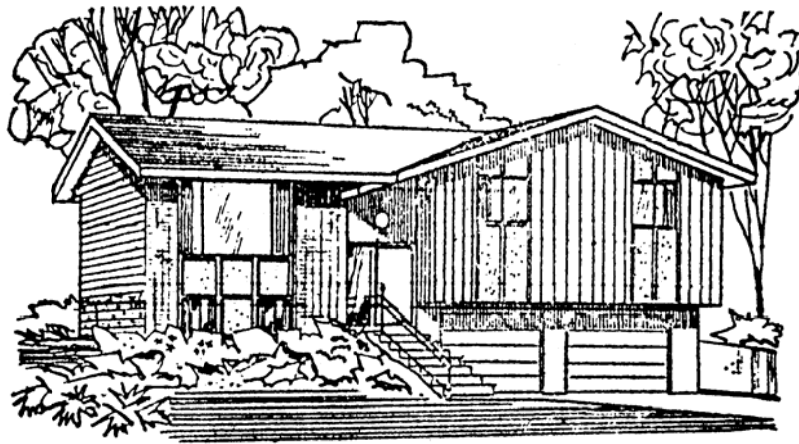


SELECTED
POST-WORLD WAR II
RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL
STYLES AND BUILDING TYPES



Center for Historic Preservation Research
Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
Colorado Historical Society
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Introduction

This guide was prepared specifically for the 2006 Colorado Preservation, Inc. Pre-Conference Workshop entitled, "Identifying, Evaluating and Nominating Post-World War II Neighborhoods." As the title of the publication implies, this guide is selective in its inclusions. It is not meant to be comprehensive or complete at this time. The chosen styles and types have been included since they represent the information believed to be most relevant for resources encountered during surveys of Post-World War II residential neighborhoods, though not everything is covered.

Across the nation, professionals working for local governments, state historic preservation offices and federal agencies are beginning to tackle the challenges associated with postwar resources. And survey consultants are encountering more post-1945 buildings-- infill housing, properties within large suburban tract developments, and community facilities such as schools, churches, and shopping malls-- in the field. Clearly, further guidance is needed for everyone interested in studying the Post-World War II built environment. *Selected Post-World War II Residential Architectural Styles and Building Types* represents a first attempt, a starting point. The pages devoted to the recognizable styles and types of the postwar era include background information, common elements, and representative photographs.

OAHF staff members Dale Heckendorn, Holly Wilson, Chris Geddes, and Mary Therese Anstey worked collaboratively on the research and field work necessary to compose and revise the text. Time constraints did not allow for exhaustive investigation. As both survey and scholarship make new information available, these styles and types may be updated while other entries likely will be created.

For information regarding recognized styles and types preceding the Post-World War II period, please see *A Guide to Colorado's Historic Architecture and Engineering* (available at <https://www.historycolorado.org/colorados-historic-architecture-engineering-guide>).

Usonian

Typically associated with modern architecture of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, Usonia as a concept actually goes back to the turn of the twentieth century. Conceived by Frank Lloyd Wright around 1900, Usonia was a design philosophy that evolved over many years, coming to fruition in the 1930s. As his commissions for large, grand houses dropped off with the onset of the Great Depression, Wright looked for a way to address the need for affordable middle-class housing while employing a simple design. The result was an architecture he termed “Usonian,” which focused on the residents of a culturally reformed United States of North America. The Usonian houses were smaller than his sprawling Prairie style residences, contained little ornamentation and lacked basements or attics. These houses were arranged in zones, typically with three areas: living space, small bedrooms, and a kitchen-dining area. Built-in components and furniture allowed homeowners to appreciate the simpler, integrated space Wright intended.

The idea behind Usonia was about more than just designing smaller houses. It was about planning, nature, and simple design on a human scale. Wright’s concept for Usonia came about due to his increasing focus on community, planning, and serving human needs. He was interested in setting up decentralized communities with commercial, residential, educational, industrial, cultural, and recreational facilities. While his early concepts of these communities remained just that, many of the components were applied in a handful of places across the country, though not on the scale that he originally envisioned. As Wright did with the Prairie style of his earlier fame, he also incorporated the smaller Usonian house with the site. Wright integrated the house with the landscape and nature in an attempt to get away from box-like structures. Walls extended beyond the interior to the outside, intermingling the two. Large windows brought the outside in. Natural materials blended the house with the site and warm colors on the interior further contributed to the feeling of bringing the outdoors inside. Usonian houses were quite unlike the boxy, stark International Style houses that appeared to be dropped onto, rather than a part of, their location.



Boulder, Colorado

Also called Wrightian, the Usonian style has been adopted and adapted by numerous architects across the country. Not much is known about these houses as they are of more recent vintage and often have not been surveyed. Usonian is a recognized style found in such

books as *How to Complete the Ohio Historic Inventory* and *House Styles in America, The Old House Journal Guide to the Architecture of American Homes*.

Common elements:

- dominant horizontal lines
- flat roofs with large overhangs
- integrated windows
- organic siting (a private side and an open side, usually facing south)
- carports
- zoned plans (three primary areas: living spaces, kitchen-dining areas at the intersection, and small bedrooms)
- open living areas
- concrete slab floors with integral gravity heating
- built-in components
- Inside-outside walls
- Central hearths



Designed by locally prominent architect James Hunter in 1951, this house in Boulder exhibits many of the features typical of Usonian architecture. Here the rear open side faces south and the chimney integrates the interior and exterior.

Commonly used in domestic buildings, this 1953 Victor Hornbein designed library is an excellent example of the Usonian style as applied to a public building.

*Hornbein Building, Aurora
(Photo courtesy of City of Aurora
Historic Sites)*



Minimal Traditional

These simple homes were built in large numbers immediately preceding and following World War II; this form represented an economical choice for large tract-housing developments because they were inexpensive to construct. The Minimal Traditional was more a building type than a true style. Minimal Traditional properties emerged as a transition from established bungalow and period cottage forms to early ranch homes. In the Minimal Traditional form, the narrow deep footprint of the bungalow or period cottage was transformed to a square, boxy plan with small rooms situated around a core. The Minimal Traditional was a somewhat larger version of the 1940s Federal Housing Authority (FHA) minimum house, a standardized plan which resembled a small (750 square feet) box.

The Minimal Traditional was very loosely based on the Tudor Revival style of the 1920s and 1930s. It was a relatively small, one-story building often with a predominant front facing gable section or gabled covered entry, echoing Tudor features. Rather than the steeply pitched roof of its Tudor predecessor, the Minimal Traditional roof pitch was low or intermediate with closed eaves and rake. The simplified façade features few architectural details other than decorative shutters. Typical wall materials include cement asbestos shingles in an assortment of colors, brick (usually striated), wood, or metal siding (a replacement material).

Common Elements:

- Boxy appearance with minimal architectural or decorative details
- Small, usually one story
- Rectangular plan on a concrete slab
- Low or intermediate pitched roof
- Simple roof, typically side-gabled (occasionally hipped)
- Closed eaves (little or no overhang)
- Front-facing gable section or gabled projection over front entry
- Usually a central main entry with flanking windows
- Both asbestos shingle and aluminum siding common
- Later examples in brick (usually striated)



These two metro Denver examples represent the classic early form of Minimal Traditional.

Selected Post-World War II Residential Architectural Styles and Building Types



This brick house represents a later example of the Minimal Traditional form.



The two Denver area Minimal Traditional homes (left and below) exhibit prominent front facing gables.



Ranch

Remotely derived from Spanish Colonial precedents of the southwest and drawing inspiration from the Craftsman and Prairie styles, this building type originated in the 1930s with California architects. It gained popularity in the 1940s during the postwar building boom. By the early 1950s, it was replacing Minimal Traditional houses and dominated American domestic construction well into the 1960s.

The low horizontal silhouette and rambling floor plan of the ranch reflected the fascination with the informal lifestyle of the West Coast. Often a garage or carport was attached to one end further extending the elongated profile. The garage became an integral part of the house and was often the portion of the building that projected farthest toward the street. Most ranch homes lacked decorative detailing; some possessed cast iron porch supports or non-functional shutters. The primary focus of the house shifted from the street to the back yard as evidenced by the almost anonymous front entry and minimal porch. With the exception of a picture window in the living room, there were generally smaller windows in the front with larger ones in back. In the 1960s, rear patio sliding glass doors became popular features.

Common elements:

- elongated, asymmetrical façade
- low, horizontal orientation
- one-story
- low-pitched roof
- wide overhanging eaves
- minimal front porch
- integral, attached garage
- rear porch or patio
- picture window
- low chimneys
- decorative wrought iron porch supports
- non-functional shutters



These three examples of the ranch building type are located in the Denver metropolitan area. Such homes were constructed, often within large subdivisions consisting of nearly all ranch homes, throughout the United States in the Post-World War II period.

A-Frame



Pitkin

The A-Frame building type achieved popularity in the 1960s as vacation homes, ski huts, and other simple residential buildings. The form is defined by the steeply pitched gable roof whose eaves extend to grade. The roof forms the walls on the two side elevations. The interior is generally an open plan with living, dining and kitchen facilities on the lower level and a sleeping loft above. A gable balcony off the loft is common. Occasionally, dormers were used to increase loft space and illumination. The simplicity of the form facilitated the production of A-Frames as kit structures. *Leisure Homes*, a prominent A-frame kit manufacturer, was established in San Francisco in May 1953. They quickly expanded their operations with offices in Los Angeles and Denver. Before long, the Denver group of Sheridan and Hanson became **the** national franchiser for *Leisure Homes*.

A-Frames are widely distributed across Colorado, though more commonly found in the mountains and in recreational communities. While predominately residential, the form is occasionally found in commercial and retail facilities.

Common elements:

1. steeply pitched front gable roof
2. roof eaves extend to grade
3. rectangular plan



Cripple Creek



*A-frame liquor store with addition,
Aurora
(Photo courtesy of Lyle Hansen)*

Restaurants and commercial establishments appreciated the 'landmark' quality and visibility associated with using A-frames for their businesses. Most used brightly colored paint to emphasize the dominant roof form.



*A-Frame restaurant, Denver
(Photo courtesy of Lyle Hansen)*



*Side entry on A-frame restaurant,
Manitou Springs*

The dominant gable of the A-frame Salem United Church of Christ in Denver features stained glass detailing.

Split-Level

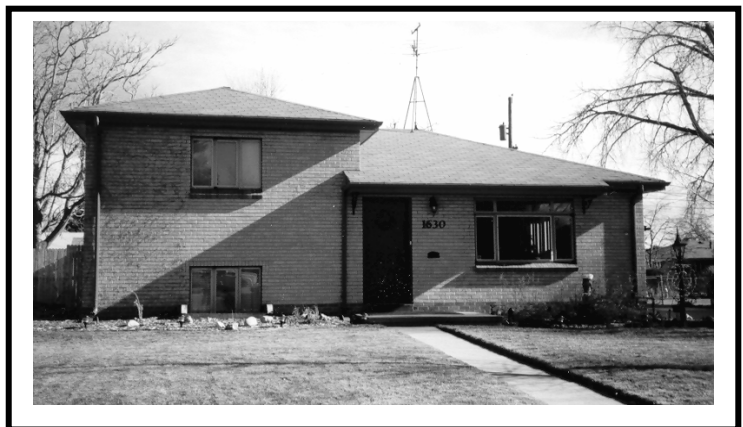
Often referred to as a tri-level, a split-level is more of a building type than a style. Developed in the 1930s, it emerged in the 1950s as a multi-story counterpart to the dominant one-story Ranch house. Retaining the low pitched roof, overhanging eaves and horizontal lines of the Ranch, these homes added a two-story unit connected at mid-height to a one story section creating three staggered floor levels. This bifurcated floor layout reflected an interior planning theory that determined families needed three types of interior space: a noisy living and service area on the partially below grade level (represented by a family room and often a garage); the mid-level quiet living area (containing the living room, dining room and kitchen); and the upper level with the bedrooms.



A variety of wall cladding, such as brick and clapboard, is used and is often mixed, with the brick relegated to the lower level. Attached garages, often partially below grade, are more characteristic of later construction. Windows typically include a picture window. There may be some traditional detailing, such as decorative shutters, but their form clearly identifies them as modern houses. This postwar suburban house type remained popular through the 1970s. Although its heyday lasted about 25 years, new examples of split levels can be found today, attesting to the durable appeal of the design.

Common elements:

1. two-story section connected at mid-height to one-story "wing"
2. low-pitched roof
3. overhanging eaves
4. horizontal lines
5. attached garages on the lowest level and often below grade



Both photographs show examples located in Denver. Similar to the ranch building type, Split-Levels often were constructed within large subdivisions.

Bi-Level

The Bi-Level came into popularity in the early 1960s as a variation of the ranch type. The raised or garden level basement makes the lower level more livable by allowing the lower windows to be larger and above grade. The lower level usually contains a family room, a bedroom, bathroom, and utility room. The upper level includes the living room, kitchen, bathroom and additional bedrooms.

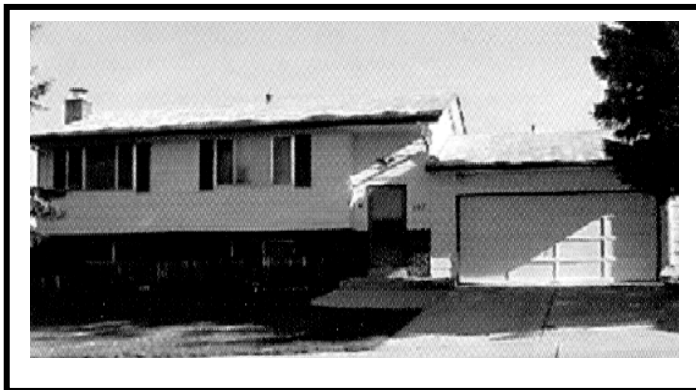


This line drawing of a Bi-Level home for sale appeared in the September 8, 1963 edition of the Denver Post.

The main entry is at grade, either centered on the facade or next to an attached garage. The entry opens onto the mid-level landing of the main stair. A short flight of steps up or down leads to the living areas. In the center entry form, a short flight of steps generally connects the garage to the basement utility room. When the main entry is adjacent to the garage, an interior garage door opens directly onto the main stair landing.

The lower level exterior is often faced in brick. The upper level is generally sheathed in wood, vinyl or aluminum siding. The upper level facade often projects over the lower level. In such examples, the entry is flush with the lower level, giving the entrance the appearance of being recessed.

Early examples in 1960 and 1961 were variously described by builders as “two-level homes,” “raised ranches,” “bi-levels,” and “two-level split ranches.” One builder briefly used the term “splanch,” apparently a contraction of split-level and ranch. By the mid-1960s, builders and real estate agents universally employed the term “bi-level” to characterize this residential form. This building type experienced its greatest popularity from the 1960s to the 1980s.



A Castle Rock Bi-Level

Common Elements:

- Raised basement; windows at or slightly above grade – no window wells
- Mid-level main entry
- Central entry most common
- Upper level projecting facade
- Garage wing with separate roof line
- Rear deck from upper level

Selected Post-World War II Residential Architectural Styles and Building Types



The two Bi-Level homes above, one in metropolitan Denver (top) and the other in Elizabeth (bottom), both display the characteristic central entry.

Neo-Mansard

By the late 1960s, domestic architecture witnessed a shift away from the Modern influences and back toward styles based on traditional architectural shapes and detailing. The first form to emerge during this eclectic phase was the Neo-Mansard. Named for its characteristic roof form, the style bears little resemblance to the Second Empire style of the 1870s. Builders in the early 1960s realized that a relatively inexpensive way to obtain dramatic decorative effect was to construct a slightly sloping upper wall surface covered with wood shakes (or other decorative roofing materials). Unlike the Second Empire, where upper story windows were contained within dormers, Neo-Mansard properties had window openings cut through the lower slope of the mansard roof, forming a recessed window.

The Neo-Mansard form was not confined to houses; it was also found on apartment houses, small commercial buildings and shopping centers. Its commercial application was often a new treatment (alteration) to an older building. This building type was most popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but has persisted through the 1980s with modifications. For example, windows that break through the cornice are common features on more recent buildings, but were rarely seen on early versions. Later examples usually lack the true double slope of the Mansard, appearing instead with a large pent roof projecting below a flat roof.

Common Elements:

- Faux mansard roof
- Mansard is most often covered with wood shakes
- Recessed windows in mansard roof
- Often has mansard roof on more than one level
- Breakthrough cornice windows on later examples

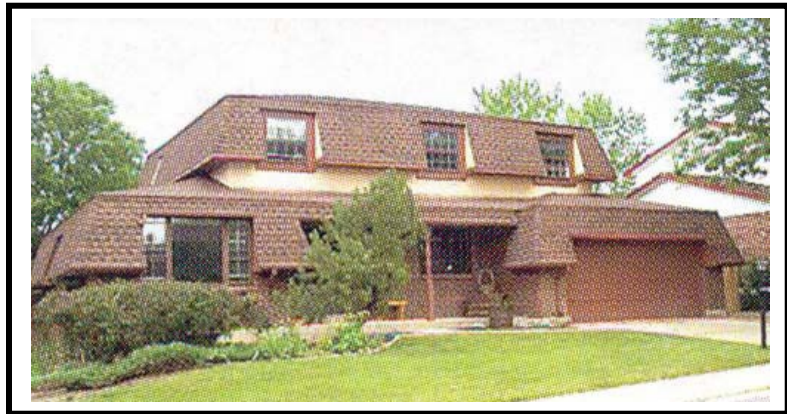


A Neo-Mansard home in Aurora

Selected Post-World War II Residential Architectural Styles and Building Types



*Metro Denver
Neo-Mansard
residential ex-
amples*



A commercial property on Colfax Avenue in Aurora with a Neo-Mansard addition in front of an existing building.

Selected Post-World War II Residential Architectural Styles and Building Types



This Aurora fire station (upper left), home (left), and apartment house (lower right) are later examples that lack the double slope in the mansard roof. Instead, these Neo-Mansard examples rely upon a large pent-like projection below a flat roof to create the effect.



