
Charming. Romantic. Picturesque. Author Gladys Montgomery deftly traces the development of Gothic architecture over seven centuries from soaring medieval European cathedrals to delightful American rural cottages. The two leading proponents of the “Carpenter Gothic” architectural movement in America were landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing and architect Alexander Jackson Davis. Both actively wrote and distributed architectural plans and pattern books such as Downing’s The Architecture of Country Houses (1850) extolling “the rural gothic style” for American households.

Lavishly illustrated, color photographs by a variety of photographers present both grand and modest Carpenter Gothic homes and structures. Drawings and blueprints by Downing and Davis and illustrations from the Historic American Buildings Survey complement the high-quality images in the book.

Enchanting storybook cottages with “gingerbread” trim are among the profiled homes listed geographically by city and state. Well researched and written, the volume traces the evolution of residential architecture in the Gothic and Gothic Revival styles from England to America by examining the influences of Inigo Jones, Augustus Pugin, and Downing and Davis, among others. Design elements of the style include peaked or arched windows and doors, wooden ceiling beams, and elaborate details; technological advances such as the scroll saw that made many of these design elements creatively possible are also discussed. Chapters on the details and hallmarks of Carpenter Gothic style, on period interior design and decoration, and on gardens and natural elements will be useful for researchers of Gothic architecture. Visual comparisons of typical wallpapers, window coverings, furnishings, and doors are also quite beneficial.

Although the text is filled with historical references to monographs and pattern books, a bibliography of these sources is not included. The Photo Credits and Acknowledgments list individuals, archives, libraries, and historic homes, but an appendix of resources and organizations would have been useful. There is a general index at the end of the publication. The book is produced on high-quality paper with a sound binding. Storybook Cottages provides a needed update to Carpenter Gothic: Nineteenth Century Ornamented Houses of New England (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1978) which is illustrated with black and white photographs and has very little accompanying text.

Storybook Cottages: America’s Carpenter Gothic Style will be useful as an introduction to this captivating, uniquely American historic style. Although it is recommended for advanced students, larger public library and academic collections, it is also a delightfully cozy coffee table book - suitable for dreaming.

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