

Past, Present, Future

By Rob Foster

Charlopean. It's a term I use on occasion to describe that hot European architectural style that is so dominant in the Charlotte market. Whether it's English Cottage or French Country, or any of the many other styles around, everyone wants the same thing: a timeless look that has great curb appeal. I grew up in Charlotte and have seen many architectural styles come and go — or get hot then not. I would like to discuss the past, present and future of the styles I've witnessed. The Charlotte area has always been a very traditional, builder-driven market. The city was built on classic styles such as Georgian, Williamsburg and the Craftsman bungalow, just to mention a few. These were very nice homes in scale and had a true presence. Fairly boxy in shape, this meant they were easier to build. When you drive through Dilworth, notice the attention to detail on many of the older and even newer craftsman bungalows. Tapered wood columns sitting on a stone base and eave brackets running up the large overhang rakes. These details are very indicative of the architectural style. Big porches and nicely proportioned square and rectangle windows tend to show off the home to the street. In the Meyers Park area, it's hard to believe that those big trees were small at one time. This was back when many of these styles, such as Williamsburg and Georgian were built. Big, brick boxes is what they were called — and still are. If you look at the eave details, you might see detailed molding or blocks within a built-up boxing detail. Typically lower pitched roofs. You may even see a series of "boxes" built down the corner of the house. These boxes are called quoins. As was with the craftsman and many other early Charlotte styles, simplicity, both interior and exterior, were very important. And good flow was a must. Its simple and easy to build. Which meant it was affordable, assuming location didn't kill you. After all, Meyers Park was once out in the country — hard to believe.

As we now travel to the present day, some of these styles are still going strong. The Craftsman bungalow, in my opinion, will never fade or go away. And we shouldn't want it to. It's beautiful and everyone loves a big front porch. It's as hot as it ever was. It's one of the

most efficient styles. The floor plans tend to use the space wisely, utilizing the "what would have been attic space" as heated space. Then adding a few dormers for light, and there you go. Also, the porches make the house look bigger than it really is. The champagne taste on a beer budget — never heard that before. I still see new tear-down construction in the infill areas coming back as new and improved classic styles. Also the brick boxes are still being done. I think because of the simplicity and it makes very good use of the space. There is also the traditional 5/4 and a door look. In a traditional builder-driven market, you will always have this.

As the 80s and 90s came and went, I saw our market asking, not screaming, for a new look — a look where you couldn't tell what day of what month of what year the house was built. We all know the neighborhoods where these homes are. Hard to believe that was the "in" thing once. This was the birth of the Charlopean movement. The simple thing to do was to give the traditional Ballantyne or Peninsula house a face-lift with new "lipstick." Increase the pitches and add some European details. That was the word. As 2000 rolled around, the clients buying the homes wanted a more authentic look. In the French Country style, you might find wood plank shutters with shutter dogs. The dog is the metal bracket that holds the shutter against the house. This was the true detail as it was done in the Old Country. You may also find a brick frieze detail up against the boxing. This was done a long time ago because it was easier for the wood and smooth brick to meet as opposed to a rougher stone façade and wood boxing. Typically, you would have steeper roof pitches, finials and arched windows in some areas. Then English Cottage style, sometimes done with a cedar and stone combination exterior, and maybe cedar post with brackets ... possible a small copper roof somewhere. You will also have the true American styles as well as Low Country and American Farmhouse. The addition of these new "timeless" looks just added to an already beautiful city.

As I now turn the clock forward, there will be definite things that will happen to the

architecture of our region. What was "smart house" technology not all that long ago will be a standard in the custom home market. Many builders have already adopted this change. Its not really a change. Just giving the people what they are asking for: comfort and convenience. I will be discussing these changes in upcoming articles. You will also see a surge of more ornate and not so common styles. Some of these are Tuscan, Mediterranean, Tudor, just to mention a few. The needs and flow of the floor plans will also change with the times. As an exercise, if you are in a home built before 1990, as yourself, what would you do differently or what rooms would you have or not have or what conveniences would you like to have that you don't. Chances are that in today's homes most of those issues have been addressed and are common features in a custom home today. This exercise will also be true in the next 20ish years. A home should reflect and adapt to how a family lives. Again, I will breakdown this issue in an upcoming article. As Charlotte grows in both size and population, so will the areas around us. I see the mountains as a "hot" area. Its already going strong with many new exclusive neighborhoods. Some of these homes are primary and some secondary. I see the High Country Craftsman (the Colorado look) becoming big. It will eventually make a presence closer to Charlotte, assuming the architectural guidelines will allow it.

With the planet going green, so will architecture. From appliances to solar homes, the definition of green is very broad. It's the right thing to do and will happen. I've seen small pockets of green neighborhoods. The use of glass in certain area and the position of the home on the lot will be more important. This is a whole other topic that we will talk about later.

To summarize my views of the architectural styles in the Charlotte area, there is a certain "freedom of style" that is present here. The difference here as opposed to other areas is that its somewhat controlled for the most part. There's not many areas I know of that can sustain as many styles as we have in such a tight proximity. I am constantly trying to stay on top of what's coming. All I can see is that we are in store for some very, very exciting new looks. ■