

American Architecture (HSPV 521)

Fall 2024

Meeting Time and Place:
Fridays,
10:15AM to 1:15PM Bennett 231

Instructor: Carla Yanni, (*she/her*)

cyanni@upenn.edu

Carla.yanni@gmail.com

Office Hours: On Zoom. Tuesdays from 1pm to 2pm, but I am available at many other times. Please send me an email, and I'll send the zoom link.

Teaching Assistant: Daniel Saldaña Ayala (*he/him*)

dsalda@design.upenn.edu

Daniel's office hours: Friday afternoon, 2pm to 4pm

Description:

This course is a survey of architecture in the United States. The organization, while broadly chronological, emphasizes themes around which important scholarship has gathered. The central purpose is to acquaint you with major cultural, economic, technological, and environmental factors that have conditioned the design of buildings and settlements in North America for the last 400 years. To that end, we will study a mix of "high-style" and "vernacular" architectures while encouraging you to think critically about these categories.

Throughout the semester, you will be asked to grapple with both the content of assigned readings and the methodologies their authors employ. Louis Sullivan, for instance, gives us the tall office building "artistically considered" while Carol Willis presents it as a financial and legal artifact. What do you make of the difference? Finally, you will learn how to describe buildings (a skill also honed in HSPV 600). Rich or "thick" description is more than accurate prose. It is integral to understanding the built environment – indeed, to *seeing* it at all.

Although this is a lecture class, it requires students to participate regularly in discussions of assigned readings. The paper is short but intensive. Based on original research and independent thought, it is a graduate-level exercise in argumentation, clear prose, and the use of scholarly apparatus.

Required Texts (available as e-books through the Penn library system. To access the e-books, in Canvas, go to "Course materials @ Penn Libraries," a tab on the left.

Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Technological and Cultural Context* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999) This book is out-of-print, so it is not available at the Penn bookstore. If accessing the book through the library is inconvenient, you can find a used copy for about \$18.

Keith L. Eggener, ed., *American Architectural History: A Contemporary Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004). The Eggener book is available for purchase at the Penn Bookstore, 3601 Walnut St.). The bookstore will return the unsold books in mid-October.

Recommended for Purchase, but not required:

Steven Conn and Max Page, eds., *Building the Nation: Americans Write About Their Architecture, Their Cities, and Their Landscape* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

Cyril Harris, *Dictionary of Architecture and Construction* (any ed.).

Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (any ed.).
 Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (any ed.).

Course Requirements:

Attendance and participation. We cover a lot of ground in each lecture, so regular attendance is crucial. It is equally important that you complete each week's readings prior to the lecture. Readings provide the context for lectures rather than duplicating them. Non-Gelernter readings are the focus of discussions that occur in the second half of our class period. Primary sources are marked with an asterisk. While each discussion session is typically led by two students (a sign-up sheet will circulate) all students are expected keep the conversation going by drawing on their insights from the readings, citing specific passages when possible. No more than one absence will be excused throughout the semester without a doctor's note. Classroom use of the internet is prohibited unless you've obtained written permission from the instructor. Attendance and participation count for **20 percent** of your grade.

Why I take attendance, even though we are all grown-ups here:

As an educator, I place a high value on coming to class well-prepared and deeply motivated, and I expect the same from my students. (This means you!) I believe that in a successful college class, the professor and the students create a community of engaged scholars who explore an intellectual subject *together*. There are in-class assignments and projects that will require your attention. If you want to do well in this class, you will need to keep up with the readings, attend class, participate in a meaningful way. Therefore, students are expected to attend all classes. If you expect to miss class, please let me know.

Terminology & Visual Identification Quiz. Held on **October 11**, this 20-minute quiz will require you to identify key structural components and stylistic hallmarks of several buildings we have discussed in class on previous dates. The result counts for **5 percent** of your final grade.

Mid-Term Exam The mid-term, held on **October 18** will take 40 minutes. It consists of four slide IDs (building name, date, location, designer, significance). The midterm is worth 20% of your grade.

The Final

The final, day, time and location to be announced, runs 100 minutes and involves two slide comparisons and two essay questions. Location of the final to be announced later. Strong essays will take the form of well-organized arguments, avoid generalization, and cite specific readings and buildings. The final is worth **30 percent** of your grade. You may bring one 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper to the exam. You can hand-write or type your notes on this single sheet of paper; you may use both front and back. The paper should not have any images on it.

Historiography Paper:

This paper is your chance to think critically about the practice of architectural history, specifically about when and why attitudes toward particular buildings and building types vary over time and across disciplines. You will be making a scholarly argument, not writing a summary or a book report. As such, you will need to present a clear thesis, supported by evidence and framed by an introduction and a conclusion (see Frederick Crews, *The Random House Handbook* for further discussion). Footnotes should follow the standard format outlined in Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. While you may use the internet to assist your research, few if any of your cited sources should be websites. If you believe your topic merits an exception to this rule, please obtain instructor's permission well before you submit your paper. The paper should be 8 pages long. It must employ double-spaced text, 12-point font, and 1" margins. It counts for **25 percent** of your final grade and is due on Canvas **November 18 at midnight**. A fuller explanation of this assignment appears on the last pages of this syllabus. Please submit the paper as a word document on Canvas. Images may be in a separate pdf.

A Note on Academic Integrity, Absences, and Gadgets: *Everyone, at all times, is expected to abide by the principles set out in the University's Code of Academic Integrity—see <https://provost.upenn.edu/policies/pennbook/2013/02/13/code-of-academic-integrity>* Attendance is mandatory at all class meetings. Over the course of the semester, you are allowed one unexcused absence without a doctor's note and/or written permission from the instructor. You are responsible for any work missed while absent. Classroom use of computers, tablets, or smartphones is prohibited unless A) in-class exercises explicitly require computers, or B) you've obtained a written exception from your professor. Do not use AI for this assignment.

A Note on Our Surroundings: Philadelphia arguably contains the best cross-section of urban building types in the country as well as many canonical works. You should consider the city part of our classroom. To orient yourself, you may wish to consult some of the sources listed under "Philadelphia Architectural & Geographic Resources," below.

Please note: The Modules on Canvas are more up-to-date than this syllabus. If you see a discrepancy, please let me know, but the modules are more reliable.

I will post the powerpoints after I give the lectures, not before.

COURSE CALENDAR:

Week 1 (August 30) Course Overview No readings required

Week 2 (September 6) Colonial Era and the Early Republic

Mark Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 2 and chap. 3

*Anonymous, excerpt from "On the Architecture of America," 1790, in Conn and Page, 9-10

*Anonymous, excerpt from "On the Arts," 1815, in Conn and Page, 10-12

Catherine Kelly, "Looking past loyalty," in *Republic of Taste: Art, Politics, and Everyday Life in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), chap. 4

Lina Mann, Building the White House, in the White House Historical Association website

Dell Upton, "Black and White Landscapes in Eighteenth Century Virginia," *Places: A Quarterly Journal of Environmental Design* 2 (Winter 1985): 59-72

WEEK 3 (September 13) Jefferson and Plantation Landscapes

*Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, William Peden, ed. (1982), 150-154

Jessica Sewell and Andrew Johnston, chapter on hotels, in McInnis and Nelson, Eds. *Educated in Tyranny*

Mabel Wilson, "Notes on the Virginia Capitol Nation, Race, and Slavery in Jefferson's America," in *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*

Annette Gordon Reed, "Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson, and the Ways we Talk about the Past," *New York Times*, August 24, 2017

Week 4 (September 20) No class

Week 5 (September 27) Carceral Space in 19C USA // Library Visit

*Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, "Philadelphia and its Solitary Prison," 1842, 97-111

Dell Upton, *Another City*, introduction

Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States*, introduction

and chapter 3 on cottage planned asylums

Maurie McInnis, "Mapping Richmond's Slave Trade," in *Slaves Waiting for Sale*, chapter 3, p 55-83

Second Part of Class "Researching American Architecture" tutorial led by Kathryn Rueter at Fisher Fine Arts Library – Remainder of Class
Fall Break October 4, 2025

Week 6 (October 11) Domesticity and the Rural Ideal & terminology quiz (Quiz is First 20 minutes of Class)

Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 4

*A. J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850; repr., Dover, 1969), pp. 22-27

Clifford E. Clark, "Domestic Architecture and an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 7, no. 1 (1976): 33-56

Gwendolyn Wright, "Independence and the Rural Cottage," in Eggener, 142- 156

**Week 7 (October 18) MID-TERM EXAM (first half of class)
Native American Architectures (second half)**

Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 1

Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton, "'Modifying Factors' in Native American Architecture," chap. 2 in Eggener

Watch lecture on youtube presented by Ted Jojola, (Isleta Pueblo), Matriarchy and PlaceKnowing in Native American planning

Glasgow, "How Indigenous Architects ... Use Design"

Week 8 (October 25) Gilded Age // Tenements

*Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, excerpt from *The American Woman's Home*, 1869, in Conn and Page, 324-328

*Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, excerpts

Andrew Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York*, 3-60

Week 9 (Nov 1) Furness, Richardson, and the Idea of the Architect

Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 5

*"Art in Architecture – Influence of the Columbian Exhibition on American Building," *The Times* [Philadelphia], 19 November 1893, 17

Michael J. Lewis, *Frank Furness: Architecture and the Violent Mind*, ch 7 "Talkers are no Great Doers," 175-18

Week 10 (November 8) Sullivan and Skyscrapers

Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 6

*Louis Sullivan, excerpt from "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," 1896, in Conn and Page, 221-226

Paula Lupkin, The Wainwright Building: A Monument to St. Louis's Lager Landscape, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 77, no. 4 (December 2018), 428–447

Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance* (1995), 19-65

Week 11 (November 15) Frank Lloyd Wright/ Early Modernism in the American Context

Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 8.

James F. O'Gorman, "The Prairie House," in Eggener, 267-280

David Gebhard, "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 22, No. 2/3 (Summer - Autumn, 1987), 109-14

HISTORIOGRAPHY PAPER DUE November 18 at midnight- submit on Canvas

Week 12 (November 22) High Modernism and the Problem of Housing

Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 9

Katherine Bristol, "The Pruitt Igoe Myth," in Eggener

Alice T. Friedman, "People Who Live in Glass Houses: Edith Farnsworth, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Philip Johnson," in Eggener, 316-341

Week 13 (WED November 27) Kahn // Venturi and Scott Brown

*This is a **Wednesday**, but it is a Penn Friday! (It is to make up for the Friday lost to Fall Break.)*

Gabrielle Esperdy, *Autopia: An Intellectual History of the American Roadside at MidCentury*, chapter 1.

Kathleen James-Chakraborty, "Louis Kahn in Ahmedabad and Dhaka,"

Architecture beyond Europe (2013) <https://journals.openedition.org/abe/3385>

Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (1972, second ed. 1977), 3-20

Friday November 29 – NO CLASS

Week 14 December 6 Postmodernism, continued, and the New Urbanism

Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 10.

Neil Levine, "Robert Venturi and the Return of Historicism," in Eggener

*Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, "The Second Coming of the American Small Town," *Wilson Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 19-50.

FINAL EXAM:

Location and day and time to be determined

COURSE-RELATED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WEBSITES

Dictionaries, Glossaries, Primers

Francis D.K. Ching, *A Visual Dictionary of Architecture* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1995).

James S. Curl, *Classical Architecture: An Introduction to Its Vocabulary and Essentials, with a Select Glossary of Terms* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003).

Cyril M. Harris, *Dictionary of Architecture & Construction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

Carl R. Lounsbury, ed., *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Therese O'Malley, *Keywords in American Landscape Design* (New Haven: Center for the Advanced Study of the Visual Arts / Yale University Press, 2010).

John Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

Field Guides & Stylebooks

Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Knopf, 1984). Dell

Upton, *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1986).

Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

Interpretation of Cultural Landscapes

Allan B. Jacobs, *Looking at Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985). Donald

Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

Select Local Guidebooks

John Andrew Gallery, *Philadelphia Architecture: a Guide to the City*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2009).

Edward Teitelman and Richard W. Longstreth, *Architecture in Philadelphia; a Guide* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974).

Richard Webster, *Philadelphia Preserved: Catalog of the Historic American Buildings Survey* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976).

Richard Saul Wurman and John Andrew Gallery, *Man-Made Philadelphia; a Guide to Its Physical and Cultural Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).

Major Architectural History Resources Online *Places in Time (via Bryn Mawr College)*

<http://www.brynmawr.edu/iconog/>

Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project (via Philadelphia Athenaeum)

<http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/> Note: full access via Penn Library computers

Historic Maps Online

<http://www.philageohistory.org>

http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/wphila/maps/maps_tc.html

<http://libwww.freelibrary.org/maps/mapSearchFrm.cfm> <http://www.phillyh2o.org/maps>

<http://www.pagenealogy.net/maps%20here.htm>

Historic Photographs Online

<http://www.phillyhistory.org/PhotoArchive>

Historiography Paper Guidelines, Elaborated

In this assignment, the goal is to compare the ways scholars have looked at a well-known American building or building type over time. (If you have doubts about whether your building or

type meets these criteria, please ask; note that you must choose a canonical building or building *type*, not an architectural *style*). Take, for example, Minoru Yamasaki's Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, built ca. 1952 and demolished in 1972). The project's fate supposedly demonstrated "the failure of Modernism" until historians began questioning that view in the 1980s. What do you make of the shift? Did the impetus come from within the field of architectural history or outside of it? Does scholarship on your building tend to get stuck in ruts? If so, what aspects of the building's history remain unexplored and what methods might you use to correct that? Essays you've read for our class are good points of departure. Example: what questions would Carol Willis or Alice Friedman ask about a warehouse if she were studying it? Some paper-writing ground rules:

This paper should draw primarily on scholarly sources, e.g. the professional writings of architectural historians, sociologists, architects, and urban planners, not of architecture critics. Such sources will have footnotes or endnotes; their primary aim is to interpret or explain their subject, not to judge its aesthetic merit (such and such building or style is "good" or "bad"). You may also wish to consult a limited number of "primary sources," e.g., articles in architecture magazines, trade journals, or newspapers that reveal how your building or type was originally discussed in these forums. Are there themes in these sources that historians have overlooked or failed to analyze? You need only peruse a handful, perhaps those cited by the historians themselves (see their footnotes / endnotes). For all of your research, the bibliographies in our course readings are a good place to start, as are the Avery Index, America: History and Life, and JSTOR. These databases are available via Franklin, and library staff are happy to assist in their use. The staff have kindly aggregated many of these sources and tools here: <https://guides.library.upenn.edu/hspv2017/amarch>

Summary of your site's history should be minimal – only as much as your reader needs to make sense of the historiography. The assignment isn't to write an account of your building but to systematically analyze what scholars have said about it. As you organize your findings, look for patterns. Can the viewpoints you've discovered be grouped by authors' academic disciplines or by other identifiable camps? Are other variables like the era in which certain views are expressed more important? Your job is to make a cohesive argument with an overarching thesis, not a narrow, source-by-source summary of your readings. By the same token, your thesis must go beyond "over time, opinions about this building have changed" or "there is a wide variety of opinions about this building." Which kinds of scholars say what? Why? What sorts of evidence do they use? Whether or not they "liked" the building is of secondary importance.

A final word of advice about this paper: this assignment is less about finding the "right" building than about exploring what has been said or could be said about the building you choose. Accordingly, you'll want a building that:

Has been written about from multiple scholarly perspectives, **OR**

Seems ripe for re-examination using the methodologies we've encountered in our non-textbook readings (geography, sociology, archaeology, economics, etc.)

Read the assignment carefully. Choosing a canonical building is helpful, especially if you're following Route 1. But just because a particular building has been discussed extensively doesn't mean there's much diversity in the approaches the writers have taken. As a result, people sometimes end up with a pile of textbook entries which say much the same thing or a pile of architectural criticism, which tends to be an intellectual dead-end (so-and-so liked the building, so-and-so didn't). Even in this situation, you have other tools at your disposal! Look at your

syllabus. Everyone has said the same thing about Fallingwater? What would a gendered reading by Alice Friedman look like? Everyone has said the same thing about the Wainwright Building? What might a historian of real estate (Carol Willis) or a historian of technology (Carl Condit) say? You get the idea.

If you'd like a book-length example of this approach, take a look at Dell Upton's *Architecture in the United States*. There are plenty of canonical buildings in there, and plenty of obscure ones, too. (Added bonus: you can get the whole thing in electronic form via Franklin). Interested in Monticello? There's a section on it. Interested in Frank Furness? There's his Academy of the Fine Arts - interpreted partly through the conventions of commercial arcade design.

Gelernter, *History of American Architecture*, chap. 5.