

[Craftsman Homes Built America's Dream](#)

"A little love nest beside a stream, where red,
Red roses grow, our bungalow of dreams.
Far from the city somehow it seems,
We're sitting pretty in our bungalow of dreams."

Thus went the chorus of "Our Bungalow of Dreams," a song written in 1927 that reflects widespread affection for a building style that swept across America as the 20th century was born. Today these distinctive Arts and Crafts homes still grace cities from California to Cape Cod, retaining the elegance and grace of an aesthetic, social and industrial movement.

The story began in England and was largely authored by William Morris whose home decorating themes stood in almost stark contrast to the guided and ornate households of the Victorian Age. He, and others, wanted a return to organic simplicity and designs that blended with the natural environment. His decorative arts became integral to a new architectural style that simultaneously developed, sailed swiftly across the Atlantic and was adapted by American builders and designers.

Birth of a Movement

The appeal of Arts and Crafts homes, with their open interior design, low profile and simplicity of line was about much more than style. It was a reflection of social change brought about by the Industrial Revolution. In England, Morris and his mentors bemoaned the effects of mass production and the loss of personal connection to one's work. They urged return to the craftsmanship of the past, when individuals were invested in the quality - not the quantity - of their work. Morris's home decorations fully expressed this ideal and used patterns from nature, natural dyes and wall papers made from wood block prints.

At the same time, the Industrial Revolution was slowly changing daily family life in England and America. People were moving to cities for work in factories and families were earning a living - one that allowed an increasing number of people to own a home. Their homes would be simple - no need for servant quarters and grand entryways. Exteriors would be simple and easily maintained. Gingerbread carvings were replaced by natural stone, brick and timber that distinguished several variations of Craftsman homes in America.

America's Craft Masters and Marketers

The nation gave birth to many accomplished architects whose work exemplifies the Movement - Greene and Greene, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Julia Morgan among others. Wisconsin offered up Gustav Stickley whose woodwork and furniture fully embraced and expressed Arts and Crafts principles. He also published the first of many magazines and catalogs that helped to popularize craftsman homes and decor.

While the work of these noted architects and designers captured attention in the early 1900s - and continues to do so today, it was a more popular medium that made the Craftsman house, the beloved Bungalow, an everyday American dream. Sears and Roebuck Company, Montgomery Ward and other national retailers began selling Craftsman home plans in catalogs, along with materials, blueprints and do-it-yourself kit homes. Sears and Roebuck even included house paint in its kits. Michigan alone had three major companies selling Bungalow and Craftsman kits across America. The costs of the kits ranged from a little over \$1,000 to about \$2,500.

This mass marketing mirrored other changes in American cities. Roads were being built, streetcars and trolleys were carrying people to an increasing number of white collar jobs and the demand for home ownership soared. Building materials were relatively cheap and the American dream of home ownership was thriving.

American Craftsman Styles

Arts and Crafts homes come in a number of styles. The Bungalow was among the most popular and still prized today. It characteristically has one story, a brick or rock fireplace, a small porch supported by brick or simple wooden columns, and a gently sloped roof. Some Bungalows have a small half-story perched atop the traditional design. Within this broad class are several styles that reflect the use of gables and extended rafters.

The Craftsman home has a more grand scale than the Bungalow. Its two-story design features fine detail work around windows and on eaves. Roof rafters are exposed and cut in simple, yet elegant geometric patterns. The Craftsman home was generally larger than the more modest bungalow, with additional bedrooms upstairs and larger common living spaces. Front porches with characteristic columns might span the width of the house.

Yet another popular style in the Craftsman genre was the Foursquare or Box House that was often built on narrow urban lots. The two stories of the Foursquare were separated by a piece of simple trim board and a porch graced the entire front of the home. As with other Craftsman styles, brick, rock

and wood used in simple lines embellished the Box House which was one of the most popular kit homes for Sears and Roebuck between 1900 and 1920. Many of these Foursquare homes have become the two-up, two-down apartments of modern American cities.

So popular is the Craftsman home, there was a resurgence of new building in this style at the end of the 20th century. The organic feel of the family friendly homes continues to appeal to people who are building in the 21st century. And, as testimony to the fundamental principle of the movement expressed by William Morris, Craftsmen homes built 100 years ago remain standing and strong. Built with care, attention to detail and dedication to craft, they elegantly stand the test of time.

About the Author

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