

# *A Thumbnail Guide to Neighborhood Architecture*

Whether you're a lifelong New Orleanian or a Jazz Fest visitor from Los Angeles, you can't help but notice that our city's richest cultural traditions unfurl against a rather extraordinary physical backdrop.

For in the background of every second line, adjacent to neighborhood restaurants and music clubs, and framing our Mardi Gras parades are collections of visually arresting houses you just won't find in such abundance or variety anywhere else. They can be large or modest, stately or expressive, frilly or refined, but together they compose the visual context for life in New Orleans' neighborhoods. So keep this guide with you as you travel the streets and see if you can spot examples of the house types and styles that impart indelible character to our city streets. Before long, you'll be able to spout descriptions of the streetscape just as easily as you can whistle the opening riff to "Tipitina's" or explain how to make a roux.

## **House Types**

Stripped of ornamentation, what shape does a house have? Where does it sit in relation to the sidewalk? Does its roof slope toward the street and back of its lot, or does it slope toward the side property lines? Does it have one or five openings across the front, and what does that tell you about the floor plan? Answer these questions and the guide below can ensure you will have a pretty good idea of what to call the type of New Orleans house you're viewing.



### Creole Cottages

The Creole cottage is one of the oldest house types you'll find in New Orleans. Found most often in neighborhoods like the Vieux Carré, Tremé, and Faubourg Marigny, the Creole cottage has a roofline that slopes to the front and to the back, with gables on the side. Most are built at the front property line, right up to the sidewalk, and have four openings across the front.



### Shotgun Houses

Certainly the most plentiful house type in New Orleans, the shotgun fits perfectly in the long, skinny lots that early developers laid out when they subdivided their family plantations. Shotguns have rooflines that slope to both sides rather than to the front and the back and, in their most elemental form, are just one room wide without an inside hallway.

There are abundant variations on the one-room-wide theme. One is the sidehall shotgun: three openings across the front, including a door that opens to a hallway down one side.

Another is the double shotgun, a duplex having two one-room-wide living units sharing a wall down the middle and having four openings across the front. And if you run across a shotgun house that's one story tall in front but two stories tall in back, you've found a camelback.





### **Townhouses**

Townhouses are two-story buildings, often masonry, and found most commonly in neighborhoods like the American Sector of the Central Business District, the French Quarter, and Faubourg Marigny. Some had commercial space on the ground floor and living quarters above. Townhouses are built at the front property line and have a cantilevered balcony on the second floor. There are three openings across the front including a door that opens to a sidehall and stairway to the second floor.

### **Double-Gallery Houses**

The double-gallery house is a direct descendant of the townhouse, adapted for neighborhoods where lots are larger and the character is more residential than urban. Like the townhouse, it is two stories tall with three openings across the front and has a side hall and interior stair to the second floor. But because it is situated on a deeper lot and is set back from the sidewalk, there is room for covered porches (or galleries) across the front at both the first and second floors as well as a front garden.

The Garden District, Lower Garden District, and Esplanade Ridge are great places to spot these houses.





### Center-hall Houses

Center-hall houses can be identified by the five openings across the front, comprising a door in the middle (leading to a central hallway) flanked by two windows on either side.

Most have rooflines similar to those of Creole cottages—sloping to the front and back with gables on the sides. This house type is usually found in the Garden District, Uptown, Carrollton, and Esplanade Ridge set back from the sidewalk with a full-width front porch. However, there are a handful of masonry center-halls in the French Quarter, Faubourg Marigny, and Tremé without a setback or front porch.



### Raised-Basement Houses

Our high water table makes it nearly impossible to have a subsurface basement in New Orleans, so our forebears invented the raised-basement house in the early twentieth century. A uniquely New Orleans house type, it consists of a lower-ceilinged “basement” built at ground level with higher-ceilinged living space above. Carrollton, Mid-City, and Broadmoor are home to hundreds of examples of raised-basement houses, identifiable by the prominent stairs that lead to the living space on the second level.



### Bungalows

Though the bungalow isn’t a distinctly New Orleans house type, many fine examples of this twentieth-century house type add considerable visual interest to neighborhoods like Gentilly Terrace, Broadmoor, and Edgewood Park. Bungalows have asymmetrical facades and floor plans and are often built in the Craftsman style. Though some students of New Orleans architecture use the term “bungalow” to refer to the house style as well as the house type, it’s used here to describe the floor plan only.





## The Elements of Styles

Ornamentation applied to the exterior of a house helps categorize it by style and offers clues to the era in which it was built. For just as clothes styles go in and out of favor over time, so too do architectural styles.

In the street walks that follow, the styles you'll encounter most often include Creole (before 1830), Greek Revival (1830-1860), Italianate (1860-1880), Eastlake and Queen Anne (1880-1910), and Craftsman (1910-1940). Other Revival styles—Colonial, Neoclassical, and Mediterranean—overlapped with the Craftsman style.

## What to Look For

### Greek Revival

- Box columns
- Clean, horizontal lines
- Greek Key-patterned door surrounds
- Entablature with dentil work



### Italianate

- Paired brackets over square or round columns
- Arched-top windows, transoms, and door glass
- Corbels in the entablature



### Eastlake

- Turned wood columns
- Frieze of piercework panels and spindles
- Spandrels
- Milled brackets



### Craftsman

- Exposed rafter tails
- Deep eaves with post or angle brackets
- Windows and doors with asymmetrical patterns
- Flared box columns, often atop masonry pedestals

### Revival Styles

- Colonial Revival
- Neoclassical Revival
- Mediterranean Revival



# **New Orleans Streets**