

# RESOURCE GUIDE IV: GLOSSARY OF COMMON ARCHITECTURAL TERMS

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**aggregate** – A neutral granular substance that, in combination with a matrix, forms concrete or mortar.

**arbor** – A light trellis-like frame covered with shade-producing plants. See ***trellis, pergola***

**arch** – A curved structure designed to support weight above. Arches can also be used as a decorative element on an exterior facade. Types of arches can include round, pointed/Gothic, segmental, and Tudor.

**architrave** – In classical architecture, the lowest member of the entablature, the beam that spans from column to column, resting on column capitals.

**ashlar** – A kind of square-cut stone laid up in a regular pattern

**awning window** – A window construction wherein a single sash is hinged along the top of the frame and pushed outward. See ***casement window, hopper window, sash***

**backplate** – A flat piece of wood or metal on a wall or ceiling to which fixtures or fittings are attached.

**baluster and balustrade** – The short, vertically-oriented members designed to support a handrail are balusters. A row of repeating balusters create a balustrade.

**bargeboard or gableboard or vergeboard** – A board which hangs from the projecting end of a

roof, often ornamenting gables.

**bay** – Within a structure, a repeated spatial element; it can also be used to describe a building's exterior dimensions. For example a shopfront may be "4 bays wide."

**bay window** – A window in a protruded bay, or the bay itself.

**board and batten** – A type of wall cladding for wood-frame houses; closely spaced, applied boards or sheets of plywood, the vertical joints of which are covered by narrow wood strips.

**bollard** – A post used in landscape design to separate foot and vehicular traffic. A bollard may house a light fixture.

**bond or bonding pattern** – A repeated pattern of masonry units in a planar surface.

**brace** – A stiffener in a wall assembly, often diagonal.

**bracket** – Any overhanging member projecting from a wall to support a weight acting outside the wall, such as a cornice or bay window.

**casement window** – A window construction wherein a single sash is hinged on one side and swings outward like a door. See also ***awning window, hopper window, sash***

**cheek wall** – A narrow, upright section of wall, often forming the side of a masonry element such as a porch or stoop; in landscape

construction, a wall built alongside a series of steps to retain abutting earth.

**clapboard** – A type of house siding consisting of horizontal beveled pieces of wood that are thinner at the top than the bottom.

**clerestory windows** – A window or array of windows placed above eye level to provide additional light into a room. Clerestory windows can be operable or fixed, and are often found on storefronts. See also ***transom***

**column** – A vertically-oriented structural support.

**consolidation** – A repair and patching process often employing resins and polymers to save existing building elements, keep them in service and avoid wholesale replacement.

**coping** – A finish course of brick, stone or tile along the top of a wall, often projecting slightly to cast a shadow line.

**corbel** – A classical architectural element consisting of a decorative molding extending from a wall for structural support, decorative purposes, or both. Usually masonry.

**corner board** – A board which is used as trim on the external corner of a wood-frame structure and against which the ends of the siding are fitted.

**cornice** – A molded horizontal projection or mold that crowns

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or finishes the top of a wall, façade, building or storefront; the uppermost and most prominent part of a Classical entablature

**course** – A layer of masonry units running horizontally, sometimes as a decorative band.

**dentil** – Small, tooth-like moldings, usually found on a structure's cornice.

**dormer** – A structure projecting from a sloping roof that usually has a vertical window or vent.

**double hung window** – A vertical window with two sashes, one of which slides over the other. See also **glider window, sash**

**downspout** – A vertical pipe, often of sheet metal, used to conduct water from a roof-drain or gutter to the ground, subsurface pipe, splash block or cistern.

**dressed stone** – Well-finished stone used in walls.

**dry laid wall** or **gravity wall** – A low wall of stones laid up without mortar.

**dutchman** – A small wedge inserted as a filler to close an opening; or a small piece of material used to cover a defect.

**eave** – On a roof, the underside of the portion of the roof that projects beyond the edge of a wall.

**entablature** – In classical architecture, beams or horizontal band (molds) supported by columns

**façade** or **primary façade** – An exterior face of a building which is

the architectural front, sometimes distinguished from the other faces by elaboration of architectural or ornamental details.

**fanlight** – A semicircular transom window opening over a doorway.

**fascia** – A flat board with a plain vertical face at the eaves level. Rain gutters are often mounted on it.

**fenestration** – The arrangement and design of windows in a building.

**field stone** or **rubble stone** – Rough stones of irregular form and character.

**finial** – An ornament which terminates the point of a spire, pinnacle, etc.

**flashing** – A thin impervious material placed into a construction to prevent water penetration and /or to guide water drainage, especially between a roof and a wall, over exterior door openings and windows, or at roofing joints, valleys or hips.

**frieze** – The central portion of a classical entablature, located between the architrave below and the cornice above, also horizontal trim connecting the siding and cornice at the top of a façade (exterior) or wall (interior).

**gable roof** – A type of roof containing a triangle-shaped vertical surface between a roof's ridge and eaves. Cross-gables are gable roofs, that are secondary in prominence and possibly ridge height, and typically perpendicular

to the main roof ridge.

**galvanized metal** – A metal coated with zinc to decrease rusting; used extensively for roofing, flashings, gutters, gravel stops, railings and ornamental details.

**gambrel roof** – A type of roof in which each of its sides has two different slopes between the central ridge and the eaves. Commonly found on Dutch Colonial structures.

**glazing** – Setting glass in an opening; the glass surface of a glazed opening.

**glider** or **sliding window** – A horizontal window with two sashes, one of which slides over the other. See also **double-hung window, sash**

**half-timbering** – The use of exposed wood framing on the exterior of a structure. Originally used on Medieval-era structures in Europe, it is commonly associated with Tudor Revival structures in the United States and is often false half-timbering, purely a decorative element.

**hipped roof** or **hip roof** – A roof which slopes upwards from the adjoining sides of a building, requiring "hip" rafters at the corners.

**hopper window** – A window construction wherein a single sash is hinged on the bottom of the frame and pulled inward to create a vent. See also awning window casement window, sash

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**keystone** – On an arch, the stone located at the highest point, defining the position of the other stones that make up the rest of the arch.

**knee wall** – A low interior wall that is less than one story tall and normally meets a sloping roof or ceiling.

**lancet window** – A tall, narrow window with a pointed/Gothic arch at its top. Common on Gothic Revival structures.

**lattice** – An orthogonal or diagonal network of wood or metal straps, laths, bars or rods, which appear “woven” together to create a screen.

**leader** – A vertical pipe, often of sheet metal, used to conduct water from a roof-drain or gutter to the ground, subsurface pipe, splash block or cistern.

**light or lite** – A pane of glass, a window, or a compartment of a window. In traditional architecture, a lite refers to each smaller component of a window sash, which together create a repetitive pattern. See ***muntin, sash***

**lime mortar** – A mortar made by mixing lime putty and sand; often used in historic masonry because of its flexibility and compatibility with softer masonry units.

**lintel** – A horizontal member located above a window or other opening.

**louver** – An assembly of sloping,

overlapping blades or slats; may be fixed or adjustable; designed to admit air and/or light in varying degrees and to exclude rain and snow; especially used in doors, windows and the intake and discharge of mechanical ventilation systems.

**medallion** – A decorative circular or oval shaped ornament.

**meeting rail** – In a double-hung window, the horizontal member at the top of the lower sash, or the horizontal member at the bottom of the upper sash.

**modillion** – A horizontal bracket or block at the underside of a cornice.

**moldings** – A construction element used to create a transition, or to cover a joint, where two material surfaces meet, such as between a siding and a window, or between a wall and a ceiling. Most commonly made from wood, stone or metal, moldings may be functional or purely decorative and they range from plain to highly stylized..

**muntin** – A secondary framing member to hold panes within a window, window wall or glazed door; also called a glazing bar, sash bar, window bar, or division bar. See ***lights/lites***

**oculus** – A circular window or opening, often placed in a central location on a structure’s façade.

**parapet** – A wall at the edge

of a roofline, often extending beyond it, that defines the end of the structure’s façade and the beginning of the roof.

**pediment** – The triangular surface of a gable roof, or a similarly-styled triangular molding surrounding a window or entryway.

**pergola** – An overhead wooden garden structure supported by posts and often covered with vines.

**pilaster or engaged column or pier** – A simulated pillar that projects slightly from the wall, often with a capital and base.

**plumbing vent or stack vent** – A pipe penetrating the roof that vents sewer gasses from household drains.

**post** – A vertically-oriented decorative structural support similar to a column.

**portico** – A porch or covered walk consisting of a roof supported by columns, often at a structure’s entry.

**quoins** – Decorative brickwork or stonework utilized at the corners of a structure’s exterior walls.

**rafters** – Rectangular timbers used in the construction of pitched roofs supporting the roof covering.

**rails and stiles** – The two basic components of a frame required for the joinery construction of windows, doors, paneling and cabinetry. Rails are the horizontal

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elements, Stiles are the upright vertical members.

**ridge** – Line at the intersection of upper edges of two sloping roof surfaces.

**rosette** – A round pattern with a carved or painted conventionalized floral motif; a circular or oval decorative wood plaque used in joinery, such as one applied to a wall to receive the end of a stair rail; an ornamental nailhead or screwhead.

**sash** – A frame which encloses a window's glass surfaces. A window may have multiple sashes; each sash may be further divided into multiple lites.

**sheathing** – Wood, plywood, or composite sheets placed over the studs and rafters of a building, which provides the base for siding materials or roof cladding.

**shake** – A thick, often rustic and sometimes hand-split, wood roofing element.

**shed roof** or **pent roof** – A roof formed like an inclined plane, the slope being all on one side.

**shingle** – A unit of wood, asphaltic material, slate, tile, concrete, asbestos cement, or other material cut to stock lengths, widths, and thickness; used as an exterior covering on sloping roofs and side walls; applied in an overlapping fashion.

**shutter** – A moveable screen or cover used to cover an opening, especially a window.

**sidelight** – A framed area of fixed glass at the side of a door or window. See **transom**

**sill** – The lowest horizontal member at the bottom of a wood framed wall into which posts and studs are tenoned. It also refers to the lowest horizontal member in a frame or opening for a window or door.

**skylight** – In a roof, an opening which is glazed with a transparent or translucent material; used to admit light to the space below.

**soffit** – The exposed undersurface of any overhead component of a building, such as an arch, balcony, beam, cornice, lintel, or vault.

**spacer bar** – A metal or plastic element used to separate panes of architectural glass in a Simulated Divided Lite (SDL) window.

**splash block** or **splash pad** – A masonry block laid on the ground below a downspout to carry roof drainage away from a building and to prevent soil erosion.

**stile** – One of the upright structural members of a frame, as at the outer edge of a door or window sash. Combine with rail

**stoop** – A raised landing, sometimes shaded by an overhang, at the entrance to a house

**stucco** – An exterior wall covering made of plaster applied over wood or metal lath. Variety of finishes.

**surround** – An encircling border or decorative frame.

**terra-cotta** – Hard, unglazed fired clay; used for ornamental work and roof and floor tile.

**tongue and groove** – Boards joined by the insertion of the protrusion of one board into the corresponding channel of the adjacent board.

**transom** – A window or array of windows located above a doorway or other opening, such as a shop window, to increase light. It may be fixed or operable. See clerestory, fanlights, sidelights.

**trellis** – A garden structure of light, often overlapped or crossing wood or metal members used as an over-head or vertical sun-shade and plant support.

**valley** – The trough or gutter formed by the intersection of two inclined planes of a roof.

**verge board** – see **bargeboard**

**vernacular architecture** – Building conventions growing from local needs and available materials.

*From: Cyril M. Harris. "Dictionary of Architecture & Construction." McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993*

*Baker H. Morrow. "A Dictionary of Landscape Architecture." University of New Mexico Press, 1987.*