

The Colonial Styles: Georgian and Federal Architecture

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Colonial styles developed in England between 1720 and 1840 and were imported into the then English Colonies in America by English Settlers. The kings of England during this period were the four "German" Georges of the House of Hanover who collectively reigned from 1714 to 1830, so the architectural style that emerged during their reigns became known as the "Georgian" style.



A Federal style brick house on Sheridan Boulevard. Note the small Palladian window above the elaborate entry typical of the style.

Georgian architecture style was intended to reflect Renaissance ideals made popular by Sir Christopher Wren, Britain's most famous architect of the 17th century. It was a simplification of earlier, more ornate Baroque styles. Typically rectangular and symmetrical, two rooms deep and two stories high (Four over Four) with one or more chimneys extending through the roof or at

either end. Brick or clapboard with the rarer shingle siding are the usual exterior finishes. The classic double-hung window was first used with this style. English Georgian featured hip roofs while in America the gable-end roof was more common. High-style Georgian homes often contained an oval

or round parlor, the most famous of which is the Oval Office in the White House — originally intended as a sitting room or parlor.

The Georgian variation known as the "Federal style" was developed in Scotland by architect [Robert Adam](#). It came to be known as the "Federal" style by Americans eager to divorce themselves from everything British after the American

Revolution. In England it remains the "Adamesque" form of the Georgian style. Its main identifying feature is an elaborate entry way with classical detailing and commonly a [Palladian window](#) at the center of the second story. The main entry door is usually centered on the front façade with a semi-circular or elliptical fanlight window above it and often flanked by leaded glass sidelights. The door is typically

framed with simple [pilasters](#) and a broken triangular pediment. The entry pediment was often extended to create a porch. The porch may be rectangular or elliptical and is often supported by groupings of slender, simple [Doric](#) columns. The use of classical elements such as columns and arches is typical of the Colonial period. The front facade is symmetrical. The area to the right of the entry was a mirror image of the area to the left. This rigid symmetry is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Georgian houses.

A number of variations of the Georgian house developed in the Colonies. The Cape Code is a single story version of the Georgian style as is the Saltbox house common in New England.

During the colonial period, Nebraska was not even a name known to the Colonists, much less a place. All of the classic colonial houses built here in the late 19th century were part of the Colonial Revival movement. The movement began about 1870 and was given considerable momentum by the [1876 Centennial Exhibition](#) which awakened Americans to their colonial



The Dutch Colonial featured a gambrel roof and curved eaves

traditions. Colonial revival architecture while loosely based on the architecture of the colonial period, became much more elaborate with highly decorated facades and elaborate pediments.

Characteristically it featured a ridge line that ran parallel to the street, a central entry portico and symmetrical windows on both sides. The movement spun off a variety of sub-types, including the Dutch Colonial style characterized by its gambrel roof and curved eaves.



The classic Post-War 1-1/2 story brick Cape Cod on Worthington in South Lincoln.

Colonial-style houses are still being built, and the Cape Cod style became nearly ubiquitous as the most common postwar house built in America. The "Colonial" style common in modern housing is a very distant descendent of



Our reproduction 18th century mahogany claw-and-ball foot table. See how it was built in [Fine Furniture and Built-Ins](#).

the original Georgian Architecture, stripped of most Georgian style elements and incorporating many features of the modern Ranch style. See [Postwar Styles: Cape Cod, Colonial and Ranch](#) for more information on Post-War styles.

Colonial Interiors

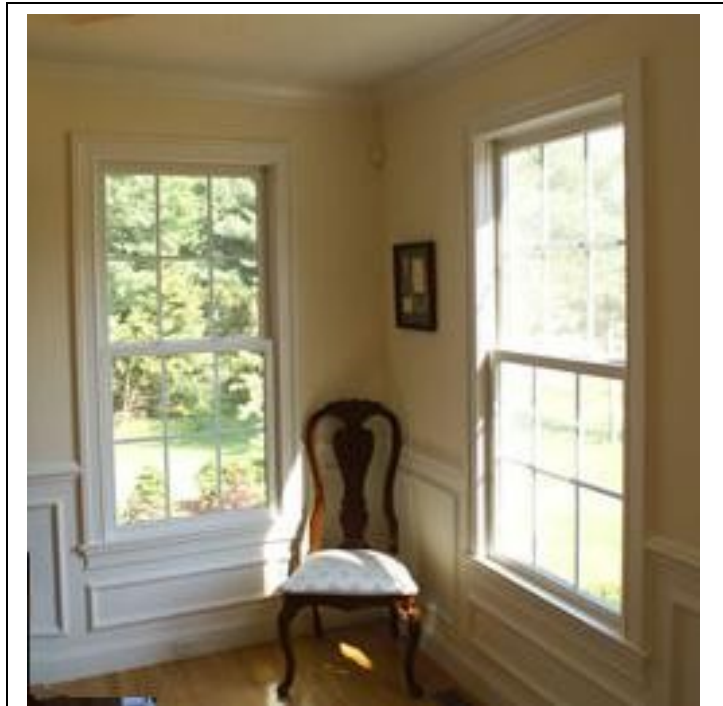
You would not want to live in an actual colonial house. With no kitchen, no bathrooms, and no closets (See [Beyond the Closet — 21st Century Storage Solutions](#)) life would be a little more challenging than we are

used to today.

While we know what a colonial parlor probably looked like since they are

represented in period drawings and woodcuts, the "colonial" kitchen and bath are modern interpretations. The actually colonial bath was a tin tub in front of the fireplace. So, since there were no kitchens or baths as we know them today, we have to imagine what the rooms might have looked like if our Founding Fathers had owned toilets, microwaves and dishwashers. American colonial style blends English Georgian elements with American informality for a more relaxed atmosphere than the stilted English parlor.

Interior decoration is spare, and primarily relies on paint for color and



Typical colonial window with stool and apron. The simple painted crown molding and paneling with integrated chair rail is also typical.

plaster for texture. Paneled walls, wide mouldings, oriental rugs, wing chairs, Chippendale and Queen Anne furnishings, damask fabrics and elaborate draperies (needed to keep out drafts) are the hallmarks of the Colonial interior style. A grandfather clock fits in very well.

Mouldings are usually wide, deep and painted. Painted crown and chair mouldings are common. (Stained woodwork is a modern interpretation -- but still fits well.) Ceiling beams would not be out of place. Door and window trim is simple with flat or gently curved mouldings suitable for hand shaping. All windows were trimmed with a stool (inside sill) and apron. Floors

are oak (for parlors and "public" rooms) and pine wide-plank wood. Tile and stone are common in entries, kitchens and baths.

The Colonial Kitchen

The kitchen style most compatible with this architecture is, naturally, a Colonial or Traditional style. This style includes a wide range of features and finishes and is very adaptable to your personal tastes.

Cabinets: Colonial cabinets typically feature raised panels intermixed

with glass small-lite doors, either curved or flat top, in cherry, hickory, maple, oak, or painted wood. A more exotic domestic wood, such as birch or chestnut, is also a good choice. Imported woods are not. Beaded door styles also work well. Door styles and finishes can be mixed and matched for special effects. It is very common to see painted and

stained cabinets in the same kitchen. Tall wall cabinets should go all the way to the ceiling in at least a few spots. Soffits, if any, should be shallow. Feet on cabinets rather than recessed toe kicks make the cabinets look less "built-in" and more like the furniture common in early colonial kitchens. (For more information see "[Cabinet Basics](#).")

Photo: [Kraftmaid](#)



A modern Colonial or Traditional style kitchen featuring mixed stained and painted cabinets Kraftmaid cabinets.



A working fireplace is a welcome addition to a traditional colonial kitchen.

Countertops: The classic Colonial counter top is soapstone, but granite and laminate (especially laminate that looks like granite or soapstone) also work well. Tile countertops are fairly unusual. (For more information see "[New and Traditional Countertop Choices](#).")

Flooring: For flooring, wide plank wood, or true linoleum are the first choices. Ceramic and stone are also good. The look of wide plank wood using modern laminate flooring is also an option. (For more information see "[Flooring Options for Kitchens and Baths](#).")

Mouldings: A simple crown molding with a chair rail are the finishing touches. These usually are stained or painted to match the cabinets.

Most Requested Feature: The most requested feature in a Colonial Kitchen is a working fireplace. In early American homes, the fireplace was not only the main heat source in the house, but also the stove. The huge open wood burning hearths of yesteryear are out of place in modern homes, but nothing produces a feeling of coziness like a working fireplace. Today's natural gas or LP units are safe, efficient and can be remote controlled. Designed just to warm up the kitchen, these units are usually more compact than living room or great room fireplaces and may be vented through the wall rather than up through the roof using an expensive multi-story stove pipe.