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## Vernacular Architecture Forum Syllabus Exchange



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**instructor:** Thomas Carter  
**course title:** American Vernacular Architecture  
**institution:** University of Utah  
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UNIVERSITY OF UTAH  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE  
Fall Semester 2006

Architecture 6232: American Vernacular Architecture. Class meets in Room 228 AAC on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:45am to 12:00pm.

Instructor: Thomas Carter. Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00pm--5:00pm, or by appointment [tcarter@arch.utah.edu](mailto:tcarter@arch.utah.edu).

### Course Description

Vernacular architecture is generally defined in the United States as being both a “type” of building and a “method” for studying buildings. Referring to a type of building, the adjective vernacular carries the connotation of “common” in the numerical sense—the most routinely encountered buildings of a given time and place. As a method of study, vernacular architecture has become synonymous with an archaeologically-driven approach to artifactual analysis that emphasizes the investigation of building fabric as an indicator of social and cultural meaning. For the purposes of this course, we will follow this bipartite approach and use the term vernacular architecture to refer to both the ordinary buildings within a given community at a particular time and a method for studying them anthropologically.

The course is also divided into two parts. Part I focuses on method, beginning with a definition of the field of vernacular architecture studies and then introducing the three principal steps in the research process: gathering data through field and archival investigation; analyzing the data in terms of time, space, form, function, and technology; and finally, interpreting the data through various theoretical applications. Part II of the course looks at specific vernacular architectural communities. Here lectures and readings identify and interpret specific local, regional, national, international, and finally global vernacular traditions from the United States and Europe. Building communities centered on class, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and occupation are also treated.

One of the chief aims of the course is to get you to stop thinking (as many architects continue to do) of vernacular architecture as a kind of naïve and unconsidered (ad hoc) response to local environmental conditions. Among historians of all kinds, this simplistic definition has long been abandoned in favor of one that acknowledges culture as the principal determining factor in vernacular design. During the semester we’ll look at a number of studies which demonstrate the designed (planned) nature of the everyday built environment as well as those that explore the myriad ways in which social organization and cultural values are expressed symbolically in the human landscape.

I should say at the outset that this course is not intended as a survey of the various kinds of American vernacular architectures (you might want to take my American Survey/ARCH 6212 if you want a good sampling of such buildings). It is, rather, a research-based excursion into the theories and techniques of vernacular architecture/architectural history study. Along the way I will expect you to actively engage in analyzing and interpreting buildings on your own, using an approach to architectural research that I believe is applicable to situations and contexts that vary greatly in both size and scope (thinking ahead to your own master’s project research).

Good luck.

## Requirements

Course grades will be based on your performance on two tests, a term project, a fieldwork training session, and an in-class presentation of your project.

The two exams, each an hour-long in length and covering materials from both lectures and readings, will be given in class on **September 27<sup>th</sup>** and **December 5<sup>th</sup>**. The first exam deals with material presented during the first five weeks of the course. The second draws principally upon the second part of the semester materials. Each exam counts for a quarter (25%) of your grade (the two tests are equivalent in weight), and you'll be asked to know some basic terminologies (some of the important building types, technologies, and features), a number of definitions (concepts like *type*, *style*, and *vernacular architecture*), and several short answer/essays (covering the theoretical/interpretive aspects of vernacular architecture study).

The term project constitutes the second half (the other 50%) of your grade. For this work I'll ask you to document with measured drawings and photographs an example of vernacular building and then interpret it historically and culturally in a short written essay and presentation. There is also a documentation training session that everyone must attend on the morning of **September 9**. The session should last about 3 hours, from 9am to noon, with the meeting time and place to be announced. In-class presentations of your projects will be given during the week after Thanksgiving, on the **27<sup>th</sup>** and **29<sup>th</sup> of November**. Final projects are due in my office by 5pm on Friday **December 1**. NB: a complete description of the term project assignment is found on a separate sheet.

## Grading

To repeat: each of the exams count equally for 25% of your grade, making the term project more weighted at 50% of the total. The documentation training session is required (if you absolutely cannot make it, please come and talk to me). The field session, like the in-class presentations (both preliminary and final) are not graded per se, but your attendance and contribution will figure in the final project grade. Grading on the tests is pretty straightforward (you get the right answer and you get full credit), but on the term projects I'll try to be a bit more clear about what I expect.

For the preliminary, midterm pinups, I'm looking for what constitutes a first (rough) draft of your measured drawings. These can be produced by CAD or by hand, but at this stage they can be pretty basic. The idea here is to make sure you're not putting off the documentation part of the project (which is what the thing is all about), and also these initial sheets should get us started talking about ways to analyze and interpret the buildings. And too, I want to make sure you're all on the right track before you put too much work into the final sheets.

Year end presentations will take the form of a class report on your collective findings. As the projects come together, I'll explain this further. Basically, however, I'd like you to begin talking as a class about what your buildings might mean within their community and then organize

yourselves into groups for the final presentation. Again, we'll talk about the form this will take when we decide on project topics, but a general statement of significance will be helpful when you start writing up your individual essays. Vernacular buildings are more easily read and understood when placed within their social and cultural contexts.

The final project which is due on **December 1<sup>st</sup>** will consist of (1) a 24 x 36 inch sheet (I have paper) documenting some aspect of the building you have chosen to study (it may be an elevation and plan, plans only, a section, a series of exterior or interior details, etc.—I can help you decide on what to concentrate on); (2) photographs (the number may vary); and (3) a five-page essay detailing the history of your building, describing its architectural style, and explaining its significance (see above). Your final drawings may be in CAD or done by hand. No ink or mylar.

I will grade both graphic and textual products on (1) timeliness, (2) completeness, (3) precision/execution; and (4) intellectual engagement.

The first is self-explanatory. All projects are due by 5pm on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Late projects will be penalized one grade for every day they are late.

The second criterion, completeness, simply means you'll need to finish and submit all three components of the project. Please use endnotes in your essay and no "google" citations allowed. I prefer references in the *Chicago Manual of Style* format.

The third area of grading pertains to your graphic work and is a factor of taking some pride in the quality of your drawings. We have some conventions (which I'll give you), and it will be necessary to follow them as closely as possible (north arrows, scales, line weights, and lettering). Remember, too, that it's not the artwork itself that is being graded, but rather the care with which it is done that is important.

The fourth criterion for evaluation involves your "intellectual engagement" in the project. This is subjective up to a point, but it is rather easy for me to tell whether or not you've taken the time to think about the buildings and what they might mean in terms of history and culture. Your engagement will be based on how well (a) you have researched your buildings (have you conducted an exhaustive archival search or simply checked a few references) and (b) your interpretations relate to the themes raised in class and the readings. Obviously, there are no "right" interpretations, just "educated" ones. The object of the course is to get you to start reading buildings for cultural and historical meaning, and this is what I'll be looking for in your work.

#### Required Readings:

Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005)

All other readings are on electronic-reserve in the Marriott Library.

## Accommodations Policy

Some of the lectures, readings, and presentations in this course may include material that conflicts with the core beliefs of some students. Please review the syllabus carefully to see if the course is one that you are committed to taking. If you have a concern, please discuss it with me at your earliest convenience.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### **PART I: Definitions and Research Methodology**

Week 1: Introduction to Vernacular Architecture

Aug 23 W Semester Agenda

Week 2: Rationale and Definitions

Aug 28 M Why Vernacular Architecture?

Aug 30 W Definitions

Read, Carter and Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture*, Introduction: xiii-xxv; and Chapter 1: 1-18; and Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 18-82.

Week 3: Research I: Gathering Data

Sept 4 M Labor Day (no class)

Sept 6 W Survey and Documentation

**Sept 9 Sat Fieldwork Session (9-noon)**

Read: Carter and Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture*, Chapter 2: 19-43.

Week 4: Research II: Organizing Data

Sept 11 M Frameworks for Analysis: Time, Space, and Form

Sept 13 W Frameworks for Analysis: Function and Technology

Read: Carter and Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture*, Chapter 3: 45-62.

Week 5: Interpretation

Sept 18 M Forms of Explanation

Sept 20 W Case Studies

Read: Carter and Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture*, Chapters 4 and 5: 65-95.

Week 6: Midterm

Sept 25 M Summary and Review

Sept 27 W Exam #1

### **Fall Break and Preliminary Project Reviews**

Week 7: Fall Break

Oct 2 M No Class

Oct 4 W No Class

Week 8: Preliminary Term Project Reviews (a sign up sheet will be made available).

Feb 23 M Pin-up Drawings

Feb 25 W Pin-up Drawings (pass back and talk about exams)

## **PART II: Vernacular Architectural Communities**

### Week 9: Communities I

Oct 16 M      Community Approach: American Indians

Read all three:

Howard Russell, *Indian New England before the Mayflower* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1980): Chapter III: The Household, "A Place to Live," 51-57; "Roles of the Sexes," 96-103; and "The Day's Round," 104-110.

Thomas Carter, Timothy McCleary, and Edward Chappell, "In the Lodge of the Chickadee: Architecture and Cultural Resistance on the Crow Indian Reservation, 1884-1920" in *Building Environments, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture X*, ed. by Kenneth Breisch and Alison K. Hoagland (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 81-96.

Alison K. Hoagland, "Russian Churches, American Houses, Aleut People: Converging Cultures in the Pribilof Islands, Alaska," in *Images of an American Land: Vernacular Architecture in the Western United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 129-152.

Oct 18 W      Regional Traditions in Colonial America

Read both

Cary Carson, "The English House in America," unpublished manuscript.

Cary Carson, Norma Barka, William Kelso, Garry W. Stone, and Dell Upton, "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," *Winterthur Portfolio* 16: 2/3 (1981): 135-178.

Mark L. Brack, "Domestic Architecture in Hispanic California: The Monterrey Style Reconsidered," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture IV*, ed. by Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 163-173.

### Week 10: Communities II

Oct 23 M      Early Globalization: British Georgian Architecture

Read

Excerpts from James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), 2-45 and 92-121.

Oct 25 W National Identities

Read

Henry Glassie, "Eighteenth-Century Cultural Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, ed. by Dell Upton and John Vlach (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 394-425.

Clifford Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*. ed. by Robert Blair St. George (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1988), 535-550.

Week 11: Communities III

Oct 30 M Globalization

Read

Anthony King, "Changes in the Core: The Global Production of Building Form," in Anthony King, *Urbanism, Colonialism, and the World-Economy: Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System* (London: Routledge, 1990), 100-129.

Nov 1 W No Class (your teacher has a doctor's excuse)

Week 12: Communities IV

Nov 6 M Race

Read

John Vlach, "'Without Recourse to Owners': The Architecture of Urban Slavery in the Antebellum South," in *Shaping Communities: Perspective in Vernacular Architecture, VI* (ed. by Carter Hudgins and Elizabeth Collins Cromley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 150-160.

M. Ruth Little, "The Other Side of the Tracks: The Middle-Class Neighborhoods That Jim Crow Built in Early-Twentieth-Century North Carolina," in *Exploring Everyday Landscapes: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture VII*. Ed. by Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 268-280

Nov 8 W Class



Read

Edward Chappell and Julie Richter, "Wealth and Houses in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," in *Exploring Everyday Landscapes: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture VII*, ed. by Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 3-22.

Eric Sandweiss, "Building for Downtown Living," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture III*, ed. by Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 160-173.

And excerpts from Paul Fussell, *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System* (New York: Touchstone, 1983), 76-96 ("About the House").

Week 13: Communities V

Nov 13 M Gender

Read

Leslie Kanes Weisman, "The Social Caste System: Design for Social Inequality," in Leslie Kanes Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 9-34.

Susan Saegert, "Masculine Cities, Feminine Suburbs: Polarized Ideas, Contradictory Realities," in *Women and the American City*, ed. by Catharine Stimpson, Elsa Dixler, Martha Nelson, and Kahryn Yatrakis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 93-108.

Deryck Holdworth, "'I'm a Lumberjack and I'm OK': The Built Environment and Varied Masculinities in the Industrial Age," in *Gender, Class, and Shelter: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture V* (ed. by Elizabeth Collins Cromley and Carter Hudgins (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 11-25.

Nov 15 W Ethnicities

Read

Dell Upton, "Introduction," in Dell Upton, *Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America* (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1986), 7-15.

Geoffrey Gyrisco, "East Slav Identity and Church Architecture in Minneapolis, Minnesota," in *Exploring Everyday Landscapes: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture VII*, ed. by Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 199-211.

Thomas Hubka and Judith Kenny, "The Worker's Cottage in Milwaukee's Polish Community:

Housing and the Process of Americanization, 1870-1920,” in *People, Power, Places: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture VIII*, ed. by Sally McMurry and Annmarie Adams (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 33-52.

Week 14: Communities VI

Nov 20 M Religion

Thomas Carter, various articles on the Mormon landscape.

Nov 22 W Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 15: Class Presentations II (Sign-up Sheet is available)

Nov 27 M Project Reviews

Nov 29 W Project Reviews

Week 16: Conclusions

Dec 4 M Course Summary

Dec 6 W Exam #2

