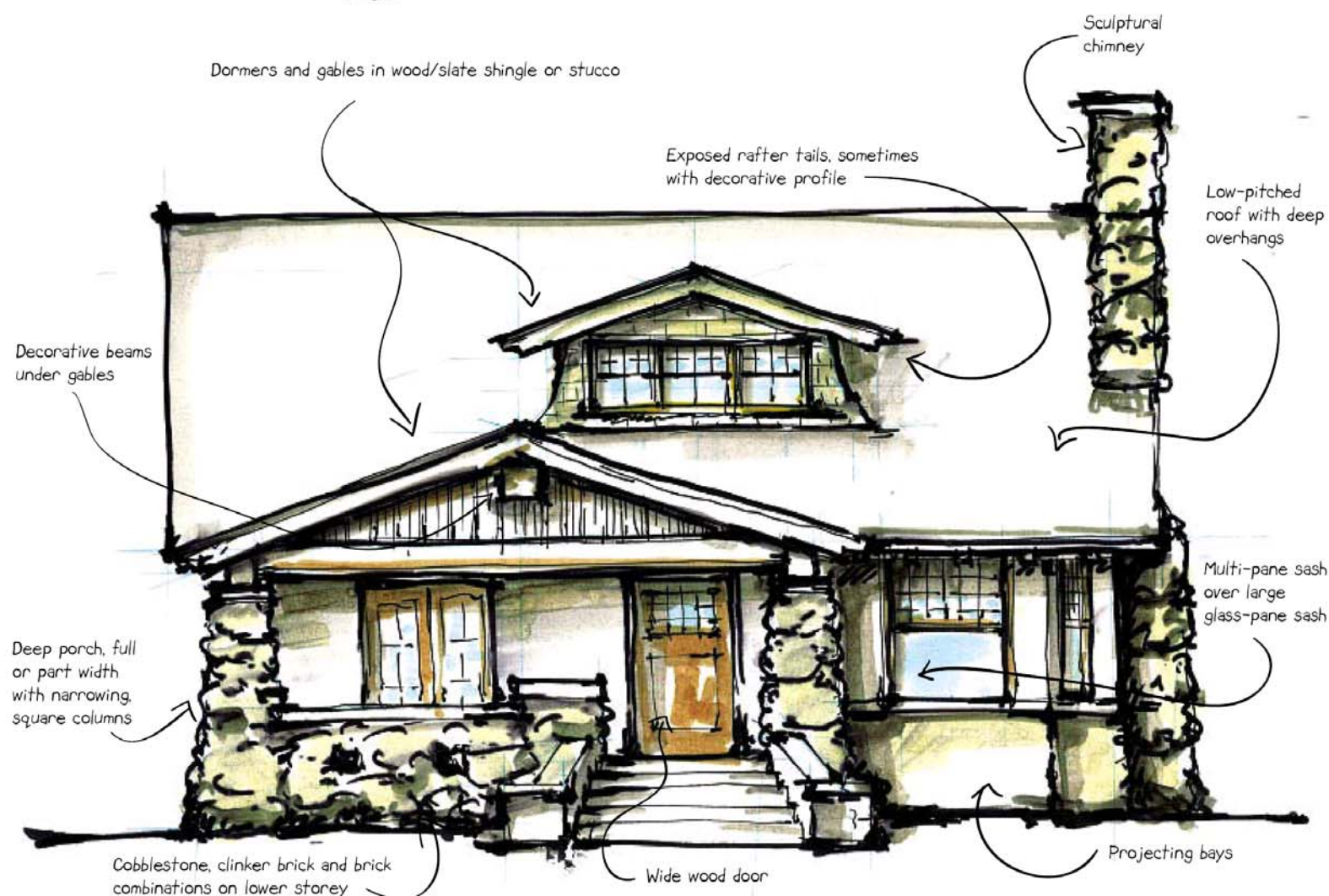


A Craftsman bungalow can easily lose its character as the result of a few — seemingly minor — missteps: changing the windows to energy-efficient ones, recladding the walls with siding or adding a brand new metal screen door



WHAT LIES BENEATH



The authentic bungalow has seen many iterations, and is still prey to heedless renovators

From India to Toronto

The grace of a small elegant house is a wonderful thing. The pressures placed on a house by dense populations in and around it are enormous and constant: materials erode and finishes wear away. Over a lifetime, a house can lose everything that once made it elegant and interesting, as homeowner after homeowner tries to make it larger, warmer, easier to maintain and brighter. After a century or more of this piecemeal — albeit well-intentioned — alteration, what began as a beautiful exterior is often left shrouded under a thick disguise. This series examines several Toronto house types and describes their original façades.

BY SCOTT WEIR

Both my mother and I were raised in bungalows, although the suburban ranch-style bungalow I grew up in, built by my parents in the '50s, was very different from the cobblestone bungalow my mother grew up in. The word "bungalow" has morphed over the years, but its connotations are rooted in a common source.

"Bungalow" is a derivative of the Hindi word *bangla*, which generally refers to "a Bengal colonial house of one storey." These were brilliantly conceived buildings designed for a hot climate, with thatched or tiled roofs and wide surrounding verandahs. During their occupation of India, the British gleaned from the wisdom of their host country innovative means by which to deal with climate. By the late 19th century, "bungalow" had been adopted by the West and came to mean a cozy and relaxed cottage.

The bungalows that emerged in Toronto were largely influenced by bungalows developed for the perfect sunny climes of Southern California. Architect brothers Charles Greene and Henry Greene designed large, superbly crafted casual buildings for Pasadena that flowed effortlessly from interior to exterior, employing high-quality, textured materials that appeared to have the well-rubbed patina of age. The Arts and Crafts principle of expressing the skill of the builder was evident in their buildings, which evoked the refined wood-

construction traditions of Japan, and featured organic stained-glass walls and punctuations of hand-wrought metalwork.

By the early 20th century, Gustav Stickley defined a lifestyle around the notion of craftsmanship, encouraging energetic homeowners to take a hand in their own home's construction, publishing furniture and house designs in his influential magazine, *The Craftsman*. Craftsman bungalows began to appear in many Toronto neighbourhoods, from the mass-construction examples found in Riverdale and North Toronto, to the superbly crafted cobblestone and clinker-brick beauties along the city's western lakeshore, Indian Road and in the Beach neighbourhood. Then Sears, Roebuck and Co. began selling houses in kits — entire buildings with windows, fireplaces and decorations that could be ordered and assembled from one source.

Toronto's Craftsman bungalows can be recognized by their low-pitched gabled roofs with deep eave overhangs, decoratively shaped rafter tails and exposed roof beams. Large open porches supported on massive tapered square columns often extended across all or part of the buildings' fronts. Double-hung sash windows included multi-paned upper panels over single-paned picture windows below. Lower storeys were often made of brick, sometimes with clinker bricks or cobblestone to add rustication. Large low gables and shed dormers featured walls textured with

stucco, wood shingles or slate.

The envelope of the building was often embellished in asymmetrical fashion with square bay windows, verandahs capped by shed roofs and rustic stone chimneys.

At the end of the 19th century, a riot of varied materials and architecture proliferated. The Industrial Revolution had been underway for a century, and a myriad better, cheaper materials was now available. Magazines made ideas accessible to anyone, anywhere, so that a house being designed in Montreal could almost instantly be plagiarized in Nebraska.

Because all these elements had become standardized and mass-produced, architecture could and did become less serious. Where once the gothic cathedrals or classical orders had been based on mathematical and proportional structures that conveyed an image of the heavens, people now appreciated buildings that visually reminded them of other buildings, ones they imagined were part of a more interesting time or place.

Certain elements had reached such levels of machined perfection that they began to be used in archaic or morphed forms as decorative features. Even though glass could now be purchased cheaply in large sheets, windows were often designed with multiple, small panes to make the façade less formal. Misshapen clinker bricks, so-called because they had been burnt to such a hardness that they had become like glass, transported architecture away from the very precision to which most of the city's architecture aspired. This deliberate departure from the norm is particularly evident on Lake Shore Drive, where Craftsman bungalows are often a curious mix of brick, stone and rubble brick, with globs of clinker brick.

Like the mansard-roofed cottage, a Craftsman bungalow, whose façade is largely made up of roof and dormer, can easily



Toronto's Craftsman bungalows feature low-pitched gabled roofs with deep eave overhangs, decoratively shaped rafter tails and exposed roof beams.

lose its character as the result of a few — seemingly minor — missteps. Changing the windows from decorative wooden sashes to new, energy-efficient, single panes gives the building a dull stare. Recladding the walls with siding above the lower-storey brickwork destroys its expressive textures. Boxing in the open eaves and exposed rafter tails reduces the amount of maintenance required, but it also obliterates the character of the house. The long, low and highly visible roofs, formerly covered in slate, tile or wood shingles, are now covered with asphalt. Character eradication is perfected with the addition of the final touch — a brand new metal screen door.

It's wise to remember that cladding, such as vinyl siding, does provide extra weather protection for what were originally uninsulated buildings. So if you

are contemplating removing this type of material, you're likely to have to make additional repairs, as it was probably installed to cover a maintenance issue. And yes, wood does need to be painted (I feel a lecture coming on). Oddly, we don't seem to mind spending enormous amounts of money to layer on supposedly maintenance-free materials, yet we're often unwilling to spend even small amounts to maintain the character of the original façade. No material is maintenance-free forever. Adding these materials to an old house simply defers the problem.

But it is interesting to leave Ontario/Quebec in any direction and see the beauty achieved by other provinces and states that are unafraid to paint the wood on their buildings — if you are doubtful of the potential, then visit a beautiful and essentially wooden town

such as St. Andrews, N.B., and picture it clad in aluminum.

Look at old photographs or at the homes of some of your neighbours if you are interested in regaining some of the character that may have been stripped. It is often the neighbourhood's ramshackle and poorly maintained houses that, amid the rifle racks and Beanie Baby collections, reveal the most useful information about what has been renovated away by overly enthusiastic, tidy neighbours. If you are embarking on the conservation of a building, do some research. Certain elements, like windows, have now been greatly improved, far beyond what was available to renovators in decades past.

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■ Next week: The Dutch colonial
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