

Your House Has a Face. Is it Smiling? Part Three

If you've been following along, we've been having a spirited discussion about facades, "curb appeal," house styles, and why these things are important to you as a homeowner. We've talked about specific examples of how they can affect your personal wealth (at least as reflected in the equity you have in your home), and the pride that you take in the character and charm of your home.

If you're just tuning in, please stop reading now, and go outside across the street from your house. Close your eyes and think, "I am in the market for a home. Would I be interested in buying this house?" and then open your eyes. That is the kind of "beauty test" a home will have to pass in the coming age of computerized real estate buying before buyers will even come out and take a look. The first question is: "Is this an appropriate style for this neighborhood?" The next question is: "Do the details, proportion, and elements of this house make sense with its style?"

At this point you may be thinking, "Gosh, my house is not really any particular style, so I guess the discussion about proportion and design elements really doesn't apply to me." Not true! Every house has a style. In fact, many houses have a *variety* of styles reflected in their facades. Sometimes the remodeling designer's most challenging task is to sort these differing contributions out.

Usually, the best game plan if things are muddled with bits and pieces from too many different design families is to focus on one, and then emphasize those features. However, that doesn't mean that all other stylistic references must be deleted. In fact, it is extremely rare that our homes in Sacramento have facade styles that are "pure". Usually, they are a happy combination - Tudor mixed with Mediterranean, Spanish mixed with Moorish, Streamline Modern mixed with Mayan, etc.

At their best, these eclectic conglomerations avoid the staid and formal feel that pure styles sometimes have. That formality can be particularly awkward on the smaller homes that are prevalent in the older neighborhoods.

The point where a happy combination crosses into a muddled mess is a delicate line. Ultimately, it takes an experienced eye to determine where on that spectrum from beautiful to interesting to "just plain ugly" a given house falls.

This series of articles started with a case I had recently where my clients just didn't like the way their house looked. In their case, it was because they had themselves done a second floor addition about six years prior without much thought given to what the facade would be like. Although they met their functional and budget objectives, one day they discovered that their house was, in his words, "butt ugly". You might be thinking about your house's facade also because you do not like the existing style, or because it is so humdrum (like a post war forties, budget box).

Can anything be done about a "visually disadvantaged" facade? Just like plastic surgeons can change a human face from unattractive to beautiful, a skilled designer can transform the facade of an existing house. When there is a major remodel or addition being contemplated, without much more effort you can sometimes create a whole new style. Another approach is to magnify some minor stylistic aspects about your house now, and eliminate conflicting elements.

For any project that is going to affect your home's facade, think carefully about your home's style and those flowery, artistic concepts like proportion, rhythm and balance. If you don't, your house's curb appeal and its value to the market place are going to take a dive.

If it will help you in thinking about your house as a stylistic impression to have a label, but you do not quite know what that label should be, feel free to drop me a note or give me a call with your street address. I'll take a quick look and either apply a style name based on academic study, or "cook one up" if the "textbooks" don't seem up to the task.

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