Queen Anne Still Lives in Ontario

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When I was a teen in Hamilton, I became aware of the numbers of fascinating large Victorian houses built in the last couple of decades of the 19th century, but, in the architectural history courses I took at university, and in much of the literature, they just seemed to fall between the cracks – sometimes being seen only as regrettable high Victorian eclectic excesses. Years later I had done the same thing when running my own Canadian architectural history sessions– just ignored them. I remained attracted by these buildings, and became increasingly curious. I knew my students studying heritage architecture would encounter these buildings during their careers, so should know something about them. It turns out, that those Hamilton houses are representative of a fascinating form, from which we can still learn today.

Hamilton: Turreted Queen Anne

Such buildings survive in many cities, towns and villages throughout Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, and are representative of a form that evolved through the mid to late 19th century and into the beginnings of the 20th, and usually termed ‘Queen Anne’ or ‘Queen Anne Revival’. Curiously, the form has nothing to do with Queen Anne (1665-1714) who came to the throne in 1702, over a hundred years before the form emerged. Baroque was the popular style of her time, such as carried out by Christopher Wren (1632–1723) and his contemporaries. Moreover, the Queen Anne is not a revival of anything in particular – borrowing from assorted sources or simply improvising is common. The name

'Queen Anne' was apparently bestowed by an early practitioner and promoter, the British architect Norman Shaw (1831-1912)[1]. In keeping with the form's ambiguity, it has also been termed by those who seek to classify things into neat boxes, as 'Free Classic', 'Domestic Revival' and 'Free Renaissance'.

Background

In western economies, the mid-19th century was a period of massive change associated with industrialisation, urbanisation and social and cultural changes. For centuries, even more advanced nations were primarily agricultural, with a landed aristocracy occupying country houses, and keeping secondary urban dwellings. As the 19th century unfolded, there was the rise of a prosperous urban middle class in Europe and other places derived from European cultures, including Canada and the United States. The wealth of this new group of managers, professionals and entrepreneurs created a growing demand for substantial houses, in growing cities, the emerging suburbs, and smaller communities.

Norman Shaw and other British designers experimented with forms to satisfy this demand in the 1870s. Some of Shaw's houses are essentially revivalist, such as Cragside in Northumberland of 1869, with its half-timbering, stone arches and mullioned windows, inspiring a romantic association with some mythical heroic age. Shaw's buildings from the 1870s take on the characteristics we would identify as Queen Anne. Among his innovations were a different approach to urban street facades, and less traditional ways of dealing with interior room layouts, reflecting changing lifestyles. The form evolved and exhibited "…progressively less concern with historical accuracy, and progressively more with the quest for novelty and for architectural expressions more in keeping with the age."[2] While there are non-residential Queen Anne buildings, the form is best expressed in residences.

[1] Crocker: 2024

[2] Fletcher: (1967) p.991

Queen Anne Housing in Hampsted, London, UK

Technological changes were reflected, with improved quality machine-made bricks, larger and better glass, cheaper tiles, plumbing fixtures, and machine-made wood components, all of which became more available due to new transportation systems allowing materials to be brought from more remote factories.

The Form – in Canada and elsewhere

Unlike other emerging forms, such as the Arts & Crafts and Modernism, the Queen Anne was never a philosophical movement, but something that addressed the marketplace. It can be seen as a way to meet the expectations of the new social and cultural orders. Without a governing set of design values or forms, designers had little restraint, and could create a product to meet the aesthetic and functional expectations of the consumer, usually meaning something to be received as picturesque. Maitland (1990) notes it as "…colourful, cheerful, comfortable, undogmatic, dedicated to charm and homely pleasures, with few philosophical pretentions beyond an admirable desire to accommodate itself well to the climates, materials, terrains and tastes of the country. " "Beauty and charm, after all, are not accidental."[3]

[3] Maitland: (1990) p.13

It is tempting to look for buildings that are most faithful to some style category, but in wandering through older cities and towns, it becomes apparent that, in the Queen Anne forms intermingle, sometimes, for example, with neo-classic columns, Romanesque arches, bits of renaissance, unprecedented ornament and other details combined in one building. This mixing is one factor that makes some urbanscapes so interesting.

Hamilton, Ontario.

Hamilton: Garble ends

Identification of buildings as being Queen Anne is not always easy, given the freedom the form gave to the creative designer, and different interpretations in different countries, but there are a set of features that are more-or-less common and might be noted in those large Hamilton houses, and others in central Canada. These include a rejection of overall symmetry, and a frequent inclusion of cross gable roof forms and prominent gable ends. There is often a mix of materials on the exteriors. Turrets and bay windows can often be noted in the larger houses, and, generally, houses have sash windows to accommodate the latest technology – larger and affordable sheets of glass. Porches are common in Canada and the United States and they often wrap around the building. Again, in keeping with increased technological capabilities, sometimes varying by country, there are often machine-made elements present, including such things as terra cotta ornamentation, a profusion of wood spindles, different shaped shingles and other wooden elements, although sometimes these have suffered from

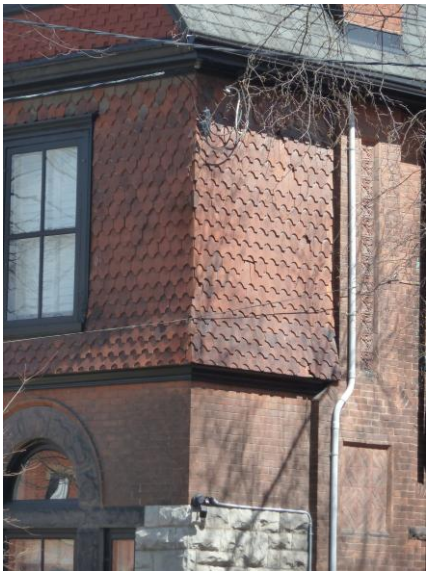
the effects of time. Mortar is often tinted to match the brick, and mortar joints struck to be flush with the brick. Decorative panels can often be noted, including in the larger Hamilton houses.

Niagara: Cross-gable roof and turret

Hamilton: tinted mortar

As with many architectural forms, the Queen Anne changed as it travelled, so what is to be found in the different parts of the anglosphere varies considerably. In Canada there are the obvious functional concerns, in particular climate, the availability of materials, and the settings. Entry vestibules with coat closets were easy to incorporate into the designs, and wide porches were cool shady places to sit (and sometime sleep) during Ontario's hot, humid summers. When the Queen Anne houses were built, Britishness was important, and many of the new arrivals aspired to reflect the forms of England or Scotland – albeit as interpreted in a new and growing country. In Ontario, we can often see the work of craftsmen happily engaging with big lathes and big logs to create turnings that may seem out of place historically. In some areas, such as Hamilton, there is a proliferation of turrets that do not purport to be at all defensive – simply picturesque and/or ornamental, often with big windows.

In the United Kingdom, striped masonry can frequently be noted. In the more urban centres, the Queen Anne style departed from the usual forms of street presentation, and the traditional arrangements of rooms. Wall-hung terra cotta tiles are common, but are unusual in Canada, although some of those big Hamilton houses do use them.



Hamilton: Ornamental wall tile

In the United States, the form attempts to be more historicist, sometimes with rather superficial half-timbering, and often clad in wood, and, accordingly, painted – frequently in contrasting colours. Extremely flamboyant examples exist in which coloured ornament is piled upon form, and then piled on complex plans and elevations, offering distinct contrast to the more sober examples usual in Canada. The Queen Anne was popular as resort and hotel architecture, especially on the East Coast.

While it is tempting to focus on the larger Queen Anne houses, the fundamental characteristics are reflected in smaller houses, where prominent gables and inexpensive ornamental materials (such as fancy cut shingles and wood turnings) can be noted.

Niagara: Ornamental wood turnings
Note big shady porches

Hamilton: Turreted small Queen Anne
Unfortunately, re-clad

The deliberate asymmetry allowed considerable flexibility to accommodate various interior demands, as well as the creation of picturesque exteriors. In keeping with the times, the Queen Anne readily integrated and reflected such things as indoor plumbing, central heating, the slow disappearance of domestic servants, and, in the most opulent homes, the inclusion of elevators. Compared with earlier residences, rooms, at least in the bigger houses, tended to have specific functions – the library, the parlour, the dressing-room, the study, the music room…

What we can learn from the Queen Anne?

The Queen Anne is not dead. The core design approach has been driven by consumer preferences, emphasizing forms and spaces that people esteem, while also adapting to technological and lifestyle changes. It encourages designers to strike a thoughtful balance.

There are abundant recent examples of consumer driven architecture and sometimes the more traditional forms of the Queen Anne are employed. The sense of familiarity and comfort seems to have remained largely unchanged over the past century and a half since the grand houses of Hamilton were built—many of which are still treasured and meticulously cared for today.

Hamilton: Still esteemed

I frequently pass by a relatively new townhouse development in Niagara. It displays the asymmetry, gables, porches, window shapes and the mixture of materials popular more than a century ago, that,

when combined, still strives for a (marketable) presentation that, as Maitland put it, is "…cheerful, comfortable, undogmatic, dedicated to charm and homely pleasures, with few philosophical pretentions." For today's designer, it points to the value of weaving together into a whole, a variety of what might be considered to be disparate elements, a comprehensive package that resonates with those who behold it.

Niagara: New Queen Anne

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