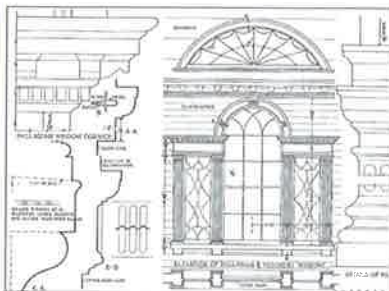


House Proud

Pilasters, Plinths & Palladio | By Gladys Montgomery



Georgian Federal Facade



Palladian Window, Tracery Sidelights



Greek Revival Temple & Wing



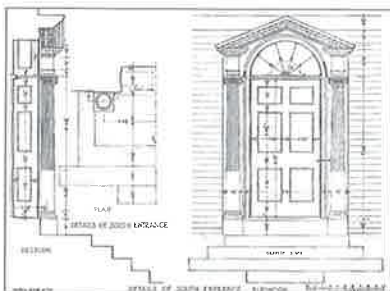
Federal Style with Hip Roof



Greek Revival Style



Colonial Revival Style



Doorway with Fanlight & Pilasters



Federal Style

Consider a Berkshire porch with tall columns, a fireplace with a mantel supported by fluted pilasters, crown moldings where walls meet ceiling in a room – these details come to us from ancient Greece and Rome. How they found their way into American homes is a great story. It begins in northeast Italy, where architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) began designing villas for the aristocracy, based upon the work of Roman architect Vitruvius, who lived in the first century BC. Though Palladio had a profound influence on architects throughout Europe, the Neoclassical style didn't become widely fashionable until the 1730s and '40s when excavations began in Herculaneum and Pompeii (Greek towns destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD). Pompeii was hit by hot ash and burned, but Herculaneum was submerged by mud slides, so its buildings and furnishings were miraculously well preserved. These excavations ignited the Neoclassical fashion in architecture and design, which was enthusiastically embraced by the well-to-do.

In America, the Neoclassical style went through three phases. The first, from 1725-1785, during the Colonial period, is the Georgian style. Bringing a new elegance and symmetry to homes of the wealthy, Georgian architecture featured weighty details: strong dentil moldings, heavy pediments, substantial multi-tiered crown moldings, and raised-field paneling and bolection molding around fireplaces. It also gave us the split pediment overmantel and Connecticut River Valley doorway, including the one at Mission House, added in about 1750. By 1790, the United States had achieved independence. The Georgian taste ceded to the more refined Federal style, which brought a lightness and grace to dentil moldings and other details, and added embellishments that included fanlights (semicircular windows), the fireplace mantel, and

applied decorations featuring floral swags, urns, bell flowers, and sheaves of wheat.

The Neoclassical style didn't become truly democratic and affordable until the Greek Revival period (1825-1860), when bold architectural elements mirrored the bold mood of the new nation. Borrowing the designs of public buildings, churches, and banks, homes featured prominent triangular front gables facing the street and outlined with moldings, along with wide fascia boards, blocky corner pilasters, and columned porches. Thanks to factory-made goods, shipping via new canals and railroads, and newfound prosperity, middle-class people could copy the homes of the rich. This was a first: because of its egalitarian character, the Greek Revival was known as America's "national style."

By 1850, Victorian styles had captured the public imagination, and the Neoclassical fell out of favor. But fast forward to the late-19th and early-20th centuries: Neoclassical details emerged again during America's Colonial Revival. In the 21st century, these details are still creating grace notes in new traditional homes. To see them online, search Federal and Greek Revival styles on the Library of Congress Historic American Buildings Survey and check out sources on www.traditionalbuilding.com.

~ Gladys Montgomery is a Realtor with William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty in Great Barrington. Attuned to the needs of buyers and sellers, and specializing in architecturally distinctive homes in all price ranges, she is licensed in Massachusetts and New York State. Her background includes a 30-year career as a marketing specialist and as a writer/editor/author specializing in architecture, design, and lifestyle topics.

