

SPANISH COLONIAL ART IN THE UNITED STATES

AN ESSAY IN CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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ART AT ALL TIMES and places has something sacramental about it. That is to say, just as a sacrament by definition is the outward and visible symbol of an inward and spiritual grace, so art is the outward and visible expression of the intangible forces of history. This is particularly true of architecture and the decorative arts. Unlike painters, say, or sculptors, architects and craftsmen can never work alone; their work is not and cannot be exclusively the product of individual or eccentric genius. Economic conditions, social structure, climate, religious beliefs, the tides of fashionable taste, all have their effect on it; and all can be read in the houses, furniture, ceramics, and common artifacts earlier generations leave behind. Reading the art of the past in this way as cultural expression is the proper business of art history; what follows is an essay in this kind of interpretation, as applied to Spanish colonial architecture and decorative arts in the United States.

Of all colonies established in the New World, New Spain had by far the best start. By the 1550s, it seemed only a matter of time until the whole New World would be Spanish; secure in the possession of all South America (except Brazil), Mexico, and most of the Caribbean Islands, Spanish power began to push northwards in a steadily lengthening chain of forts and missions—into Florida by the 1560s, New Mexico by the 1590s, Texas by the 1680s, Arizona and California during the 18th century. Who could have guessed it would prove so hollow? Who could have guessed that from the moment English settlement first came into contact with the Spanish colonies, their history would be one continuous record of defeat and disintegration? The Carolinians began it shortly after 1700, destroying Spanish power in the Floridas; the Texans carried it on the 1820s and 30s; all the States joined in to complete the process in the Mexican War, which ended in 1848 with Arizona, New Mexico, and California being annexed to the Union.

A clean and easy sweep; but why? What was it about Spanish civilization that made the contest so one-sided, the American conquest so irresistible? That is best revealed, I think, in the record of its architecture and decorative arts.

Plate 1. SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO. CHEST, FROM A SPANISH MISSION IN NEW MEXICO. New Mexico was known and explored before 1550 (by de Niza, 1539; Coronado 1540-42); but not until Don Juan Oñante arrived at a site near San Juan Pueblo in 1598 with four hundred colonists was settlement undertaken. Santa Fe was founded in 1609. The Spanish population of New Mexico never grew large, however; by 1630 it numbered only some 250. Spanish control over the territory was always precarious, as evidenced by an Indian rebellion in 1680 which drove all Spaniards out of New Mexico for twelve years. Spanish control was, of course, re-established, and during the eighteenth century a string of missions developed, although never held very securely. This little chest (somewhat over 4' long, 2' high and 2' long) was made, probably by Indian workmen, for one of them about the middle of the eighteenth century.

Perhaps the most revealing thing about this chest is the fact that it *is* a chest—and that chests like this were still, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the commonest single article of furniture in the Spanish missions of the Southwest. For chests are essentially a medieval kind of furniture. The medieval chest was, of course, the ancestor—or one of the main ancestors—of most later furniture forms. Put a board vertically behind it, and the chest becomes a chair—as European chairs, with their stiff vertical lines and storage space beneath the seat still witnessed well into the seventeenth century. Stand it on legs, and make it open from the front instead of the top, and the chest becomes a “chest of drawers”—a lowboy, a highboy, a dresser, a bureau. Reduce its depth, and put feet under it again, and the chest turns into a serving table. And so on. But all these developments had long since been history in most other parts of the Western world when Indian craftsmen in New Mexico were fashioning the kind of chest we have here. And the fact that they were preserving such an obsolescent medieval form tells us, right at the beginning, a good deal about Spanish colonial culture. It was a medieval society—a kind of fossil, preserving in this remote wilderness a way of life the rest of the Western world had largely left behind. What chance would as

backward a culture as this have, when it came up against the vigorous political and social life of the new United States, already by 1800 the most "modern" nation on earth?

A second thing that strikes us at once about chests like this is the poor quality of wood used in them. Ordinarily they are made of coarse western yellow pine—soft, easily worked, with a smooth-wearing surface, but so weak and easily split that angle-irons have to reinforce the corners, and deep or detailed carving is impossible. Why make an important and laboriously decorated piece of furniture of such poor stuff? Simply because it was the best available. What red spruce there was in New Mexico had to be saved for beams and posts; other woods, like piñon, cottonwood, or juniper, were too small or coarse or knotty for furniture of any size. Only this rough yellow pine was left.

And this again suggests an ominous weakness. Elsewhere in North America, trees were the one thing early settlers had in abundance. Oak, maple, beech, chestnut, white pine grew everywhere—excellent for building houses and furniture, and—what is even more significant—invaluable for trade. The very first ship that left Virginia for England carried a cargo of barrel-staves; almost at once, that is to say, the English colonists could begin paying off their debt to the homeland. From the beginning, they were in a "bargaining position." There never was a time when they were utterly dependent on the mother country; in the fertile soil of New England (fertile indeed compared to the Southwest!) and Virginia, independence of spirit and culture could begin to grow immediately. But how different were conditions in the Spanish Southwest! Compare with the characteristic waste and squandering of lavish natural resources that went on in the English colonies the state of affairs in New Mexico, implied in Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez' reports on his visitation there in 1776. At one place he commends the settlement because "the usable lumber that was in the old church and friary has been kept. It consists of a door . . . the balustrade of the choir loft and its small beams, along with the little balustrade of the high altar . . . an ordinary table, three small chairs, three doors, and four windows . . .". At another they have preserved "a saw. A lever. Two Two crowbars so worn out that they are no longer useful. A plane. (All came from the King). Adze, chisel, but Father Fernandez

did not find this for they say it is lost. . . ."¹ From first to last the barren Spanish settlements had to be artificially nurtured—orangeries in the wilderness, that could survive only through constant transfusions from far remote sources.

Given miserable materials and tools like these, it is hardly surprising that the chip carving on Spanish colonial furniture is so often crude; we would be surprised to find anything else. But carving of the sort on this chest is more than crude. It is degenerate. That is to say, it reflects not so much a failure of technique, as a failure in comprehension—a misinterpretation and misapplication of the art forms employed. And that is far more significant.

The motifs, of course, are Spanish—naturalistic floral forms of Renaissance origin, and the rampant lion of Castile. Spanish, too, is the basically heraldic composition; it represents the medieval and *mudejar* heritage of Spanish craftsmen, established in the New World centuries before. But in all probability it was not Spanish hands who carved what we have here. For while most Spanish settlements in the Southwest had a few Spanish artisans, or priests with at least a smattering of training in design—and some had a good deal more than that—from the first the Spanish had begun to train Indians in woodworking skills, and as time went on Indian craftsmen were employed more and more extensively. By the mid-eighteenth century, the records indicate that Indian craftsmen had become indispensable. So, for instance, we find Governor Codallas giving permission to his Indian charges to go hunting, "provided that on their return they do some carpentry work on his house"; visitation reports tell us that Indians were entirely responsible for altar screens in such churches as San Miguel in Santa Fe, San Esteban del Rey in Acome, and many other places; at Nambe, for one, "Indians built the whole edifice." And in Indian hands, the principles and forms of Spanish arts and architecture subtly and inevitably began to change into something different—something primitive, more Indian than Spanish in fact and spirit.

To be meaningful and comprehensible to the mind, any kind of visual art—and especially two-dimensional representational forms—has to be "translated." That is, to say, what we call a "picture

¹ Quotation from Fray Dominguez in E. B. Adams and Fray A. Chavez (ed. & trans.), *The Missions of New Mexico in 1776* (Albuquerque, 1956).



FIG. 1. Spanish Colonial Chest, *ca.* 1780. [Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, N. M.]



FIG. 3. Mission Church of San José, San Antonio, Texas. [Texas Highway Dept.]



FIG. 2. High Altar, S. Xavier del Bac, Tucson, Arizona.



FIG. 4. Castillo de San Marcos, St. Augustine, Fla. [National Park Service]



FIG. 5 (B). Palace of the Governors, Santa Fe, N. M. [N. M. State Tourist Bureau]



FIG. 5(A). Fatio House, St. Augustine, Florida. [Florida State News Bureau]



FIG. 5(C). Vallejo Ranch House, Petaluma, California. [Library of Congress]

two fundamentally incompatible elements. It makes evident why, once the unifying force of Spanish military power weakened, once the divisive pressures of "Anglo" penetration began, that society was bound to fall apart, why it was such an easy conquest. And we will find that same story, writ small here in Spanish colonial furniture, spelled out in all the "major" arts of New Spain as well.

Plate 2. TUCSON, ARIZONA. HIGH ALTAR AND RETABLE, CHURCH OF SAN XAVIER DEL BAC. Missionary orders of the Spanish Church were in the New World even before Cortez' conquest of Mexico in 1519; by 1535 more than a hundred Franciscan missionaries had arrived, and in 1539 one of them, Fr. Marcus de Niza, discovered and explored Arizona. In 1590 the Jesuits arrived in New Spain, and as early as 1645 had some thirty-five mission stations established and were boldly probing new fields. It was a Jesuit, Fr. Eusebio Kino (incidentally also a Royal Cosmographer), who first visited the village of Bac in 1692; in 1700 he established the first church there. Kino went on to begin mission work in Lower California; others, however, replaced him and from 1724 on there was a Jesuit in permanent residence at San Xavier. After the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1767, Franciscans took over their Arizona field, and it was under their supervision that the present church of San Xavier was built between 1783 and 1797. The work was directed by two "architects," the Gaona brothers; the workmen mainly Subaipari—and later Papago—Indians. Except for the foundations, San Xavier was constructed entirely of kiln-baked clay brick, covered with a white lime plaster; the altar is of the same material. The lifelike *santo* represents St. Francis Xavier. The Franciscans left the mission 1822, but returned in 1911; this is the only one of the seven or eight Arizona missions to remain in reasonably good condition.

The overwhelming first impression made by this—or any of the high altars in Spanish mission churches—is one of surprise. Surprise first of all at its very existence—looming up suddenly, as one's eyes become accustomed to the dim light, at the end of a heavy, cavernous nave, with plain adobe walls and simple square pillars only sparsely set off with a few bits of ornamented woodwork. Surprise, then, at its lavishness, its heaped mass of wood and plaster carving—fantastically indented columns and flying cherubim; volutes, sprays, baldachins, cornucopia; flowers and fruit; saints and crucifixes; the whole in the flickering glitter of candlelight. But surprise finally, as we look more closely, at the contrast

between the magnificence of the ensemble, and the crudeness, the naïvete, of the details. Lumpy columns. Stubby, stiff cherubim. Clumsy sprays; ill-proportioned volutes. Harsh and heavy color. A strange contrast; and a most significant one—for behind that contrast is all the history of New Spain. No "modern" society of upper, middle, and lower classes (such as, for example, the English colonies were developing) would have produced work like this. What it manifests is rather an infinitely older kind of social structure—priests and rulers on the one hand, planning this lavish, ambitious ensemble, and Indian workmen (serfs would be the better word, probably) on the other, clumsily and naïvely carrying out their orders in detail. It was in fact the old feudal society of medieval Europe, translated here to this remote corner of the New World.

Two principles motivated the priests in their lavish designs. One was their Spanish cultural background. Throughout history, a taste for bold contrasts of richly concentrated ornament in some places with flat bareness in others has been characteristic of Spanish architectural designers, and around 1700 this taste had achieved one of its most exuberant manifestations in the so-called Churrigueresque style. Aesthetically, what the designers of small Southwest mission churches like San Xavier certainly had in mind were the great Churrigueresque churches and cathedrals of Mexico, and behind them, the original models in Spain. But aesthetic effect was hardly their main motive; magnificence, no matter how beautiful, was never an end in itself. Rather, it was a means to an end—the end being to impress upon the faithful the glory and majesty of the Catholic Church. This principle the Franciscans inherited from their Jesuit predecessors, who in turn had developed it (very systematically, as a weapon in the Counter-Reformation) out of medieval precedent. Very early in the history of the Church, as the barbarian tribes had swept down over the old Roman Empire, church builders had come to realize the truth that each generation, every class of people, has to have the Faith presented to it in terms it can understand. They found that for simple peoples, accustomed to understand power in terms of stature, strength, and tangible possessions, magnificently rich architectural display is the most effective presentation of the awful majesty of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords. We read, for instance, of Justinian's great church of Holy Wisdom in Constantinople that once, when an envoy from

one of the rude nations of the North was ushered beneath its mighty dome, he fell to the floor in a stupor, overcome by the sheer splendour of this monument to the Pantocrator. That was the kind of effect builders of High Gothic cathedrals, Romanesque pilgrimage shrines, Jesuit Baroque churches, all sought for; that effect, in however small a way, was what the Spanish priests of the Southwest set out to achieve in churches like San Xavier. And, in however small a way, they achieved it.

Furthermore, they achieved it, as in medieval Europe, by setting their newly-won flock to work for them. An altarpiece like this would seldom, in the normal course of things, be entirely the work of mission Indians, to be sure; one or two Spanish artisans at least would customarily be employed on it as well. But Indian craftsmen probably carved the bulk of the detail; and it is here, just as on the chest, that they have left their mark. These motifs are by no means as abstract, of course; but they reveal the same "barbarization." These cherubim are not the work of men who really understand the anatomy of a human body; no awareness of Renaissance laws of proportion or classical sophistication went into volutes, scrolls, and garlands like this. Through all the diverse forms of true Spanish churrigueresque there can always be sensed subtle, yet strong principles of design that unify the whole; here it is missing. Jumbled and cramped together, the details are assembled piece by piece, building up a whole which is no more than the sum of its parts. Where the Churrigueresque designer worked in the Renaissance tradition of seeing all his details in relationship to the whole, the carvers here add them together like "primitive" painters, or children making a human figure—head, plus two arms, plus body, and so on. The result is a whole which lacks both the comprehensive unity of Spanish design, or the patterned discipline of Indian work. Like the decoration on the chest, it is the manifestation of two irreconcilable traditions each cancelling out the other's excellences.

And also, of course, the manifestation of a society composed of masters and slaves. For it must be obvious that an altarpiece like this served more than purely religious ends; it had a political function as well. Through it the savage was brought to an awareness of the power of God, certainly, but it made him aware, with at least equal forcefulness, of the social and cultural superiority of his rulers. In the process of making such an altarpiece, the Indian

was being civilized, to be sure, but his product was also an effective means of keeping him "in his place." This we will realize most fully, however, when we consider the Spanish mission church as a whole.

Plate 3. SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS. MISSION CHURCH OF SAN JOSÉ.

Although early explored by Cabeza de Vaca (1528-36) and Coronado (1540-42), serious Spanish occupation of Texas only began, under the stimulus of threatened French competition, in 1681. In course of time, however, an impressive chain of missions, presidios, and pueblos developed, of which one of the most notable was this, the mission of San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, near San Antonio, established in 1720 (the present church was not begun until 1768; although restored several times since, it has not been substantially altered).

Despite all this effort, by 1821 it was estimated that, excluding Indians, there were no more than 4000 Mexicans or Spanish in the Texas country, not more than 3-4000 in Upper California, and possibly 15-20,000 in the whole intervening area. To encourage settlement, the government of Mexico (which became formally independent from Spain in 1821) offered large blocks of land to American contractors who would agree to bring in colonists. So successful were such contractors (most notably Stephen F. Austin of Connecticut) that by 1830 more than 20,000 Americans had already moved into Texas, and the Mexican government tried to rescind their policy and cancel the grants; in 1836 a revolt broke out, resulting in the independence of Texas, which was admitted to the Union as a State in 1845. In the years that followed, Texas was so thoroughly Americanized that very little beyond place names, and a few mission churches like San José, survive from the Spanish era.

San José is typical of most missions of any pretensions in the Southwest, in that the church forms part of a self-contained walled "community," complete with such "secular" features as domestic living quarters, granaries, storehouses, water supply, &c. Most mission churches were based on either a simple basilican or a cruciform plan, with twin towers (one or the other often left unbuilt) planned to flank the facade, and a pierced belfry above it; decoration was characteristically concentrated in patches on the facade and towers. The so-called "rose window" at San José is a distinctive feature; while this designation appropriately suggests a medieval origin, the cramped luxuriance and oval shape found here originated more immediately in the Baroque architecture of Mexico and Old Spain.

"Half church of God, half fortress"—that description of

medieval Durham Cathedral could be applied quite as aptly to the Spanish mission churches of the Southwest. Churches built for, and often largely by, the Indians, to bring them to a knowledge of God, they were also fortresses, seats of Spanish imperial power. Indian in their abstract, geometric simplicity and often in their materials as well, Spanish in plan and overall design—Spanish Baroque monasteries, in fact, complete with characteristic contrasts of intricately massed decorative sculpture set off against plain wall surfaces—they proclaim in full-scale architectural language what furniture and altarpieces reveal in subtler, smaller ways: the record of a feudal civilization, a society of lords and serfs. The Indian they enveloped in the majesty of Spanish culture and the splendour of the Spanish church; the Spaniard they supported both psychologically and, on occasion, physically too—even to the extent to withstanding sieges by rebellious populations. In spirit, they recall the monasteries of the early Middle Ages; like St-Gall, St-Riquier, Iona, Monte Cassino, they were small islands of civilization in a barbarous wilderness as well as fortresses to protect it. But unlike them, they rarely functioned as bases from which to extend civilization over the surrounding countryside. They were too self-contained, and too precarious economically, ever to sustain strong roots; they were shells, not seeds. If anything happened in them from generation to generation, it was not the spread of Spanish culture out from them over the Southwest; it was the slow barbarization of Indians and Spaniards alike; the farther away in space and time these missions are from their Mexican bases, the more surely apparent does the failure of the Spanish effort to colonize and civilize the Southwest from them become. That was not the fault of the dedicated men who served them, of course; it was an inherent weakness, built into Spanish colonial policy from the beginning. To understand why the Spanish effort, as represented in these mission churches, failed, we need to see these churches in conjunction with their real counterparts, the great Spanish secular fortresses, like the Castillo de San Marcos, in St. Augustine.

Plate 4. ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA. CASTILLO DE SAN MARCOS (Fort Marion). St. Augustine, founded by Aviles in 1565 in response to French attempts to establish themselves at Fort Caroline on the St. Johns River, was the heart of Spanish power in Florida and the spearhead of Spanish penetration into

what is now American territory; and the Castillo de San Marcos was the heart of St. Augustine. Built over a 25-year period beginning in 1672 (after English settlement had begun at Charleston in 1670), it was a completely European-style fort, with star-shaped bastions in regular ashlar stonework, surrounded by a moat. Its huge retaining walls (30 feet high and up to 12 feet thick) were, however, of coquina—a soft whitish stone, abundant in the region, composed of crushed shells and coral cemented together, and its roof of tabby (= *tapia*, a kind of cement made from the copious Indian shell-deposits along the Florida and Carolina coasts), poured in three layers, its thickness varying from 10-20" depending on the curve of the arches below. Altogether, this establishment must have cost the Spanish Crown the equivalent of many million dollars in modern money. Often besieged but never taken, the Castillo was turned over to Britain with the surrender of Florida in 1763, reoccupied by Spain 1783-1821, used as an American military prison (Fort Marion) through the rest of the 19th century, made a national monument in 1921.

"Fort" to an American mind generally suggests some small, temporary structure erected on the frontier of an advancing civilization—such as the Pilgrims built at Plymouth in the seventeenth century, or the Kentucky frontiersmen at Harrodsburg in the eighteenth, or western forts like Laramie in the nineteenth. An American "fort" was not a place you lived in—or at least, did not intend to live in for long; it was a structure erected to protect an infant settlement, not to contain it. But what the Spaniards called a fort was very different indeed. To most intents and purposes, it *was* the settlement; the life, supplies, and fortunes of the town depended on it, flowed from it. And like their counterparts, the mission churches, great forts like the Castillo de San Marcos were both the protection and the prison of their inhabitants. Like the mission churches, they were sustained by continuous inspiration and direction from far-distant bases in Mexico and Spain. But their dependence went even further, for whereas the mission churches had of necessity to be built largely of local materials, even the materials in a fort like San Marcos—from the massive cut stones to doorframes and windowlatches—came from the motherland. Where the first forts of the English colonies were built by the settlers themselves from native resources, Florida contributed practically nothing of importance to a structure like

the Castillio. Into it went three million dollars' worth of Spanish labor, materials, and planning; the result was no product of Florida, or of New Spain. It belonged entirely to Old Spain—a wholly artificial planting. From it nothing indigenous could grow—and worse, by its very existence, it smothered any possible native shoots that might have appeared. There it sat, century after century, stagnating, until another civilization, rooted in American soil, pushed in to overwhelm it. How heavy, how crushing, was the inert weight of Spanish imperial power on the growth of Spanish colonial life we may realize best, perhaps, if we stop to consider that it was only when that weight was lifted, when the Castillo had been abandoned and Spanish rulers expelled from Florida, that we begin to have any really native domestic architecture developing in St. Augustine and elsewhere. Then, and only then, do we find an architecture appearing—the Spanish-colonial house type—that could make a significant contribution to American civilization and culture. But then, it was already too late for this contribution to be effective.

Plate 5(A). ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA. FATIO HOUSE. While St. Augustine claims to have the oldest houses in North America, to all intents and purposes what Spanish domestic architecture now exists there dates from the cession of Florida to Britain in 1763. That is true of the “oldest” house, on St. Francis Street, supposedly built in 1571 but remodelled by a British major in 1764, and the Llambias House; it is also true of the Fatio house, built in 1806 (during the period of Spanish re-occupation of Florida 1783-1819) by Andreas Ximinies. It was built of coquina, a kind of coral mined on nearby Anastasia Island, plastered on the outside for protection against damp.

Plate 5(B). SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO. PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS. Founded 1609, rebuilt after the Indian insurrection of 1680 and several times since. In general appearance, type and use of materials (adobe walls, projecting beam ends, simple geometric forms) the Governors' Palace strongly resembled the native terraced Pueblo houses of New Mexico; characteristic of the region, too, is the porch or covered walk (“portales”) with its heavy beams chamfered, notched, and painted in color.

Plate 5(C). PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA. “CASA GRANDE” (VALLEJO RANCH HOUSE). In the years between 1769, when General Gaspar de Portola, his troops, and spiritual guide Fray Junipero Serra entered upper California to establish a north-west frontier for New Spain at the King's command, and 1823,

four presidios, twenty-one missions, and three pueblos were founded in this rich territory. Of them little has survived beyond a few (mostly restored) mission churches, place names (e. g., "Los Angeles," founded 1781), and ranch houses built by great landlords to whom the territory was largely parcelled out. Many of the latter date from the period of Mexican rule, which began with the independence of Mexico in 1821. Of them, this headquarters of the Petaluma ranch (some 75,000 acres in all) is typical, although rather larger than most. It was begun in 1834 by General Mariano Vallejo for the dual purpose of attracting Spanish settlers from Mexico to the rich unoccupied lands north of San Francisco, and protecting the region against possible Russian penetration from their base at Fort Ross, only forty miles away. Built largely by Indian labor, the house consisted, like most California ranch houses, of a center section and two projecting wings (one of which was later destroyed by fire) enclosing a court or patio. Its walls were of adobe brick, four feet thick at the base; its inner partitions, roof, and outside galleries of heavy hand-hewn timbers lashed together with rawhide thongs.

American immigrants, arriving in numbers in California from the 1820's on, were strong enough to gain control of the territory by 1846, in the course of the Mexican War. California was formally ceded to the United States in 1848 (along with New Mexico, Arizona, and other districts) and admitted as a State in 1850.

Whatever permanent influence New Spain has had on American culture has come mainly through the "Spanish-colonial" house—and late, rather than early in history. It belongs, in fact, not to the era of English settlement in the old Spanish territories, but to the 1920s and 30s, the age of self-conscious "Americanism." And that is perhaps the most significant thing about it. For the way Spanish culture was resented and ignored during the American occupation of the South and Southwest in the nineteenth century tells us a good deal about the basic character of American civilization then—and perhaps still.

On the face of things, it should have seemed obvious at once that the Spanish house-types of Florida, California, and the Southwest were much more appropriate to the land and its climate than those introduced by the invading "Anglos" in the first half of the nineteenth century—not to mention how immeasurably superior to what they built in the second half. True, these houses (like all aspects of Spanish colonial culture) manifested a rather unstable mixture of Spanish and Indian traditions; but it was still practically

self-evident that the materials, methods, and plans of either were much more suited to the region than the practises of English-American builders. Indeed, they were the product of centuries of adaptation to just such an environment as this. The Fatio House and Santa Fe Governors' Palace in their rather different ways both derive from the medieval town house of Spain, and in the Vallejo ranch-house we have the traditional Spanish country *hacienda*. And while Indian influence has modified, simplified, even barbarized these Spanish traditions (considerably in the Palace, to a lesser extent in the California and Florida houses), the change has if anything only made them more suitable to hot and dry lands. Wood and plaster—the commonest American building materials—are hardly comparable for coolness and stability to the kind of thick walls Spanish-Indian materials like adobe, coquina, or “tabby” made possible; furthermore, these materials were locally available (coquina was a kind of coral that could be mined; tabby, a kind of cement made by crushing and burning seashells from old Indian deposits along the coast of Florida and the Carolinas; adobe walls could be made from earth and clays found commonly through the whole region, either by building them up in layers of separately sun-dried bricks, or by tamping it down between wooden forms). And what better means of providing protection from a hot sun, and breezes at night, could have been devised than the full-length balconies and porches of these Spanish houses? It seems incredible that American settlers in the South and Southwest could have completely ignored such admirably “functional” building, could have so stubbornly and painfully set about improving much less efficient or suitable substitutes of their own for these obvious necessities. Yet they did; and the question is, why? The reason is both simple and significant. Briefly—it was not in them; to have adopted a foreign house-type like this would have been entirely out of keeping with the whole tenor of American culture in the nineteenth century.

To modern eyes, Spanish colonial architecture generally, and its house-types in particular, offers three main kinds of attraction. We may admire it aesthetically—take pleasure in the textural qualities of white adobe walls, creamy “tabby,” or rudely carved natural wood; enjoy the play of shadows and light, masses and voids, created by its simple shapes. Or we may admire its “functionalism”—its appropriateness to a particular climate and conditions

of life. Or again we may find it pleasingly romantic—that is, it may evoke for us a dramatic page of history now closed, an era when life was (presumably) more gracious and colorful than it is now. But that is only how we see it; to early nineteenth-century English-speaking settlers, Spanish colonial architecture looked very different indeed.

That the Spanish tradition would hardly be “romantic” to them is perhaps obvious. The “romantic” implies something remote from everyday experience, something lent charm by distance in space and time—and Spanish culture emphatically was not remote to them. Just as it was the eighteenth-century philosophers of Europe, and the nineteenth-century novelists of the civilized Eastern States—not the frontiersmen of Massachusetts or Pennsylvania, or the pioneers trekking the Great Plains—who waxed ecstatic about the “noble red man,” so it is twentieth-century television script writers who find glamour and romance in Zorro, the Cisco Kid, and the Old Spanish Southwest—not the early English settlers in Texas or Arizona or California. For them, there was nothing romantic about “greasers,” either in their persons or their works.

Then again, if we find something indescribably charming about hand-smoothed adobe walls, or rough-hewn wooden beams, that is largely because we enjoy the contrast between these “natural” materials and the world of gleaming steel, synthetics, and concrete that heavy industry has built around us. People through most of the nineteenth century, however, felt no such enthusiasm for “arts and crafts.” If they belonged to the lower classes, what they primarily admired in architecture was practical utility (and a utilitarian building is a rather different thing to a functional one—a shack is not what we mean by a “machine for living”). Or if they had upper-class pretensions, they had been taught to admire architectural forms for the ideas associated with them—classical columns that symbolized republican virtue, perhaps, or elaborately machined ornament suggesting conspicuous wealth. In any case, to such people—and especially to frontiersmen—there was nothing remarkable about “natural” materials; raw wood and stone were what they had all around them, what they used all the time as a matter of course. The most they would notice about Spanish colonial materials was that they were unfamiliar—and that was hardly a recommendation.

For most significantly—and to us, paradoxically—it was the very suitability of this architecture to its land and people that made it so unappealing, even obnoxious, to the English-speaking American settlers. Most of them, whether homesteaders or quick fortune-hunters, were individualistic adventurers. What use would they have for house-types originating in the crowded streets of medieval Spanish towns? Even if in many western frontier towns long continuous wooden porches like that on the Governors' Palace at Santa Fe did appear, it was not because Spanish tradition had proved their usefulness, but because they were obviously essential in spite of their being Spanish. Similarly, what sort of model for these small adventurers, anxious to make a pile in the goldmines or carve out a small farm for themselves, was a ranch-house like General Valejo's, designed as the headquarters for a 75,000-acre ranch and an establishment of six hundred Indian farm-laborers, vaqueros, and artisans? The sort of paternalistic, patriarchal old-world society represented by these California ranch houses was precisely what this kind of American abhorred most, by tradition and conviction both. And finally, even if these nineteenth-century settlers had had any appreciation of functional architecture in the modern sense—which they certainly did not—they would not have appreciated the Spanish-colonial house. For it was not functional architecture. It was folk architecture. And there is a great and basic difference between them.

The folk architect builds not so much functionally as adaptably. That is, rather than consciously thinking out solutions to particular problems of ventilation, structure, and so forth, as a modern architect would, he builds on the basis of inherited generations of experience with local climate, materials, and social habits. The Spanish colonial house, like all folk architecture, is an anonymous product of community life. National traditions of form and proportion, not personal tastes or measured experiments, are what determine its character. And it was precisely because the English pioneer in these regions was quite aware of this that he disliked and rejected the Spanish building tradition. Not that he could have defined this feeling consciously, perhaps; he was no social anthropologist or psychologist. But he did have the normal instincts of nineteenth-century Americans of English descent—which meant that he, as a matter of course, looked down on all other cultures and national traditions as inferior, beneath his notice except insofar as

these people ought to be "raised" to his level, ought to become "good Americans." Whether or not Spanish house-types offered any advantages in the regions he was occupying was a question he considered beneath investigation; it was simply something "Spanish," something associated with "greasers," something he wanted no part of. Only when there was no longer any question of competition with Spanish-speaking peoples, only when his conquest was long secure, and he had time to relax and begin to look at himself and his land objectively, would the American begin to try and learn something from and about the other peoples and civilizations he had overrun in his sweep across the continent. Then the Spanish tradition began to mean something; but that, of course, is another and later part of the history of the United States.