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ARCHITECTURE COACH COLUMN

Potpourri design **What Style Is It?**

Victorian? Craftsman? Art Nouveau? The style of a home isn't always cut and dry. Your listing may have a little of everything.

BY DUO DICKINSON



It's not always easy to decipher the architectural style of a home, especially when the property has been expanded or renovated several times over its lifespan. When different owners put their own stamp on the property, it gets tougher and tougher to pinpoint a single style when marketing the home for sale.

In some cases, there may be three or four styles intermingling. To determine the various styles, you must look at individual home features and how they relate to one another. That way, if a prospective buyer asks, "What style is it?" you'll be able to answer confidently by describing the dominant style and calling out special features that reflect other styles.

A perfect example of this situation comes from Sharon Nicholson, a real estate practitioner in Jackson, Tenn., who was stumped by the conflicting styles of an 82-year-old home she listed. "I was hoping you could help me out," Nicholson wrote. "I'm trying to identify the architectural style of a home. Built around 1924, I want to say it's a Victorian. But it has some features that don't have that feel. Thought you may want to add some insight. Thanks so much in advance for your expertise."

Looking at the photo Nicholson sent to me (see above), I understand why she might think there are **Victorian** roots, especially in the detailing around the entry, which has an Art Nouveau flair to its eyebrow roof.

However, this 1924 box seems to have been reinvented many times, and the true essence of its being may lie in the home's exceptionally broad eaves — perhaps 3 feet to 4 feet long. Eaves that are directly connected with the tops of the windows (there is no wall above the window "heads") give the home a **Craftsman** feel. The seemingly new windows also have a Craftsman touch, with double banding of muntins forming little squares at the corners of the upper sash.

But there are some reasons why this home is not a pure Craftsman. The front door and windows fail to follow a symmetrical pattern on the front façade, which is unusual for Craftsman architecture. And the cubic shape of this house suggests that the original was a Four Square, an offshoot of the Bungalow style that usually has two full stories vs. the Bungalow's one or one-and-one-half stories.

Perhaps the biggest architectural clue is the date of construction. In 1924, people



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were growing very tired of Victorian architecture and responded in many ways. Some builders went with the Modern Movement, creating homes with flat roofs and stark sensibilities. Others jumped on board with the Craftsman trend and the styles of [Frank Lloyd Wright](#).

Indeed, many of the elements that Frank Lloyd Wright applied to his buildings can be seen in isolated pieces of Nicholson's listing: the broad eave overhangs, the ganging up of multiple windows, and the side saddle porches.

In the case of this home, when faced with the question, "What style is it?" the best way to respond would be to celebrate the eclectic use of Craftsman as a base for so many other distinct styles — Art Nouveau, Four Square, and Victorian. The home is a patchwork quilt in which different generations of owners left their styles on its original simple "bones."

Remember, a potpourri of styles isn't a bad thing in the eyes of consumers. While some buyers may have their heart set on an authentic Victorian or a classic Bungalow, many are looking for a one-of-a-kind property that "feels" right. It never hurts to be unique.

Do You Have an Architectural Question?

If you have a question about a home style, please send a digital photograph and your question to REALTOR® Magazine Online. E-mail Kelly Quigley at kquigley@realtors.org.

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