

Prairie Style Guide



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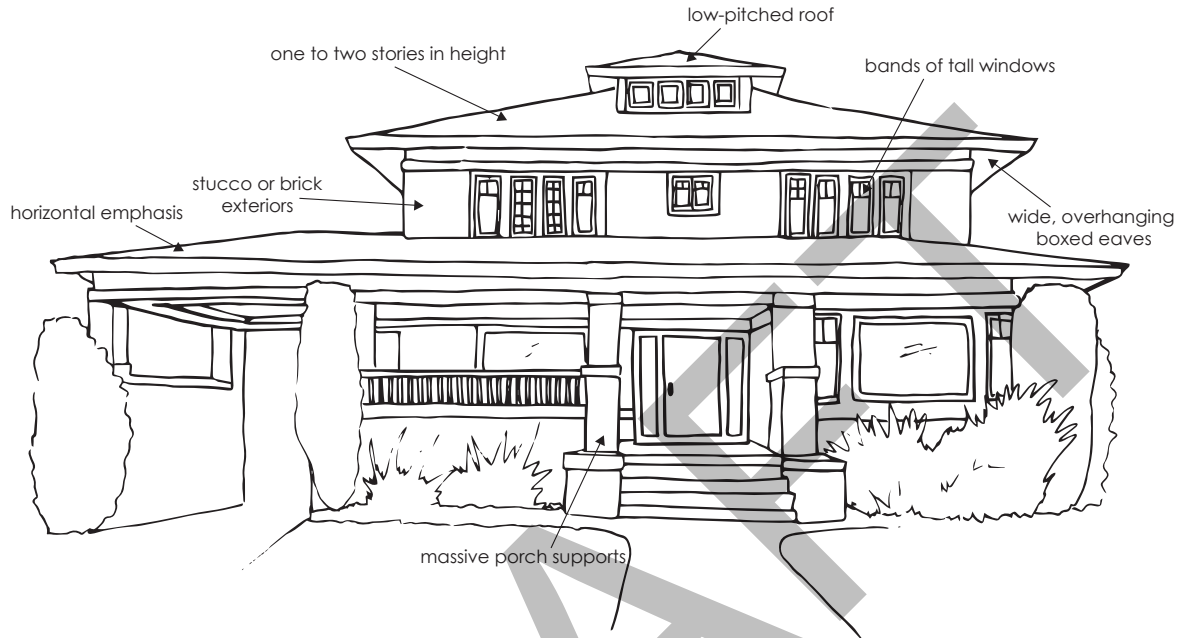
This section of the Long Beach Historic District Design Guidelines is part of a larger document created as a planning tool for the City's **historic districts**. The guidelines are intended to provide recommendations, inspiration, and advice as part of an instructive framework that will help guide sensitive changes to historic properties and encourage rehabilitation. By their nature, design guidelines are flexible. As such, outcomes may depend on the resource, the surrounding district, and the goals of the proposed project.

Any changes to the exterior of the property must be given prior approval by Historic Preservation staff through a **Certificate of Appropriateness**, and all projects may be subject to other City requirements not listed within these guidelines.

The first instance of certain terms throughout the Guidelines are highlighted in **bold** text. These terms are defined in a glossary in *Chapter 5: Additional Resources*.

For additional information, please refer to the other chapters of this document:

- Chapter 1: Purpose, Procedures & Overview
- Chapter 2: Guidelines for Maintenance and Repair
- Chapter 3: Design Guidelines by Historic District
- Chapter 4: Architectural Style Guides
- Chapter 5: Additional Resources



PRAIRIE STYLE (1900-1922)

The Prairie style is one of the few architectural styles that is truly native to the United States. It was developed at the start of the twentieth century in Chicago by a group of architects that became known as the Prairie School. The Prairie style spread rapidly, particularly in the suburbs as a vernacular residential style; however, it was short-lived and quickly faded from popularity after World War I.¹

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright pioneered and perfected the Prairie style. In 1893, he produced an early Prairie house known as the Winslow House. He went on to develop Prairie style subtypes that were widely publicized through pattern books in the Midwest.² Each design subtype had distinctions in entries and symmetry, as well as variations in roof form, such as **gabled**, low-pitched hipped, and flat.³ One of the most common vernacular Prairie style subtypes is a symmetrical hipped roof variation, which is also known as the Prairie Box or American Foursquare. Higher style forms are asymmetrically arranged with low-pitched hipped roofs. Some designs feature geometric and floral details as ornamentation, inspired the architect Louis Sullivan, a mentor to Frank Lloyd Wright.⁴

In the early twentieth century, Period Revival architectural styles were the most popular in cities like Long Beach. The Prairie style was a modern anomaly against this mainstream phenomenon, and never fully caught on as a widespread trend in Long Beach. As such, there are few examples throughout the city,⁵ though the style may be found in areas like Bluff Park.



Additional Examples of the Style



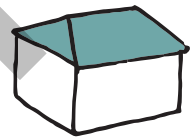


Building Form and Massing

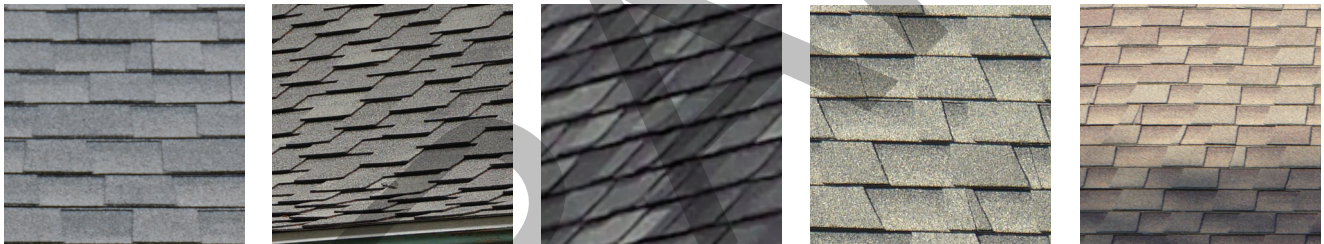
Prairie style homes are often two stories in height with a strong emphasis on horizontality, often achieved through flanking, one-story wings. Low, flat roofs cover simple, boxy volumes. Simpler examples will be symmetrically arranged, while higher style examples may have varying heights and asymmetrical **massing**.

Roof Shape and Materials

The roof on a Prairie style home will typically be a low-pitched hipped or flat roof with wide, overhanging **eaves** that contribute to the building's horizontal massing. Eaves are often boxed, and there may be dormers on the front elevation.



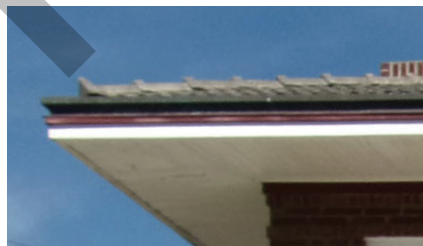
Hipped



Composition shingles in an appropriate color, like the above examples, would be acceptable for a Prairie style residence. Shingles should be in a darker, neutral color, but not so dark as black.



Boxed eaves



Boxed eaves



Boxed eaves

Cladding

Traditionally, the style may be clad in wood, brick, or even stone; however, on the West Coast, Prairie style residences are more likely to be clad in stucco or brick.



Float or dash stucco



Brick



Horizontal wood clapboards (rare in California)

Foundation

The foundation is not necessarily a focal point of a Prairie style residence. The foundations may be clad in the same material as the exterior, or consist of horizontal bands of contrasting material.

Chimneys

Chimneys are typically arranged on a side elevation or extend from the interior of the residence and are clad in the same material as the exterior of the building. They are often wide and rectangular.

Porches and Entryways

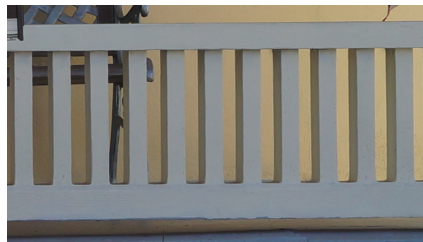


The location and orientation of the entry porch on a Prairie style home may vary. There are examples of both recessed and projecting porches that are centered or arranged to one side of the front elevation. Porch supports are most likely to be blocky, squared **piers** clad in brick or stucco. Other porch supports may be tapered or paired, similar to those found on Craftsman style residences.



Railings and Balustrades

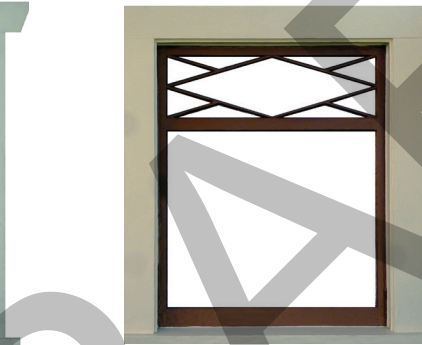
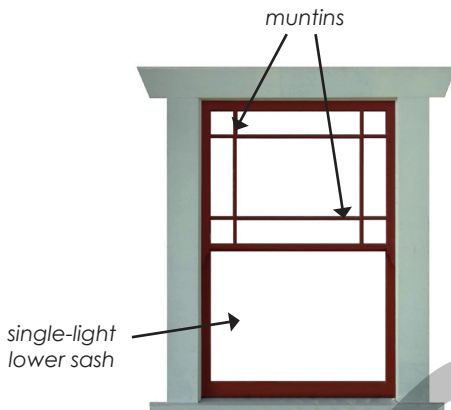
Porches and balconies on a Prairie style home are most likely to be enclosed by a low masonry or stucco wall rather than a railing. Where they do exist, railings may consist of simple and sturdy wood **balusters**, handrails, and **newel posts**.



Windows

Prairie style residences have rectangular window openings. The windows themselves share many stylistic details with the contemporaneous Craftsman style, such as multi-light **glazing**, geometric **muntings**, and **art glass**.

The wood windows on a Prairie style residence are often arranged in pairs or continuous horizontal bands. Operable windows may be casements on high-style examples, while **double-hung** wood windows may be found on more typical examples of the style.



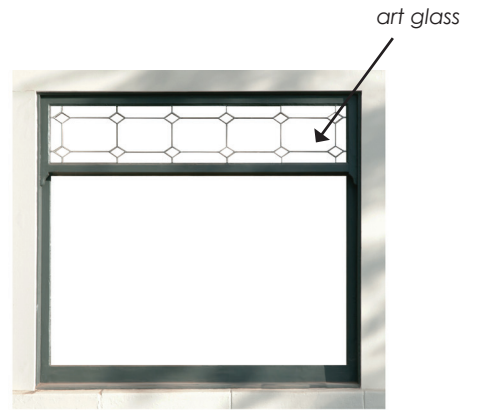
Double-hung or fixed with geometric muntins



Grouped casements with geometric muntins



Grouped multi-light wood windows



Fixed with art glass



Paired casement (dormer windows)

Awnings

Awnings are not compatible with the Prairie style. Generally, the wide eaves of the roof provide ample shade for the interior. Property owners are encouraged to consider other methods of creating shade, such as indoor shutters or window treatments.

Doors

As the styles developed concurrently, Prairie style doors are somewhat similar to Craftsman style doors. They are always wood. Many are stained to show the natural wood grain rather than painted. The doors may be embellished with elaborate paneling, geometric glazing and features like a **dentil** shelf. Other examples of Prairie style doors are solid wood with or without partial glazing, or fully-glazed, multi-light doors.

Sidelights are commonly seen flanking the primary door on the residence.



Garage Doors

There are a wide variety of compatible garage doors for a Prairie style house, including paneled or **battened** doors, with or without partial glazing or **carriage style** detailing. Contemporary garage doors are available through various retailers that both mimic the attractive appearance of a carriage style door and operate using convenient electric openers. The use of real wood garage doors is encouraged, but not required.



Wood carriage style garage doors



Wood garage doors



Compatible contemporary garage doors



Porte-Cochères

Porte-cochères or carports are a design feature that is often incorporated into high-style Prairie residences. They generally consist of a low-pitched roof or an extension of the primary roofline and supported by boxy piers similar to the porch supports.



A Prairie style residence with a porte-cochère (at left).

Decorative Features

A typical example of a Prairie style residence will not be highly decorated. Ornamentation will typically be found on the door surround or window sashes, such as **leaded** glass, art glass, or geometric muntins (see pages 6 and 7). A higher style example may be elaborated with stylized geometric or floral (“Sullivan-esque”) bands or friezes, column capitals, and medallions; however, this variant is more likely to be found in the Midwest.

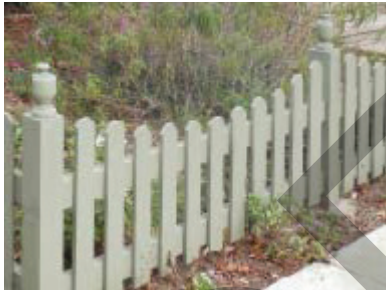
Lighting

Compatible light fixtures for a Prairie style house will be boxy with geometric detailing. They may have colored glass and/or a wide, overhanging shade to mimic the horizontality of the roofline. Compatible fixtures should be darker, patinated metal.



Fencing

The most appropriate enclosure for a Prairie style property would be a low brick and/or concrete wall; however, walls like these are unlikely to be permitted in most historic districts. A simple wood fence with vertically oriented pickets and voids, like those pictured below, would be acceptable. Fences stained to accentuate the wood grain would be preferable to a fence painted in a light color.





Paint Colors

Prairie style homes can be compatibly painted with color schemes of at least three colors—one for the exterior cladding, one for trim, and a third for windows. Muted, neutral shades of colors found in materials like stone or brick are the most appropriate. Any existing masonry or stone cladding should remain unpainted. Below are some color scheme ideas.

