

American Foursquare House Gallery Blurp

American Foursquare House, St. Paul, Minnesota

Built in 1908

American Foursquare Style Architecture

922 Portland Ave, Saint Paul, Minnesota

This fine example of American Foursquare architecture exemplifies the Architectural trends of the Arts and Crafts movement. Simple, “honest” woodworking incorporates local materials and gives the home a cozy, familiar feeling. The 2 ½ stories are broken up into four relatively equal rooms, which are adorned with “honest” woodwork, including paneling that incorporates native plant silhouettes.

The incorporation of heavy, minimally ornate woodwork on the interior and the large 3-season porch accomplishes the Arts and Crafts movement architectural goal of bringing the natural environment inside of the home.

The simple, honest features typical of American Foursquare are largely understood to be a reaction to the mass-produced, ornate decor found adorning many of the Victorian and Queen Anne style homes of this era and earlier. An emphasis on strong foundations and geometric symmetry of these homes symbolize their rootedness in the natural environment around them.

The Four Square architectural style allowed for working-class people to have high-quality, low cost housing that grew with them. It’s simple geometric shapes allowed for additions to easily be added, often built by the occupants themselves rather than contractors.

Longer Gallery Blurb Example

The modern conception of “Urban Renewal” originates in the 1950s and ‘60s following the passing of the 1949 and 1954 American Housing Acts.¹ The act was passed in part to respond to “white flight”; the post-war trend of white Americans moving to American suburbs because of the influx of black immigrants from the south. It outlined “governance over how federal financial resources would shape the growth of American cities... [The Legislation] aimed at reducing housing costs, raising housing standards, and enabling the federal government for the first time, to aid cities in clearing slums and rebuilding blighted areas.”² The section of this legislature mentioned in this pamphlet refers to Section 220, which gave private firms mortgage insurance for construction in designated areas marked for renewal.³ Before this, this type of insurance would have been impossible to receive due to the financial risk inherent to building in declining economic zones.

Providing that their locality had an approved plan for renewal, private contractors were allowed to apply and receive FHA Mortgage Insurance. Owners whose properties were demolished were reimbursed. Many of these owners were slumlords who were exacerbating the issues within city slums with high rents and terrible living conditions.⁴ A 1968 study from the University of Pennsylvania Law Review found that the restrictions around relocation payments excluded many families from receiving compensation. Worse, the minimum for most relocation

¹ 1. “UofL Libraries: Uncovering Racial Logics: Louisville’s History of Racial Oppression and Activism: Urban Renewal,” Urban Renewal - Uncovering Racial Logics: Louisville’s History of Racial Oppression and Activism - UofL Libraries at University of Louisville, accessed March 22, 2025, <https://library.louisville.edu/archives/racial-logics/urban-renewal>.

² 1. “Housing Act of 1949,” American Planning Association, accessed March 22, 2025, <https://www.planning.org/awards/2014/1949housingact.htm>.

³ 1. “Program Section 220: Hud.Gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD),” Program Section 220 | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), accessed March 24, 2025, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/housing/mfh/progdesc/progsec220.

⁴ Brent Cebul, “Tearing down Black America,” Boston Review, February 2, 2025, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/brent-cebul-tearing-down-black-america/>.

assistance programs only required “[Local Public Agencies] maintain a listing of real estate brokers able to help relocatees find new housing, and that it consider public housing near the renewal site when identifying relocation housing resources.”⁵

Huge swathes of American cities, big and small, were demolished to make way for Urban Renewal projects. According to the Pfau et.al, approximately 1.36 million people were displaced between 1950 and 1970. Sixty Percent of those individuals were non-white, and roughly sixty percent were renters. ⁶ Communities were uprooted, and thousands of those displaced were lost to the system, meaning that relocation payments could not be accurately distributed.⁷

Urban Renewal coincided with the building of highways through minority communities, as well as benefited and reinforced from racially discriminatory housing practices like redlining. The combined effects of these practices have impacted minority communities’ abilities to grow roots within their space, further stigmatizing these neighborhoods as blighted, slummed, and undesirable.

⁵ 1. Terry J. Tondro, “Urban Renewal Relocation: Problems in Enforcement of Conditions on Federal Grants to Local Agencies,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 117, no. 2 (December 1968): 183, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3311007>.

⁶ 1. Ann Pfau et al., “Using Urban Renewal Records to Advance Reparative Justice,” RSF, June 1, 2024, <https://www.rsjournal.org/content/10/2/113>.

⁷ Cebul, “Tearing Down Black America”