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History Lesson: Keep It Simple

A closer look at some classic home-design principles

"PROGRESS IS MAN'S ABILITY to complicate simplicity," said Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl. Although he likely wasn't thinking about architecture when Heyerdahl uttered those words, his observation could easily apply to remodeling and architectural design today.

The illustration at right highlights a few design principles that give this home a classic, timeless look. Here are some of the simple, yet powerful, elements that are often missing from today's homes:

- **Simplicity:** Basic square or rectangle floor plans can be pleasing. Multiple corners look busy and add to the cost of construction.

- **Display of strength:** The robust columns and massive header imply longevity, and the porch openings look as if they were cut out of a solid wall. We should think of porches this way, rather than as separate post-and-beam "pieces" whose sizes can be changed without changing other parts. Retain the header rather than undersizing or completely removing it.

Also notice how the foundation displays strength — which it should, since it supports the house. This one rises up, well above grade, for a stout, stable appearance.

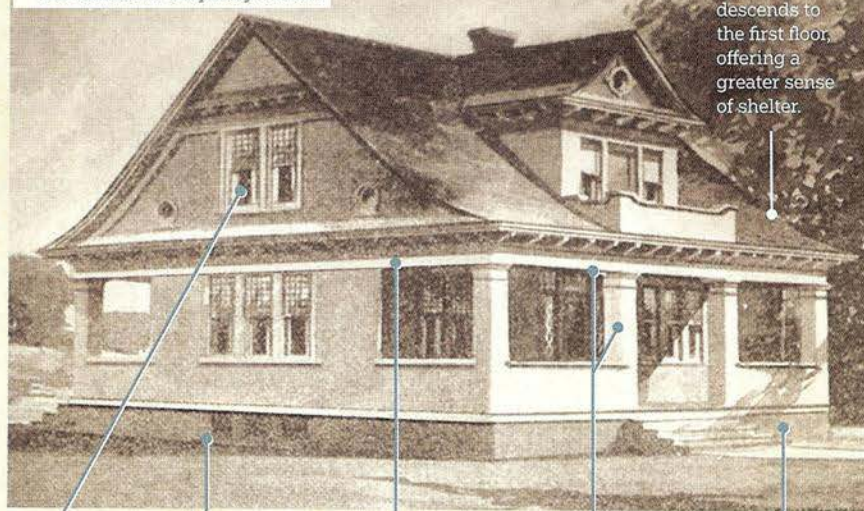
- **Uniformity and consistency:** When objects are aligned and set at consistent heights, it gives a home a flowing appearance. For example, the first-floor window groups are the same width as the porch openings.

- **Sense of shelter:** Graceful rooflines provide protection and extend to the main floor where a person could seemingly touch the edge.

- **Layers:** Corner trim that is the same color as the siding helps

Forgotten Design Principles

The floor plan of this 1918 home is basically a box, yet it reminds us how attractive simplicity can be.



The roof descends to the first floor, offering a greater sense of shelter.

Slightly smaller windows stack above first floor windows.

Above-grade basement windows eliminate water-and-debris-filled wells.

Continuous, horizontal trim divides the house, accenting its layers.

Large, sturdy porch posts and a header ground the first floor.

A foundation that rises well above grade indicates strength and stability.

accent its horizontal layers. The siding and frieze flow non-stop around the house, like layers of a gigantic cake.

- **Window sizing and alignment:** The second floor windows are smaller and grouped with one less than those on the main floor, which avoids a top-heavy appearance. Above-grade basement windows eliminate messy window wells that can fill with water and debris.

- **Symmetry and balance:** Every side of this home is attractive enough

to be the front. Each facade has adequate windows, good balance, symmetry, and is well-proportioned.

- **Restraint:** Though you have a range of designs and products competing to be used, limit yourself to ideas and materials that create a crisp, clean look. To add curb appeal to your next project, try using time-tested ideas and, above all, restrain from using too many competing shapes, colors, and materials. —Mark Wyatt is the president and founder of Wyatt Drafting & Design, in Warsaw, Ind. wyatt-house-plans.com