



Boston Landmarks Commission

City of Boston
The Environment
Department

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Architectural Terms Glossary

Acanthus: the stylized leaf of Mediterranean foliage that is often used as an ornament in Greek architecture. Generally expressed in moldings, it forms the basket capital of the Corinthian column.

Adamesque: architectural style that recalls Roman classical design, refined and delicate, as practiced by Robert and James Adam, Scottish architects who influenced the development of London and Edinburgh during the Georgian period (1750- 1800). They worked throughout England on large country estates, as well. The style became popular in America after the Revolution, but was renamed the **Federal style** so as to disassociate it with England.

Anthemion: an ornament based on the honeysuckle flower and leaves, common in Greek and Roman architecture.

Areaway: the space between a row house and the sidewalk.

Architrave: the lowest horizontal element of the entablature, it spans an opening; also, the molded framing over a door or window.

Ashlar: cut stone set with a smooth face, as opposed to field or cobblestones.

Awning: a projection that is mounted above a door or window, meant to provide shade and usually made of canvas or a similar material.

Baluster: the upright and often ornamental post of a railing or balustrade.

Balustrade: a railing comprised of a series of balusters and a top rail.

Banding: a continuous course of masonry.

Barrel Vault: an extended arched masonry roof or ceiling.

Bay Window: an angular or curved projection of a house front that is frequently filled in with windows. If curved, it is also called a **bow front**. If on an upper floor only, it is called an **oriel**.

Bond: the method or pattern in which bricks are laid. There are different types of bond, including:

- **English Bond** uses alternate rows of bricks, each row with all bricks either end out or side out.
- **Flemish Bond** uses alternate bricks end and side out within each row.
- **Common Bond** uses staggered rows of bricks each row with all bricks side out.



Bow Front: a curved projection of a house front, frequently filled in with windows. See bay window.

Bracket: a supporting element that projects from a wall and that is often used ornamentally in the form of a scroll or volute to support a cornice.

Brownstone: the common term for sandstone that is either brown or reddish-brown in color as a result of its iron content. The term also refers to a building that is clad in brownstone.

Came: the lead strip used between the panes of leaded glass windows.

Capital: head or top element of a column.

Casement Window: a metal or wood window with the sash hinged on the side.

Cast Iron: a type of iron created by pouring molten iron into a mold.

Cement: a binding agent used in construction. Portland cement is a powder ground from the heated mixture of limestone and clay.

Cladding: a covering applied to the outside of a structure for aesthetic or protective purposes.

Clapboard: wood siding that is made up of several horizontal, overlapping boards.

Cleat: a strip of metal that is used for concealing fastening of metal flashing or roofing.

Cobble: a naturally rounded stone between a pebble and a boulder in size.

Colonnade: a series of columns supporting an entablature.

Colonnette: a small column of secondary use.

Column: a vertical cylindrical support used primarily in classical architecture and various classical revival styles. It is generally comprised of three parts: a base, a long, tapered shaft, and a capital.

Console: a large ornamental bracket shaped in a reverse curve that supports a horizontal element.

Coping: a cap or covering to a wall parapet that is either flat or sloping to shield masonry from water.

Corbel: a masonry projection made up of incremental steps, often used decoratively to support a cornice.

Cornice: any projecting ornamental molding along the top of a building or wall.



Cresting: a decorative element usually found along the edge of a roof or at its peak.

Cricket: a saddle built up behind a roof projection to allow for complete drainage.

Crocket: an ornamental foliate form placed at regularly spaced intervals on Gothic buildings.

Cupola: a small enclosed structure situated upon a roof.

Dentil: small, square blocks arranged in a row below the cornice.

Drip Molding: a projecting molding around the head of a door or window frame intended to channel rain away from the opening; also referred to as a **drip lintel**.

Dormer: a window projecting vertically from a sloping roof, with a roof of its own.

Double-hung Window: a window that is comprised of two moveable sashes.

Downspout: a pipe for directing rain water from the roof to the ground. Also called a leader or conductor.

Eave: the edge of a roof that projects over the side of the building.

Eclectic: a style that combines designs from various architectural sources.

Egg and Dart: Ornamental, classical molding featuring alternating egg and dart forms.

Electrolysis: a chemical change (corrosion) that is produced by the passage of electricity through an ionic solution. Because this change causes a chemical compound to decompose into its constituent parts, it leads to the decomposition of metals.

Elevation: the external faces of a building or the drawings thereof.

Ell: originally a single-story lean-to wing containing a kitchen, but also refers to a projecting wing on the back of a house.

Enframement: any of the elements that surround a window or door frame.

Entablature: the term referring to the collective, horizontal unit of the architrave, frieze, and cornice. Often found resting on the capitals of columns in classical architecture.

Eyebrow Dormer: a curved dormer with no sides that is covered by a smooth extension of the roof.

Façade: the front face or elevation of a building.

Facing: the finish applied to the outer surface of a building.



Fanlight: a rounded or semicircular window with radiating glazed bars that is located over a door.

Fascia: a horizontal element that spans across the tops of columns or along the top of a wall.

Federal: the American name for **Adamesque style**, popular between 1780-1840.

Fenestration: the design and arrangement of windows on the elevation of a building.

Festoon: an ornamental relief of a draped loop, band, or wreath. Also called a **garland** or **swag**.

Finial: an ornament at the top of a pointed element, such as a spire.

Flashing: a thin protective covering meant to shield against rain that is frequently made of metal.

Fleche: a small spire, usually located on the roof of a church at intersection of the nave and the transept.

Foliate: ornamentation depicting leaves, flowers, and other plant forms.

French Second Empire: designating a neo-Roman style fashionable in France during the reign of Louis Napoleon (1852- 1870). Also known as the **French Academic** or **Second Empire** styles, it was popular in America between 1855-1885.

French Window: a long window reaching to the floor and opening in two leaves like a pair of doors.

Fret: a geometric, repeating design which forms a strap pattern.

Frieze: the middle section of an entablature, located above the architrave and below the cornice; an ornamental band in a stringcourse or near the top of an interior wall below the cornice.

Gable: the upper portion of an end wall that is formed by the slope of the roof.

Georgian: English adaptation of Renaissance style developed during Hanover dynasty (1714- 1837)

Greek Revival: adaptation of Greek motifs in building design of mid-nineteenth century America

Grille: a decorative grating, usually made of iron, that is used to protect an opening.

Guilloche: ornamental braid-like molding of a repetitive pattern.



Hood: a protective covering projecting out from above an opening such as a door or window.

Jamb: The straight side of a window or doorway.

Keystone: the wedge-shaped piece at the top of an arch.

Latticework: thin strips of wood that are arranged in a grid pattern, often diagonally.

Lights: the openings between the muntins of a window that are usually glazed. Also called **lites** or **panes**.

Lime: calcium hydroxide. Made by heating limestone and adding water.

Lintel: a horizontal element which spans the top of a window or door opening.

Lunette: semicircular recess or opening, usually over door or window. Can be glazed as well.

Mansard: a roof with a double slope on all four sides, the lower slope being much steeper than the upper one. Often below a flat roof, especially in row house design.

Meander: a continuous winding pattern. See **fret**.

Meeting Rail: the rail where the two sashes of a window come together. Also called a **check rail**.

Modillion: a small, s-shaped bracket used in a series to support a cornice.

Molding: an ornamental strip of varied contours that is used to line structural members, wall planes, and openings.

Mullion: a vertical structural element that separates adjacent window units.

Muntin: the horizontal, vertical, diagonal, or curved pieces that frame and mount the individual lights of a window unit.

Oriel: an angular or curved projection of a house front that is frequently filled in with windows and that does not reach the ground level. See **bay window**.

Palazzo: the Italian term for a palace or large residence.

Palladian Motif: the treatment of wall opening composed of an arched light between narrower post-lintel framing that was introduced by Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), architect of the Italian Renaissance. Palladian-inspired design was most common in American Classical Revival styles.

Palmette: a stylized leaf form that is used in classical ornament.



Parapet: a low element placed to protect and spot where there is a sudden drop, such as the edge of a roof.

Pavilion: a subsection of a larger building, usually projecting forward from it.

Pediment: a low pitched gable above a portico, door, or window opening. It may be straight-sided (**triangular**) or curved (**segmental**).

Pilaster: A shallow ornamental column or pier attached to the wall surface, often with capital and base.

Piano Nobile: the exterior definition of an upper story by strong expression of fenestration, often by tall windows opening upon a balcony.

Pitch: the slope of a roof.

Plinth: a raised base that supports a column or pilaster.

Pointing: the outer portion of mortar in the joints of a masonry wall.

Portico: an entrance porch that has a roof and is supported by columns.

Post-Lintel: the framing members, sills and head of a rectangular opening.

Quatrefoil: a Gothic design motif composed of four lobes or leaves arranged within a circle.

Queen Anne: the phase of late Victorian-Edwardian architecture incorporating various and diverse features, including elaborate detailing, an irregular plan, and intricate woodwork. This style most prevalent in America between 1880-1910.

Quoins: typically a masonry form that is used at the corners of a building for reinforcement purposes. Often used as a prominent feature in the design of a façade.

Rail: the horizontal part of the window sash.

Relief: a carved or molded ornament projecting from a flat surface.

Reveal: the surface at the side of an opening expressing thickness of wall.

Richardsonian: pertaining to an American style introduced by H.H. Richardson that was popular between 1880-1900; also known as the Romanesque Revival.

Ridge: the line at the top of a sloped roof.

Rosette: a painted or carved round floral ornament.

Row House: one unit of a series of an unbroken line of attached houses that share common side walls, or party walls. Row houses are built as a unit, and are usually visually linked by a shared style and similar decorative elements.



Rustication: masonry that is cut in uniform, rectangular blocks and separated by deep mortar joints.

Sash: the moveable framework holding the glass in a window or door.

Bottom Sash: the lower section of a window. Generally slides up to open.

Top Sash: the upper section of a window. May slide down to open.

Secondary Façade: the façade that does not overlook any public space and that does not possess any significant architectural features.

Semidetached: a building that is attached to a similar structure on one side but not attached to anything on the other.

Shaft: the main vertical segment of a column or pilaster.

Shed Dormer: a dormer that is covered by a single roof slope without a gable.

Sill: the lower horizontal part of a door or window frame that is commonly made of wood, stone, or brick.

Single-hung Window: windows in which only the bottom sash is moveable.

Soffit: the exposed underside of an architectural element.

Spall: a chip or flake from a piece of stone; to break up into chips and fragments.

Spirelet: a small spire or pinnacle.

Stile: the main vertical part of the sash or door.

Stool: the interior shelf-like board at the bottom of a window against which the bottom rail of the sash rests.

Stoop: the set of steps that leads to a front door.

Stringcourse: a continuous raised horizontal band or molding on a building façade (usually between floors).

Stucco: a coating for exterior walls that is made from a mixture of Portland cement, lime, sand, and water.

Sugaring: a term that describes the deterioration of stone that is caused by the breaking up or dissolving of the stone surface.

Surround: an ornamental window or door frame.

Swag: a carved ornament depicting draped cloth or natural motifs.

Tracery: molding within a window, containing glass and forming an ornamental design.



Transom: a small, usually rectangular window above a door.

Transom Bar: a horizontal piece that subdivides an opening, primarily between a window and a door.

Trefoil: a design of three leaves or lobes arranged within a circle that is common to Gothic architecture.

Vergeboard: an element, usually decorative, that lines the cornice alongside the gable.

Victorian: style embracing a gamut of motifs from neo-classicism to unrestrained romanticism. The various Victorian styles were most prevalent between 1860-1900.

Voussoir: one of the wedge-shaped pieces that makes up the body of an arch.

Wrought Iron: forged or hammered iron that is used for structural elements such as doors and for decoration.