

Your House Has a Face. Is it Smiling?

Part Two

We all attach a lot of importance to the home we own, and for good reasons. Our house represents a huge investment, often a significant portion of our total personal wealth. It also carries a lot of emotional and personal importance. Your house's facade, or face, is a big factor in not just how you feel about it, but it's also a factor in the way the marketplace will value your home.

In the upcoming world of computerized real estate shopping, the first impression a buyer will get of your home will be from a computerized TV view of the exterior. If your house does not pass that beauty test, it will be difficult to even get potential buyers over to look at it. These systems are not off in the distant future, they are actually here today. One such system locally is Tour Vision, in operation in El Dorado County (1-800-226-3763)

A big factor in that initial beauty test is the style of a house, how well that style is done, and how that style fits into the neighborhood. You might think it relatively easy to categorize home styles, and develop some simple check lists about what they consist of and how they visually work.

For one thing, though, the overall context, the look and character of the neighborhood determines what styles might be appropriate. In Old Land Park or East Sacramento, for example, a slick post modern statement in design, although witty with color and whimsy, would not generally be considered a style with great curb appeal. That same design, however, in a suburban area that is newly developing might be considered outstanding.

Some communities, like Gold River in Rancho Cordova, have such a limited range of style and tight design controls that you could talk about curb appeal not relating to individual houses but to the whole

neighborhood. Most neighborhoods have a great variety of styles present, and there is wide latitude regarding what styles "fit in."

Even if a style fits in, it has to be properly done to maximize curb appeal. This means that the elements expected to be seen in that style must be handled properly, and the proportions must be right. Take for example, the "Tudor Style". Some of the elements of Tudor styling include a non-symmetrical facade, steep roof, divided light windows, and varied roof forms. Also, Tudors often have surface wood members dividing up areas of stucco (this is to mimic medieval, in-filled, half timber framing).

Sometimes an inexperienced designer will latch onto just one or two of the whole palate of aspects that determine a style and slap those onto a building's face and say, "voila, c'est Tudor!" Slapping up a bunch of one by four wood over a stucco wall and painting it dark brown does *not* make a house Tudor, in spite of what a sales flyer might say. (In fact, in our office we have a name for this slapped together approach that is woefully common in Sacramento - "one-by-four two - door".

Within each style, there are also elements of proportion to consider. The size of windows, whether they are more vertical than horizontal, the steepness of the roof, the amount of roof overhang; and even how wide the trim is are just a few aspects of proportion that are important in a particular style. The best way to get a handle on these various aspects is to do some design research.

One of the best books available on residential design styles is called, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, by Virginia and Lee McAlester, published in 1984 by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., N.Y. This book covers the typical elements that are important to different styles, and has lots of illustrations and photos of homes that put things into context. It draws

examples from all over the United States. A more recent book, which is even more comprehensive, is called *Elements of Style*, edited by Stephen Calloway, published by Simon & Shuster, N.Y. The emphasis of this book is on interior detailing. It is an oversize volume that covers a lot of material in a well presented and colorful format.

to *your* house. You bet! Tune in for my next column on your house's "face."

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Does this concern about styles, facade, and other "high-fallutin" architectural stuff apply