



Postal Perfect

My Pursuit of Mail-Order Homes in Wisconsin

By Jim Draeger

Contemporary critics of suburban development often criticize the “sameness” of the modern suburban landscape. We can easily understand the homogenizing power of today’s explosive home improvement industry, from the ever-familiar Home Depots that dot our communities to bestseller publications and popular television programs featuring Norm and Martha. America’s obsession with the single-family home has made it a powerful socioeconomic indicator, and home ownership is often perceived as a litmus test of success. But is suburban “sameness” an essential characteristic of our built environment? In such a culturally, socially, and geographically diverse country, how did buildings begin to look alike?

See prices on inside of front cover

The Plaza

AS a reward for a life of thrill, a woman gained ownership to the spot of land reputed to be the center of the United States. It was well worth her time to search for and win for a beautiful house design for this enviable location. The center of the United States—the heart of liberty—was desiring of the best. It was unnecessary to say that the home for this location must be rock-ribbed American in architecture.

In the process of elimination which was to determine the suitable design, hundreds were cast aside. Exterior too plain and interior too stuffy—was there not one home that would prove suitable? At last the book, *Aladdin Homes*, was consulted. Carefully the pages were turned, here and there was a home that would possibly do, until at last, the best of them all—the one that fulfilled the wishes and hopes of the owners—was found. It was the Plaza. It is a thoroughly bargalow and bangalow architecture in American.

The very master of American architecture makes up its attractive line. The West is portrayed in the beautiful California pergola porch, the East in the interior of the house. The sunny South finds credit in the spacious porch, while the North has claimed the shingled sidewalks representing northern homes in the early days of American history.

If you are interested in making the Plaza your home, write us for the many interesting details you will need before deciding to build. See prices on inside of front cover and general specifications on pages 12 and 13.

Design from *The Comfortable House*, p. 31; courtesy of Jim Draeger

From the page to the pavement: mail-order homes like "The Plaza" appear throughout Wisconsin.

There are many ways to explore this question, but looking at one particularly interesting piece of the puzzle here in Wisconsin may provide an answer. This would be the “mail-order house” that was made possible by dramatic changes in industry and technology, which produced equally dramatic changes in the promotion and marketing of consumer goods. The new houses changed forever the business of design, carpentry, and homebuilding as well as the design and esthetics of American housing. Mail-order houses survive to this day, many of them in Wisconsin. By identifying and studying them, we can learn a great deal

Opposite: Mail-order homes promised freedom from monthly rents, and this personal independence attracted potential homebuyers from all tax brackets.

Adapted from the Sears, Roebuck 1926 catalog; courtesy of Jim Draeger

about the architecture’s role in shaping our social, cultural, technological, and economic history.

My first encounter with mail-order architecture came in 1983 during a gray, humid summertime architectural survey of the textile mill town of Gaffney, South Carolina. The owner of a substantial two-story, shingle-clad house came out the door as I stood on the sidewalk, clipboard in hand, making note of architectural details. He told me that the house had been ordered from a Sears, Roebuck catalog in the 1920s. My mind leapt to the hundreds of seemingly identical bungalows I had documented in small towns throughout South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky, and I began pondering the source of standardized working-class architecture.

This vague curiosity solidified into keen interest when I later

documented Old Hickory, Tennessee, a company town built at the end of World War I for workers at DuPont's black powder plant. In a manner typical of many company towns, workers lived in mass-produced standard-plan houses, arranged in a hierarchy reflecting their position in the company. Managers lived in one house style, supervisors lived in another, and workers lived along streets of identical houses. Old Hickory was the physical embodiment of patriarchal corporate social control, with workers literally "moving up" into the next house type as the company promoted them.

In the years approaching the Civil War, before standardized house plans were widely available, local house builders imposed their own standard forms and plans. These builders were highly skilled artisans, since timber-frame construction—the most common form of house-building—required considerable skill. This vernacular, or folk, tradition of construction was passed down from master

Wisconsin's rich folk-building tradition is due to the broad range of ethnic immigrants who settled here.

builder to apprentice, combining the expertise of the builder with his own ethnic background, personal tastes, level of ingenuity, and individual creativity. Rarely did owners construct their own houses. Although methods, forms, and details changed gradually as the area itself was settled and established, new ideas were slow to spread.

This folk-building tradition is evident in Wisconsin, easily visible in the uniformity of nineteenth-century farmhouse designs, such as the gabled ell in southeastern Wisconsin and the cornbelt cube in southwestern Wisconsin. In urban areas, the same phenomenon is seen in the Polish flats of Milwaukee and the cream brick worker cottages of Racine. Wisconsin's rich folk-building tradition is due to the broad range of ethnic immigrants who settled here in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all of whom brought ideas and abilities from their homeland and reinterpreted them in a new world context.

This folk tradition began to change with the proliferation in the mid-nineteenth century of "builder's guides" and "pattern books" such as *Upjohn's Rural Architecture*, published in 1852, and George Woodward's 1865 *Woodward's Country Homes*. The intent of these early books was to provide practical designs, plans, and building advice to a largely rural population. These guides were written primarily for the builder to use as encyclopedias of archetypal building forms and details, sample material lists, typical floor plans, and standard elevations, which they often adapted to local conditions. Prospective homeowners leafed through these guides, reading them as dream books filled with the latest esthetic trends and creature comforts, which might or might not be within their budget—or the scope of their local builder—to achieve. These guidebooks' greatest impact was to hasten the spread of new ideas, methods, and practices among builders and, indirectly, their clients. Their success spawned an explosion of builders' books after the Civil War.

At roughly the same time, advances in building technology replaced many folk-building practices. The standardization of lumber dimensions stemmed from the replacement of hand-hewn timber framing with lumber sawn in steam- and water-powered mills. Machine-cut

Guides like Woodward's Country Homes, which appeared in 1865, were written primarily for builders in rural communities, who still practiced largely vernacular styles of construction. This illustration from page 153, however, indicates that the days of balloon-frame construction were under way, even if that method had not yet gained universal acceptance.

Courtesy of Jim Draeger



nails superseded wood-pegged joints and hand-forged nails. The “balloon-frame” construction method utilized both of these innovations by placing two-by-four studs at standard intervals and joining the frame solely with nails. This lightweight framing slowly replaced heavy-hewn or sawn-timber framing, although the term *balloon frame* reveals the skepticism many builders had for the sticklike framing, which is now nearly universal. Whatever the confidence level these new buildings engendered, the freedom of design that accompanied their lightweight structure stimulated a variety of new building forms and floor plans.

The architectural press grew in response to the need for technical instruction to accommodate rapidly increasing construction and evolving technological sophistication. Periodicals reached ever-wider audiences, and magazines such as *Scientific American* and *Ladies’ Home Journal* gave extensive attention to house design. In addition, the growing reverence for the domestic sphere that occurred in the nineteenth century tended to make the average person equate esthetic sophistication with a moral and proper middle-class lifestyle. This linkage heightened popular interest in domestic design and created public demand for professional architectural designs rather than vernacular styles, which were tainted with an antiquated, amateurish image, even if their actual quality was excellent.

With the rise of the architectural profession and the increase of academically trained architects, the nature of the plan books themselves also changed. The education of builders and their clients became the provenance of specialized publications such as

The Carpenter’s Steel Square and Its Uses and Catherine Beecher’s *The American Woman’s Home*. Consequently, pattern books began directly selling blueprint sets and building specifications; from this the late-nineteenth-century business of mail-order house plans evolved. Although local builders were still a primary audience, pattern books now dictated a specific set of directions and a formal design. These were to be read, understood, and approved by the client, who then expected the builder to follow the

book. As pattern books developed into mail-order catalogs, both the autonomy and the identity of the local builder began to disappear at all levels: the individual construction projects, the local communities, and the regions overall.

Knoxville, Tennessee, architect George F. Barber led the transition from pattern books to mail-order houses, beginning about 1888. Barber had moved from his native Illinois to Tennessee for health reasons. Like many of his competitors, Barber published plan books, sold plans to periodicals such as *Scientific American* and *Carpentry and Building*, and ran advertisements in magazines such as *Harper’s Weekly*. He provided plans for



Photos from *America’s Favorite Houses*, p. 82; courtesy of Jim Draeger
W. J. (left) and Otto (right) Sovereign, founders of the Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan.

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PERSPECTIVE VIEW.

Residence of CHAR. J. BURTON, Glensville, N. Y.

DESIGN No. 33



FIRST



...at to b

elaborate Victorian residences to a burgeoning upper-middle-class population. Over a dozen of his ornate Queen Anne residences have been recorded in Wisconsin, including design #33, used to build both the Raphael Soquet house in Green Bay and the Edward Hammer House in Hillsboro. Their “keyhole” windows, ornately decorated vergeboards, and squatty, turned porch posts are typical of Barber’s “too much is not enough” ornamental esthetic. Barber’s company produced twenty-three house plan catalogs between 1888 and 1912, and, because he also supplied building material, he became the bridge between the pattern books of the late-nineteenth century and the “house-by-mail” catalogs of the twentieth century.

The Rural Free Delivery Act of 1896 also boosted mail-order marketing. It brought mail delivery and therefore mass-produced goods to rural America. The tremendous expansion of the railroads in the same period allowed inexpensive transportation of these goods.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Midwest began to exert a much stronger influence on pattern-book houses, and Wisconsin played a powerful supporting role. William A. Radford was on the forefront of this movement. Radford grew up in the Oshkosh millwork business of his father, in 1890 becoming secretary-treasurer of the Radford Sash and Door Company, a leading producer of stock millwork. In the 1890s, Radford relocated to the Chicago suburb of Riverside. At this time, the lumber industry that Radford had left behind in the Fox River Valley had a direct connection to Chicago’s emergence as a regional lumber market, as large quantities of Wisconsin lumber were shipped through the city. At this same time, Chicago was also becoming a major publishing center. Not surprisingly, this convergence of lumber and publishing interests created in Chicago a center for architectural publishing. Radford recognized this entwinement and in 1902 began to publish a series of architectural books starting with *The Radford Ideal Homes*.

William Radford’s designs typify the esthetic breadth of many mail-order companies. The 1908 publication *Radford’s Artistic Homes* includes diverse designs, from stark and plain Midwestern cube farmhouses to adventurous Prairie School and bungalow designs. Both flashy and ordinary, the mixture was designed to appeal to the broadest audience. Radford’s

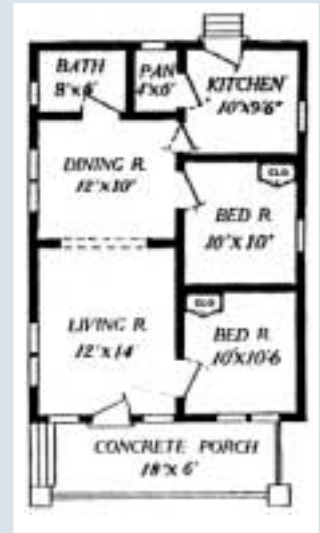
Opposite: George F. Barber’s design #33 is a Victorian mansion re-created several times in Wisconsin, including the Edward Hammer House at 560 Water Street in Hillsboro (Vernon County).

The Fred Bloor House in Hartford is also a Barber house (although not design #33); its veranda details (right inset) reflect Barber’s ornamental esthetic.

Design from *The Cottage Souvenir No 2*, p. 72; photos courtesy of Jim Draeger

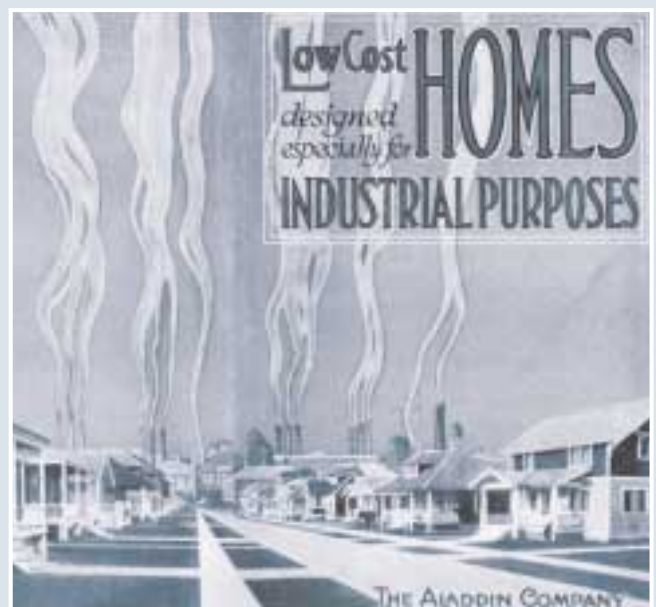
Pleasantville

In an autocratic decision that typified the rationalization of company towns, the Montreal Mining Company’s planners bought fifty identical bungalows. In describing Montreal’s model “the Raymond,” its catalog proclaims, “What housewife would not be delighted with the plan of the Raymond? Of course, the exposed rafters, casements, windows and porch all contribute their part to make this little bungalow complete, attractive and modern. . . . For compactness, convenience, and modern designing, the Raymond is



among the leaders. When entering the front through the attractively designed bungalow door, one is impressed with the roominess of this apparently small house.”

In reality, the Raymond was a twenty-two- by thirty-foot house that utilized a typical bungalow floor plan of the time. Its tiny 660-square-foot floor plan economized on space by using an L-shaped circulation pattern and eliminating hallways. Industrial housing had a logical relationship to industrial towns. Firms such as Aladdin offered houses in a range of sizes and costs, delivered to remote locations. Their simple precut designs were quickly erected by semi-skilled laborers. Companies found that well-planned, attractive, and decent housing provided by mail-order firms attracted a married and inherently more stable workforce.



Top: Design from *The 1919 Aladdin Catalog*, p. 28, courtesy of Jim Draeger; bottom: Design from *Low Cost Homes Designed Especially for Industrial Purposes*, 1920



design number 7067-B at 449 W. State in Burlington was built from a contemporary bungalow design in that book and reflects the role that plan books played in fostering new design ideas in smaller communities.

Radford's roots in the lumber and milling industries are just one example of the origins of the mail-order-home business. Millwork companies, which manufactured all types of woodwork, including doors, sashes, sills, and other basic building materials, were at the forefront of the houses-by-mail movement. Companies like Gordon Van Tine of Davenport, Iowa, began as a millwork company, offering stock building elements by catalog. Success as a houses-by-mail company arrived when Gordon Van Tine packaged components such as stairs, windows, and doors with a set of blueprints. It eventually became a full-blown, mail-order-home business. Others such as Sears, Roebuck and the Chicago Wrecking Company (later Harris Brothers) also had extensive millwork catalogs prior to their entry into the house market. Like the millwork trade, mail-order architecture was based primarily in the Midwest due to its proximity to timber, good rail connections, and areas of growth and settlement.

It was the growth of mail-order firms and the dream-book quality of their catalogs that took the burgeoning house plan business a step beyond its millwork origins and offered a complete build-it-yourself home kit, ordered through the mail and delivered by rail. The founders of Aladdin Homes, W. J. and Otto Sovereign, brothers from Bay City, Michigan, got the idea for precut buildings from local shipbuilders' experiments in precut assemble-it-yourself wooden boats. Their first order was for a "\$298 five-room cottage" in 1907. Just as the genie fulfilled Aladdin's wishes, the company promised to make their customers' home-owning dreams come true. Success came quickly for the "magical" Aladdin Company. Their catalogs featured attractive drawings of each house and its detailed floor plan. Aladdin sold complete house kits, right down to the paint and doorknocker. Their designs were primarily bungalows and American four-squares, aimed at a thrifty, conservative, middle-class and working-class market.

Picture a couple poring over the pages of a 1921 Aladdin catalog, savoring the colorful renderings, studying the floor plans,

Top: As the mail-order-home industry became more popular and prevalent, national companies formed agreements with local lumberyards to help put a familiar name on the building materials delivered to the customer. The Beloit Retail Lumber Dealers' catalog cover reflects their support of the national trends. Bottom: William Radford left behind his family's Oshkosh milling company to become an industry leader in the mail-order-home business. Radford's Bungalows Catalog of 1909 was especially popular.

Courtesy of Jim Draeger



comparing prices and features. Nervous about buying a house by mail, they are reassured by the premium lumber grades, “Dollar-A-Knot” guarantee on finished materials, and testimonials from satisfied customers. They select the popular “Plaza,” priced at \$2,883, and send in the order form. When a local sales representative appears at their door, they discuss the details of the order. When do they expect delivery? Are they planning on adding a brick or stone veneer? Would they like to see Aladdin’s furniture catalog to select furnishings ideally suited to their new home? How about an Aladdin garage, barn, or ready-made addition? Details are ironed out, and the order is finalized. The family, relatives, and friends start work on the foundation, excavating with horse teams and hand shovels and laying the foundation. Weeks later, the railroad stationmaster announces the arrival of several railroad boxcars of building materials. The family hauls lumber, nail buckets, shingle bundles, and paint cans to the building site. They begin to assemble the house, with framing, subfloor, wall sheathing, baseboards, doorframes, and stairs all cut and fitted in the factory. Unlike other houses in the neighborhood, there are no piles of scrap lumber—no waste, due to precut construction. Nails are driven as the house slowly takes shape through evenings and weekends of family effort. When the last nail is driven and the final coat of Aladdin paint applied, the house stands completed, the physical expression of their wistful dreaming.

Unlike the guides and plan books of the past, the Aladdin Company aimed its house kits at the do-it-yourself carpenter, allowing a person with minimal carpentry skill to build a house by assembling precut and numbered parts, like a full-scale Lego set. Aladdin bridged the gap between skilled craftsman and weekend warrior. In its more elaborate designs, the company offered distinctive and well-crafted ornaments that were beyond the skill of the ordinary carpenter. The Plaza design, an example of which is found at 210 East Anthony Street in Hustisford, illustrates the sophistication of Aladdin’s work. The low-pitched, stacked rooflines, Japanese-influence joinery, and expansive

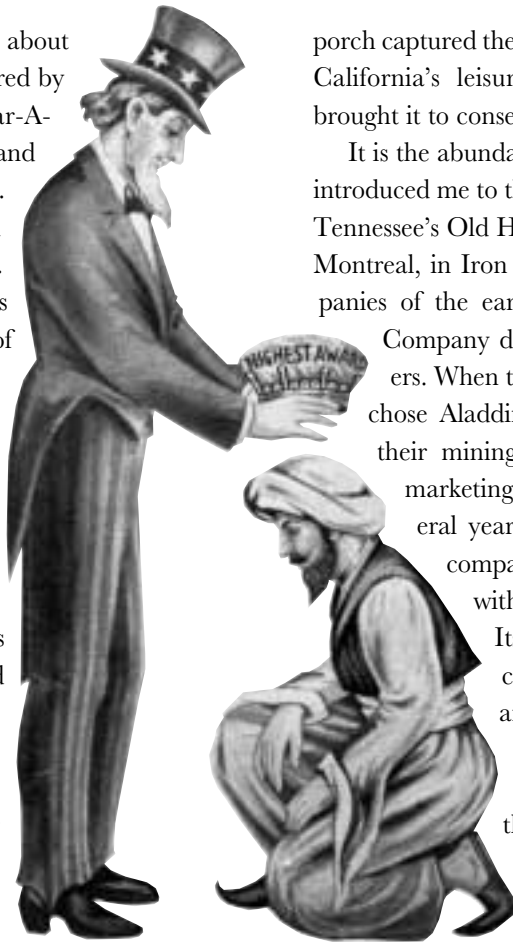
porch captured the essential character of the hand-built homes of California’s leisure class. Aladdin captured this spirit and brought it to conservative, largely working-class Wisconsin.

It is the abundance of Aladdin designs in Wisconsin that first introduced me to the company, when I discovered a sister city to Tennessee’s Old Hickory in Wisconsin’s northern community of Montreal, in Iron County. Like many paternal industrial companies of the early twentieth century, the Montreal Mining Company developed a planned community for its workers. When the company expanded the town in 1918, they chose Aladdin homes to attract workers with families to their mining operation. Aladdin had been aggressively marketing precut houses to industrial companies for several years, and by 1917 it had a catalog devoted to company housing offering entire towns, complete with stores, churches, schools, and warehouses. Its 1919 catalogue listed over three hundred corporate customers including mining, iron, and steel companies. Their motto was “A complete home or a complete city.”

The Aladdin Company may have housed the respective workforces of entire industries, but what was the role of the granddaddy of the mail-order catalog, the one best known by generations? Founded in 1886 as a general merchandise mail-order business, Sears, Roebuck began selling millwork and plans in 1895 and entered the catalog home business in 1908, eventually becoming the largest mail-order supply house in the United States. Sears’s 1908 catalog offered twenty-two models. After the mid-teens, the firm applied romantic or picturesque names as part of its promotional schemes. Sears also advertised its houses on the basis of cost, quality, and quick delivery. Sears’s mail-order houses appeared in its own catalogs, of course, as well as in popular publications such as *House Beautiful*.

Sears, Roebuck enjoyed extraordinary success. In more than three decades of operation, it claims to have sold over 100,000 homes. Its achievement was tied to its innovative home financing, offered at a time when long-term mortgages were rare. Mortgages could extend as long as fifteen years and could include the cost of the lot. This boosted sales during the boom years of the 1920s but hurt the company badly later when the Depression forced Sears into foreclosing on mortgages of loyal customers.

It was the 1996 publication of *Houses by Mail* by Ward Jandal



Design from *The Wedge*; courtesy of Jim Draeger

Uncle Sam crowns Aladdin with “The Highest Award” in January 1916 to reaffirm the company’s leadership role, reminding customers that as the houses-by-mail business began to become crowded with competitors, the Aladdin Company had already been in existence for ten years.

and Katherine Cole Stevenson, and its extensive material on Sears houses, that allowed me a watershed moment in my personal fascination with mail-order design. The book included a compendium of Sears house plans, organized by house shape—in effect, a handy field guide to Sears houses. Armed with a well-thumbed copy of that book, I started taking a much closer look at the modest suburban tracts of the teens, twenties, and thirties, searching for the telltale signs of a catalog house. Because these homes were built from standard factory-produced components, many designs shared the same porch brackets, roof braces, windows, and other details, and it was possible to learn to recognize the “vocabulary” of many Sears homes and spot them on the street. Soon, as I traveled through Wisconsin’s small towns, I could recognize by sight some of the more popular and striking designs such as the Osborn or the Crescent.

I occasionally bumped into owners of these mail-order houses and at first was surprised that nearly all were ignorant of their home’s origin. Over the course of a single generation, the identity of some mail-order homes had been lost, perhaps due to the very popularity they enjoyed. It may be that the practice of “building by the book” was so commonplace that it never stuck in the societal memory, dooming the stories of these houses to obscurity.

Not so in the case of Racine residents Herman and Zella Zimmerman, who bought “The Lorain” from Sears, Roebuck in 1929. Family members can recount immediately how Herman and his brother Harvey picked up the two train car loads of lumber from the nearest railroad junction and transported them by wagon to the site at 2056 Cleveland Avenue. The seventeen-page construction manual gave step-by-step instructions that allowed Herman and his brother to build the house following a carefully detailed sequence, beginning with instructions on how the lumber should be stacked on the site. By appealing to a range of unskilled but capable workers, these kits eliminated the need for a local

builder’s participation, even as a resource. The end of local influence was complete.

Even the American Institute of Architects, a professional organization, began publishing plan books for homeowners and building contractors in 1920 through its Small Homes Bureau, although the practice was controversial. The Federal government joined the ranks of house plan publishers with booklets like its farmhouse plan book from 1934. The Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, and Subsistence Homestead Division of the Department of the Interior all published house plan books.

The mainstays of the house plan industry were the mail-order plan companies such as Radford, Standard Homes, National Plan Service, and Garlinghouse Plan Service. Their scope was national, and they exerted a tremendous influence on architecture through their rationalization and standardization of house planning. They distributed their catalogs through local lumberyards, and as a result the familiar imprints on building catalogs were instantly recognizable, encouraging the public’s confidence in the expanding group of nationwide plan sellers.

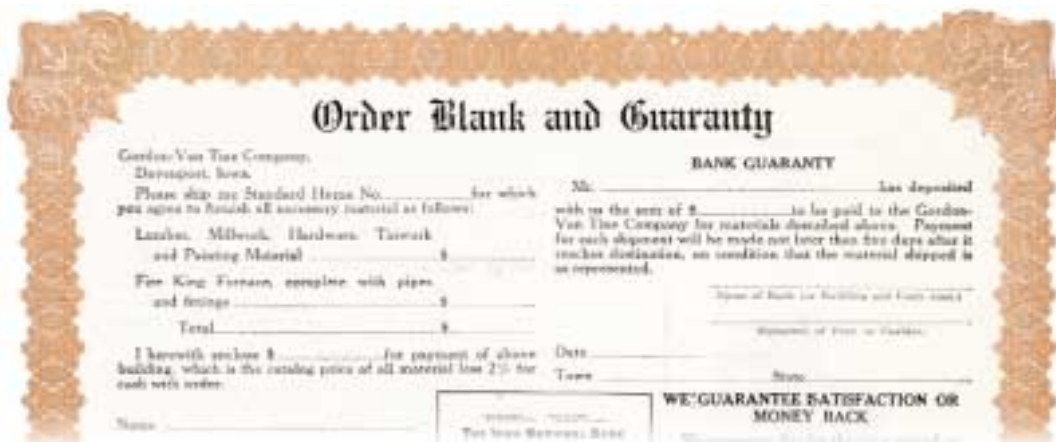
The complex interrelationship among architects, book and periodical publishers, industrial suppliers, trade groups, and manufacturers produced an astonishing array of design services, ranging from dream-inducing plans published in Sunday newspapers to an entire prefabricated house delivered to the site. This interconnection also complicates things, in an interesting way, when it comes to identifying mail-order houses.

For instance, according to WHS historic preservation division records, the Casanova House at 1126 South Sixth Street in Hudson was “built from the plans of a house in Ohio.” I was delighted when I found the Ohio house in an April 1937 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens*, which listed the plan as “courtesy of the Portland Cement Association.” The caption read, “designed by architect Stephen M. Jokel of Toledo, Ohio.” Aha, I thought, the Casanova family ordered that plan from the Portland Cement

Association, which published a number of architectural plan books. Imagine my surprise when I saw the same house illustrated in a Garlinghouse mail-order plan book, *All-American Houses*. When I discovered a third, identical house in Hibbing, Minnesota, reputedly designed by a local archi-

This order blank from Gordon Van Tine’s Standard Homes catalog, similar to those of other companies, provided the starting point for the potential home owner: the dotted line on which to sign.

Courtesy of Jim Draeger



fect, it drove home to me the difficulty of authenticating the design source of mail-order houses. How can you be sure where a design originated or what source an owner or architect used?

It is precisely this complexity that both aggravates and enriches my hunt for mail-order houses. I am not nearly so certain about my discoveries now that I know the extent to which mail-order catalog companies copied the successful plans of competi-

tors. For example, Sears, Roebuck's "Strathford" was virtually identical to Gordon Van Tine Company's design for "The Kent" and the Packard Plan Service's "Balfour."

I found a fine example of Sears, Roebuck's "No. 124," faithful in every detail. This same design appeared in *Wm. Comstock, Bungalows, Camps and Cottages* as an illustration depicting a "California Bungalow." These coincidences are not easily explained. Did Comstock photograph a Sears, Roebuck house, or did Sears lift the design out of Comstock's book? I have come to accept that there are often several "original" sources for a design, and, knowing that it is unlikely that any individual or company ever documented a deliberate act of copying, I move on to ask other questions, those that I can answer.

For instance, given the complexity of identifying catalog houses, how do I find them? I look for identical buildings that ring that "deja vu" bell in my head. I study familiar examples to understand their distinguishing characteristics. I look for the trademark details of houses from Sears, Aladdin, and other companies that allow me to pick them out on the street. When I observe exotic-looking houses that stand out of their context, I pay attention. I also photograph and study small-scale houses with over-scaled, elaborated porches. I compare them to the primary sources available in private collections, reprints, on the Web, or here at the Wisconsin Historical Society, and with time, the designer emerges.

Why bother to understand the design sources of modest middle-class suburban houses? What intrigues me most about mail-order houses is a belief that although houses of the early twentieth century

What Aladdin House would be complete without the Aladdin Homes door knocker? And what guest would fail to see the company name? This particular knocker adorns the house of the author.

Courtesy of Jim Draeger

The Author



Jim Draeger researches and speaks on a wide range of Wisconsin topics including mail-order houses, Depression-era architecture, Wisconsin resorts, and early Modernism. Currently chief of the office of historic buildings, Jim has been the Wisconsin Historical Society's architectural historian for the past fourteen years. Curiously, his architect-designed 1936 International Style home in Monona was not built from standard plans.

built from standard plans displaced various ethnic and vernacular styles, they also created a new American vernacular architecture. Standard house plans became the basis of new building traditions that are national rather than local or regional in scope. The widespread use of house plans imposed new forms and designs that became part of the broader building tradition. Rather than passing down construction

knowledge from master builder to apprentice, these plans passed knowledge from educated architects and construction managers directly to local builders and their clients. New ideas and construction methods spread quickly, and new house types such as the bungalow, the Cape Cod, and the ranch house were adopted much more rapidly because of standard plans. As a result, the architecture of America became increasingly homogenous, and local building traditions became more responsive to national changes in taste, fashion, and forms. Traditional ethnic and regional variations were displaced by a strengthened sense of national identity as standard house forms were almost universally adopted. The house continues to have strong cultural connotations as a symbol of personal, familial, and societal identity. From the bungalow's symbolism of the emerging "nuclear" family, to the modern "McMansion's" ostentatious assertions of "more is better," the single-family house is a powerful indicator of social and cultural values. The cult of the "weekend warrior" and America's nearly insatiable appetite for home improvement underscore the importance of home and show how, as we shape our homes, we are in turn shaped by them. ❧

Resources and Further Reading

A wide range of sources are available for the study of standard plan houses. General overviews of the subject include *America's Favorite Homes: Mail-Order Catalogues As a Guide to Popular Early 20th-Century Houses* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) by Robert A. Schweitzer and Michael W.R. Davis; *Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1986) by Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandal; and *House from Books: The Influence of Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) by Daniel D. Reiff.

Dover Publications of Mineola, New York, has reprinted a large number of historic plan books featuring many of the major designers mentioned in this article, and Central Michigan University's Clarke Historical Library has acquired the Aladdin company records and is placing scanned catalogs online at <http://www.lib.cmich.edu/clarke/aladdin/catdir.htm>.

