Francisco architecture. He was a member of the Landmarks Board in 1995-96, and he wrote landmark nominations to preserve the Shriners Hospital and the Music Concourse in Golden Gate Park.

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## NOTES

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- 1 In his famous book, *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style* (1955, revised 1971), Vincent Scully shows how Downing's board-and-batten Gothic Revival house was later adapted by architects to become the Stick style, and how the Stick style became an Americanized Queen Anne, which in turn led to the Shingle style. In San Francisco in the 1880s and 1890s, Eastlake ornament was grafted onto Stick and Queen Anne houses, resulting in the wildly picturesque rowhouses with which we are all familiar. These houses take the Romantic movement to its unrestrained apogee; they were the antithesis of the formal Greek Revival which had dominated American architecture through the 1840s.
- 2 My thanks to Harold Kirker for his insights on this issue.
- 3 Although it faded early as a residential style in San Francisco, the Gothic Revival continued to be used in churches into the 1880s.
- 4 The Landmarks Board Case Report for these cottages gives considerable historical detail regarding them and asserts that 214 Dolores is the older of the two.
- 5 I reproduced this drawing in *Russian Hill: The Summit 1853-1906* (San Francisco: Aerie Publications, 1997), p. 22.
- 6 In 1893, Willis Polk extended this bay window to the first story. Later still (after 1906), the horizontal wood siding that covered this house was coated in stucco.
- 7 Anne Bloomfield, "The Real Estate Associates: A Land and Housing Developer of the 1870s in San Francisco," in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 37, no. 1 (March 1978).
- 8 *Daily Evening Bulletin*, July 27, 1868, p. 3, col. 3.
- 9 The Artists' Competition, as it was called (because artists voted on their favorite houses), was covered in the *Call* newspaper on Sept. 17 (p. 8), 18 (p. 7), 22 (p. 6), and 23 (p. 8), 1892.
- 10 The author of a short article, "Our Local Architecture," in the *Daily Evening Bulletin*, March 23, 1875, p. 2, col. 2, expressed the opinion that the first bay window in San Francisco had been built "by a Frenchman on a fanciful little building on Stockton near California." I have been unable to determine the exact location and date of construction of this house.
- 11 It was built at 1405 Taylor Street, near Jackson, and was moved to 1033 Green in 1891. It once had a small cupola that has been replaced by a modern third story.
- 12 "Our Local Architecture," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, March 23, 1875, p. 2.
- 13 "A Singular City," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb. 1, 1880, p. 1.
- 14 "Bay Windows," *California Architect and Building Review*, March 1881.
- 15 In spring, perhaps, but otherwise this was unduly optimistic.
- 16 Bishop's San Francisco directory for 1878, p. 41, lists two houses designed by Charles S. Bugbee, including the Bagley residence on Liberty Street. The Spring Valley Water Co. tap record gives the location and date, Dec. 1876, when Samuel Bugbee was still alive and the firm was known as S. C. Bugbee and Son.
- 17 *Engineer of the Pacific*, June 1878.
- 18 *San Francisco Real Estate Circular*, Jan. 1885, p. 3, col. 1.
- 19 *California Architect and Building Review*, March 1881.

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## SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS:

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CABN = *California Architect and Building News*

EOP = *Engineer of the Pacific* (at Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.)