



GLOSSARY OF GENERAL TERMS

Petra Design

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Adobe

Unburnt brick dried in the sun, commonly used for building in the American Southwest, Spain and Latin America. Usually covered with stucco in homes.

Arch

The curved or pointed top on a door or open entryway. Arches come in many different shapes and styles.

Art deco

A popular design style of the 1920s and '30s characterized by bold outlines, geometric and zigzag forms.

Art nouveau

A style of architecture and interior decor dating from the late 1800s marked by the overly ornate use of undulation, such as waves, flames, flower stalks and flowing hair.

Atrium

An inner courtyard of a home or other building that is open to the sky or covered by a skylight.

Awning

Crank windows, hinged on the top, that open upward.

Balcony

A platform projecting from a wall, enclosed by a railing or balustrade, supported on brackets or cantilevered out.

Baluster

A short post or pillar in a series that supports a rail, thus forming a balustrade. May be curved or straight.

Bargeboard

Trim work at the top of gable end walls below the soffit.

Barrel Tiles

Rounded clay roof tiles most often used on Spanish-style houses. Usually red, but available in many colors.

Bay, bow and oriel windows

These windows project out from the front or side of a house. Oriel windows generally project from an upper story, supported by a bracket. Bay windows are angled projections that rise up from the ground on the first floor. Bow windows are rounded projections, often formed of the window glass itself.

Bead molding

A small, cylindrical molding enriched with ornaments resembling a string of beads.

Bracket

A small supporting piece of wood or stone, often formed of scrolls or other decorative shapes, designed to bear a projected weight, such as a window.

Canopy

A projection or hood over a door, window, niche, etc.

Cantilever

A horizontal projection from a building, such as a step, balcony, beam or canopy, that is without external bracing and appears to be self-supporting.

Capital

The head or crowning feature of a column.

Cased Opening

A doorway with no door, shown on the blueprint with two parallel dashed lines.

Casement window

Crank windows that are hinged on one side and open like a door. In our plans, these windows usually go over the sink in the kitchen.

Castellated

Decorated with battlements (a parapet with alternating indentations and raised portions); also called crenellation. Buildings with battlements are usually brick or stone.

Ceramic tile

Any of a wide range of sturdy floor and wall tiles made from fired clay and set with grout. May be glazed or unglazed. Colors and finishes vary. May be used indoors or out.

Chair-rail molding

A wooden molding placed along the lower part of the wall to prevent chairs, when pushed back, from damaging the wall. Also used as decoration.

Clapboard

Overlapping horizontal boards that cover the timber-framed wall of a house.

Clerestory window

A window (usually narrow) placed in the upper walls of a room, usually at an angle, to provide extra light.

Concrete

Cement mixed with coarse and fine aggregate (pebbles, crushed stone, brick), sand and water in specific proportions. There are three types of concrete: precast, reinforced and prestressed.

Corinthian column

In classical architecture, a column decorated at the top with a mixed bag of curlicues, scrolls and other lavish ornamentation.

Cornice

Any projecting ornamental molding that finishes or crowns the top of a building, wall, arch, etc.

Cove molding

The large concave molding produced by the sloped or arched junction of a wall and ceiling.

Popular accent for dramatic living rooms.

Cupola

A dome, especially a small dome on a circular or polygonal base crowning a roof or turret. Usually only decorative in modern homes. Older cupolas can be reached by stairs.

Dome

An arched roof or ceiling of even curvature erected on a circular or square base. Domes can be segmented, semicircular, pointed or bulbous. Often decorated with stained or painted glass. Adds light, color and drama to a room or foyer.

Doric column

A Greek-style column with only a simple decoration around the top, usually a smooth or slightly rounded band of wood, stone or plaster.

Dormer window

A window placed vertically in a sloping roof that has a tiny roof of its own. Most often seen in second-floor bedrooms.

Dormer Windows

Also referred to as dog houses, dormer comes from the French word dormir, which means “to sleep.” Dormers are located on the second floor, usually in bedrooms or bathrooms, and project through the roof to provide a window in this space.

Double Hung Windows

Both lower and upper sashes can move up or down.

Eave

Made up of both the soffit and the fascia. This is the term that is given to that edge of the overhang beyond the wall.

Empty-Nester

This is a very broad term. We have used it most often for homes that we felt focused on those of us who’s chicks have left the nest. We don’t need all of the bedrooms anymore and at least ready access to them, so more attention is given to more elegant master suites, main floor dens, centrally located Great Rooms, etc. There are some plans that have all of the secondary bedrooms in a daylight basement for when the kids do come home for a visit.

Facing

A covering applied to the outer surface of a building.

Fanlight

A window, often semicircular, with radiating glazing bars suggesting a fan that is placed over a door.

Fascia

A horizontal piece (such as a board) covering the joint between the top of a wall and the projecting eaves; also called fascia board.

Festoon

A carved or painted ornament in the form of a garland of fruit and flowers tied with ribbons and suspended at both ends in a loop; also called a swag.

Fieldstone

Rough, irregularly shaped pieces of rock that can be used to cover the surface of a building, make a walkway, line a garden bed, etc.

Finial

A formal ornament at the top of a canopy, gable, pinnacle, etc., usually in the general shape of a fleur-de-lis.

Fluting

Shallow, concave grooves running vertically on the shaft of a column, pilaster or other surface.

Floor Framing

Built up on the foundation wall and piers out of 2 x 10 floor joists and beams. The direction and the length of the framing are shown on the blueprints, and they typically are placed 16 inches apart.

Foyer

The entrance hall of a home.

French door

A tall casement window that reaches to the floor and opens like a door. It is a popular accent that brings more light into a home.

Frieze

A decorated band along the upper part of an interior wall.

Friezeboard

Trim work that follows the eave horizontally below the soffit on the wall.

Gable Roof

A roof that consists of two sloping planes that meet at the ridge (peak). The planes are supported at their ends by triangular, upward extensions of walls known as gables.

Gable

The triangular upper portion of a wall at the end of a pitched roof. It typically has straight sides, but there are many variations.

Gallery

A long room, often on an upper floor, for recreation, entertainment or display of artwork.

Gambrel roof

A roof with one low, steep slope and an upper, less-steep one on each of its two sides, giving the look of a traditional American hay barn.

Gargoyle

A figurine that projects from a roof or the parapet of a wall or tower and is carved into a grotesque figure, human or animal.

Gazebo

A small lookout tower or summerhouse with a view, usually in a garden or park, but sometimes on the porch or roof of a house; also called a belvedere.

Half-timbering

A method of construction featuring walls built of timber framework with the spaces filled in by plaster or brickwork. Often, some of the exposed planks are laid at an angle to create a pattern. In modern homes, half-timbering is usually not authentic, used only as decoration in small areas.

Handicap Adaptable

Any plan that has been designed to make future accessibility features easy to add. Normally, you would see similar features to the fully accessible house, without having the accessories actually present.

Handicap Accessible

This refers to any house plan that has made definite provisions for people with mobility problems. Including but not limited to grab bars, wider doors and hallways, wheel chair maneuvering space, etc.

Header

A brick laid in a wall so that only its end appears on the face of the wall. To add a varied appearance to brickwork, headers are alternated with “stretchers,” bricks laid full length on their sides.

Herringbone work

Stone, brick or tile work in which the components are laid diagonally instead of horizontally, forming a distinctive zigzag pattern along a wall face.

Hipped roof

A roof with sloped instead of vertical ends.

Hip Roof

A roof that consists of four sloping planes that meet at the ridge (peak). The roof seems to sit on top of the supporting walls, creating a pyramid shape when viewed from the side.

Hopper

Crank windows, hinged on the bottom, that open outward from the top.

Ionic column

A Greek-style column topped by a single scroll just below the top.

Lattice window

A window with diamond-shaped leaded lights or glazing bars arranged like an open-work screen; also, loosely, any hinged window, as distinct from a sash window.

Lintel

A horizontal beam or stone bridging an opening, most often a door.

Load Bearing Walls

Load bearing walls carry the load from above, down to the foundation. Load bearing walls brace from the floor to the roof. They are noted on the blueprint with hatch lines.

Log-construction

A form of timber construction in which walls are made of tree trunks (or logs planed down to create flat or rounded sides) that are laid horizontally on top of each another.

Loggia

A gallery open on one or more sides, sometimes pillared. It may also be a separate structure, usually in a garden.

Mansard roof

This roof is flat on top, sloping steeply down on all four sides, thus appearing to sheath the entire top story of a house or other building.

Mantelpiece

The wood, brick, stone or marble frame surrounding a fireplace, sometimes including a mirror above.

Mullion

A vertical post or other upright that divides a window or other opening into two or more panes. Sometimes only ornamental.

Niche

A recess in a wall (interior or exterior), especially for a statue. Usually curved at the back.

Overhang

Part of the roof that hangs over the wall.

Palladian Window

One larger window with a circle top window above and flanked by two smaller, rectangular windows. These are usually fixed windows.

Parapet

A low wall placed to protect any spot where there's a sudden drop, such as at the edge of a bridge or housetop.

Parquet flooring

Flooring of thin hardwood laid in patterns on a wood subfloor. Inlaid parquet consists of a veneer of decorative hardwood glued in patterns to squares of softwood backing, then laid on a subfloor.

Patio

Paved recreation area, usually at the rear of a home.

Pedestal

In classical architecture, the base supporting a column or colonnade.

Pediment

In classical architecture, a low-pitched gable above a portico; also a similar feature above doors in homes. It may be straight or curved, “broken” in the center, or solid.

Penthouse

A separately roofed structure on the top of a tall block of apartments/condominiums, or simply the top-floor unit in a residential high-rise.

Pergola

A covered walk in a garden, usually formed by a double row of posts or pillars with joists above and covered by climbing plants.

Pilaster

A shallow pier or a rectangular column projecting only slightly from a wall. Primarily decorative.

Porch

The roofed entrance to a house.

Portico

A roofed entrance to a house that is columned like a temple front.

Porte-cochere

A roofed structure extending from the side or front entrance of a home over an adjacent driveway to shelter those getting in or out of vehicles.

Precast concrete

Concrete components cast in a factory or on site before being placed in position.

Prefabrication

The manufacture of whole buildings or components cast in a factory or on site before being placed in position.

Prestressed concrete

A development of ordinary reinforced concrete. The reinforcing steel is replaced by wire cables in ducts.

Quoins

The dressed stones at the corners of buildings, usually laid so their faces are alternately large and small. Usually in contrasting color of brick from the rest of the wall. Common accent in Georgian homes.

Rake

Refers to the slope of the roof at the end of a gable, where the outside part of the overhang forms an upside down V.

Reinforced concrete

Steel rods are inserted in concrete beams to help them withstand longitudinal stress without collapsing. This development has allowed the construction of very large structures using concrete beams.

Risers (Steps)

Height of the step, which varies per house (vertical surface).

Rustication

Masonry cut in massive blocks separated by deep joints, used to give a rich, bold texture to an outside wall. Common in Romanesque homes. Effect sometimes simulated in stucco and other building materials.

Sash window

A window formed with sashes, or sliding frames running in vertical grooves.

Scissors (Stairs)

Also known as U-shaped stairs, scissors stairs reverse direction half way up to return back the way it started.

Shed (Roof)

A shed is actually a half gable. One slopping plane is supported by walls. This usually comes off the back side or out of another roof. Shed roofs are also used over some porches.

Shutters

Window or door screens featuring horizontal slats that may be articulated, allowing control over air and light transmission. They are usually made of wood. While they may be hinged, modern exterior shutters are often decorative and remain fixed to the wall alongside the window or door opening.

Sill

The lower horizontal part of a window frame. Materials vary widely, from wood to marble.

Single Hung Windows

Only the bottom sash moves up and down, the top is fixed.

Sliders

Windows that slide open, like sliding glass doors.

Skylight

A window set into a roof or ceiling to provide extra lighting. Sizes, shapes and placement vary widely.

Soffit

The underside of any architectural element (as of an overhang or staircase). In modern homes, the wood or metal screening used to cover such areas.

Solarium

A glass-enclosed porch or room, often used to display flowers and other plants; also called a sunroom or garden room.

Stanchion

A vertical supporting beam, nowadays mainly of steel.

Strut

A roof timber, either upright and connected to the rafter above it, or sloping, connecting another post to the rafter.

Stucco

A sturdy type of plaster used on exterior walls; often spread in a decorative pattern.

Studs

Smaller upright beams in a house, to which drywall panels or laths for plaster are attached.

Storage

Extra space tucked anywhere that you can put the Christmas decorations, snow skis, or boxes of stuff that you just hang onto.

Terrace

A level promenade in front of a building; usually made of stone and accented with plants, statuary, etc.

Terracotta

Fired but unglazed clay, used mainly for floor and roof tiles. Can be fired in molds to produce a wide range of shapes. Usually red.

Thatch

A roof covering of straw, reeds or even living grass. In modern homes, most “thatching” is only decorative, simulated with shingles.

Thermal windows

Windows designed with multiple panes to trap air and provide greater insulation.

Tie-beam

The main horizontal beam in a roof, connecting the bases of the rafters, usually just above a wall.

Transom

Small, usually rectangular or fanlight window over a door. Some transoms open to cross-ventilate a home, while others are only decorative.

Trim

The framing or edging of openings and other features on the facade of a building or indoors. Trim is usually a different color or material than the adjacent wall.

Truss

A number of wood planks framed together to bridge a space, such as a roof truss.

Turret

A very small, slender tower. In modern homes, usually only ornamental.

Unfinished/Future Space

This term is a catch-all that refers to any space, regardless of its location, that can be finished at a later date. It often refers to a Bonus Room, or an unfinished daylight basement.

Unfinished Basement

Unlike ‘unfinished/future space’ this term is used to point out the presence of a full ‘dark’ basement that is built under a home on a flat lot. Building codes require that this type of basement have at least one window that is the same size as a typical bedroom window that can escape through. Daylight Basement. A full or partial basement that is well suited for a sloping lot. They can either be only partially in the ground allowing them to have larger windows for daylight or a full ‘walk-out’ type that usually has door that lead to a lower patio.

Wainscoting

Decorative paneling covering the lower 3-4 feet of an interior wall. Usually wood in a plain design; may be painted or only varnished.

Weeping mortar

This decorative mortar appears to “drip” out between the exterior bricks in a home.

Widow’s walk

A small, railed observation platform atop a house. Once used to scout for seamen, such walks are usually square, done in elaborately-worked wrought iron or wood.

Wine Cellar

A special place for you prized collection. Today’s wine cellars are often greatly embellished spaces that can even be climate controlled for the serious connoisseur.

Infinite possibilities ...
to enrich every corner

