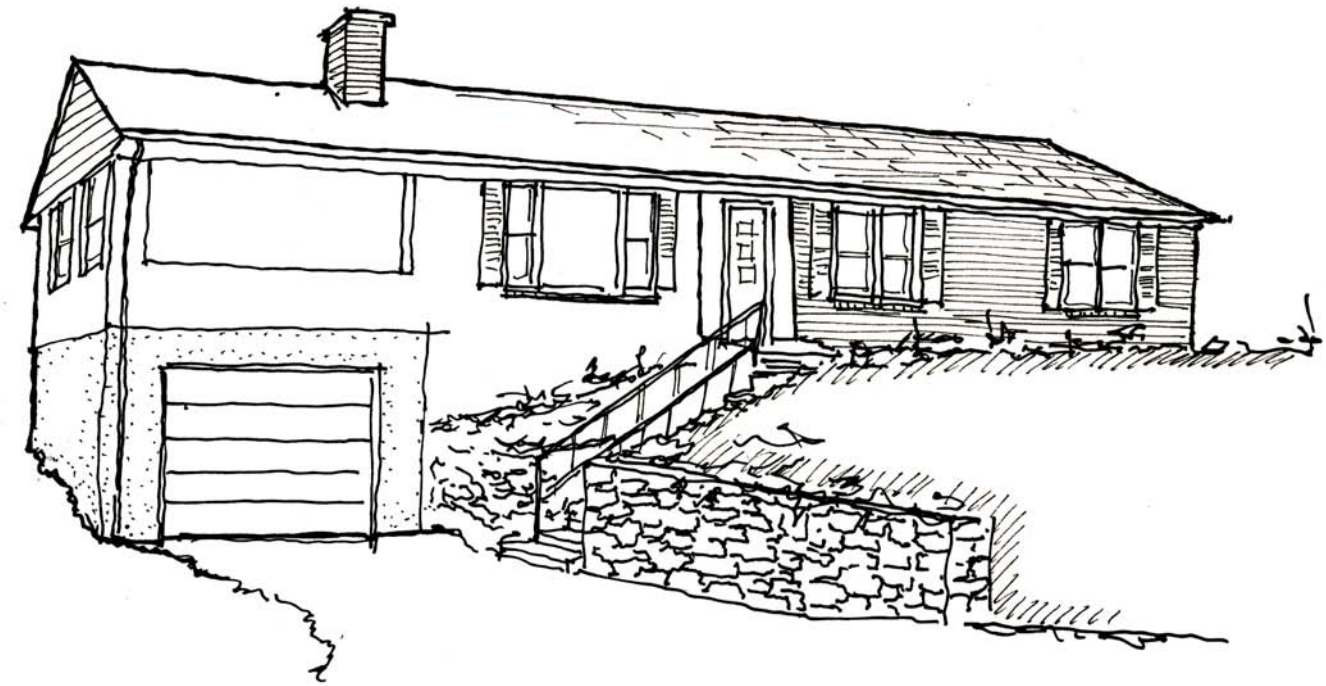
Ranch (1945-Present)



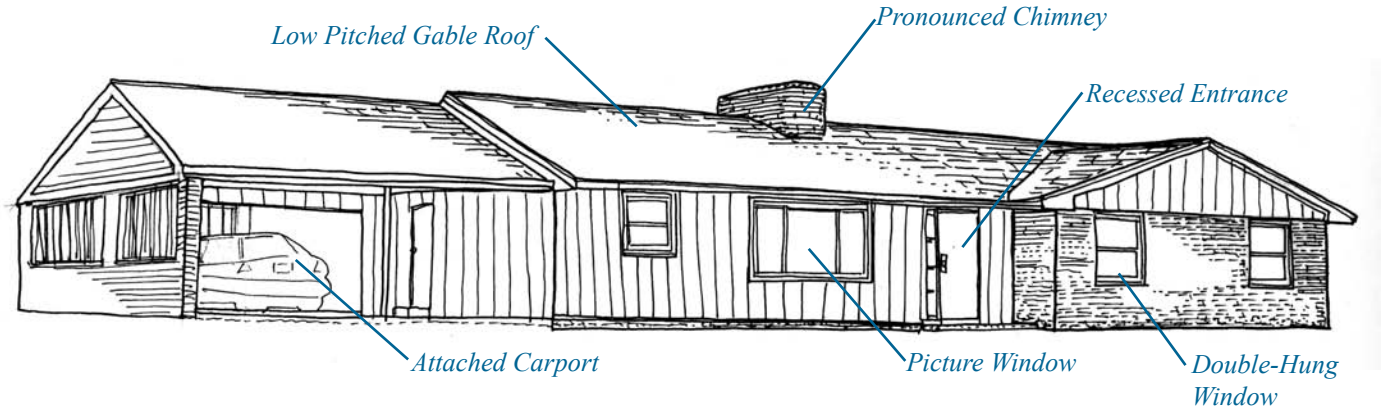
Historical Origins

Following World War II, America's middle class took up residence in the suburbs. Postwar architects and builders generally ignored the historical influences that had inspired the globe-spanning revival styles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Construction costs were an issue for people, so steeply-***pitched*** Tudor and Cape Cod ***gables*** were lowered, exterior ornament was minimized, and ***massing*** became boxier, with perhaps a protruding ***bay*** window or gable end to break monotony. Thus a modern architectural look was achieved in America's newly developed suburban neighborhoods through simple cost-cutting, a horizontal emphasis, and an absence of detail.

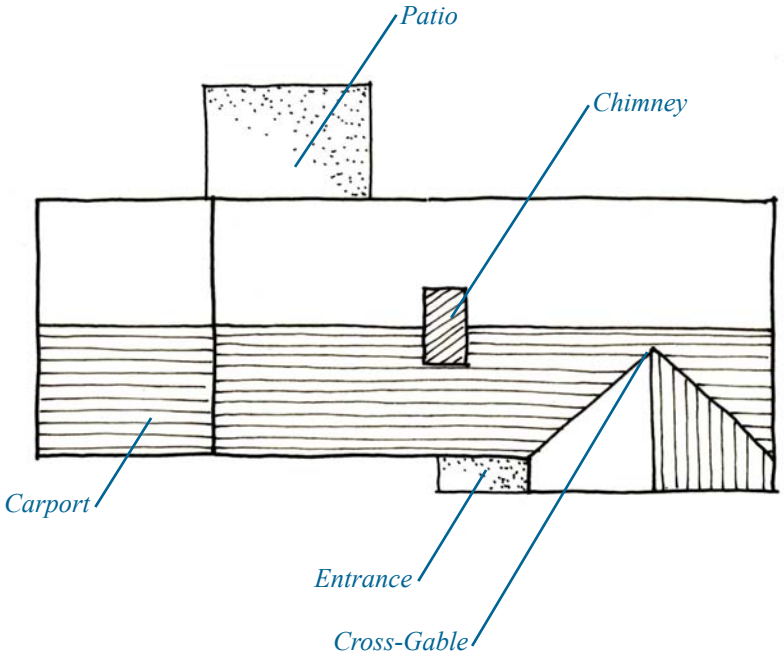
Several architectural forms emerged during the 1940s that solidified the country's rejection of previously-held classical and colonial traditions: Minimal Traditional, Ranch, Split-Level, Split-Foyer, Art Moderne, International, and Shed. Of these five styles, the Ranch clearly had the greatest impact on Roanoke's suburban neighborhoods. The American Ranch house, which originated in California during the 1930s, dominated new construction throughout the 1950s and 1960s in Roanoke; the majority of them were built speculatively by developers.

Essential Elements

- Asymmetrical ***massing***.
- One-story rectangular or L-shaped plan, often with an attached garage or ***carport***.
- Low-***pitched hipped*** or ***gabled*** roof with a pronounced chimney.
- Variety of window types including ***double-hung***, ***picture***, sliding and ***jalousie***.
- Shallow porch or recessed entrance.



Massing & Roof Forms



Aereal View of a Ranch

Based on the earlier Bungalow and Prairie style houses and Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses, a Ranch house is basically a rectangular-shaped, one-story house with a long, low overhanging roof. The roof is typically side-***gabled***, but also features cross-gables, and can be ***hipped***. Ranch houses are rectangular, L-shaped, or U-shaped. Ranch houses were typically built over a basement or on a concrete slab. However, the first floor was always built at grade to help eliminate the separation between indoor and outdoor living. Windows and doors were placed without regard to symmetry. The roof was always low-***pitched*** (4:12 to 5:12, the lowest pitch for an asphalt shingle guarantee), which reinforced its

horizontal appearance. The roof ***eaves*** can be flush, shallow, or wide, with enclosed ***soffits***. In rare instances, eaves are open with exposed ***rafters***. A wide, low chimney was also an important feature.

Wall Cladding

Brick Veneer Home with Vertical Paneling on Upper Wall Section

Ranch houses feature a mix of exterior materials. Walls may be clad with wood (vertical paneling or horizontal siding) or brick or a combination of both. Brick veneer over wood-frame construction was an inexpensive and low-maintenance alternative. Brick was often used on the lower section of the exterior wall with wood siding on the upper section. Stone veneer and stucco were also used for cladding.

Porches

Shallow Porch

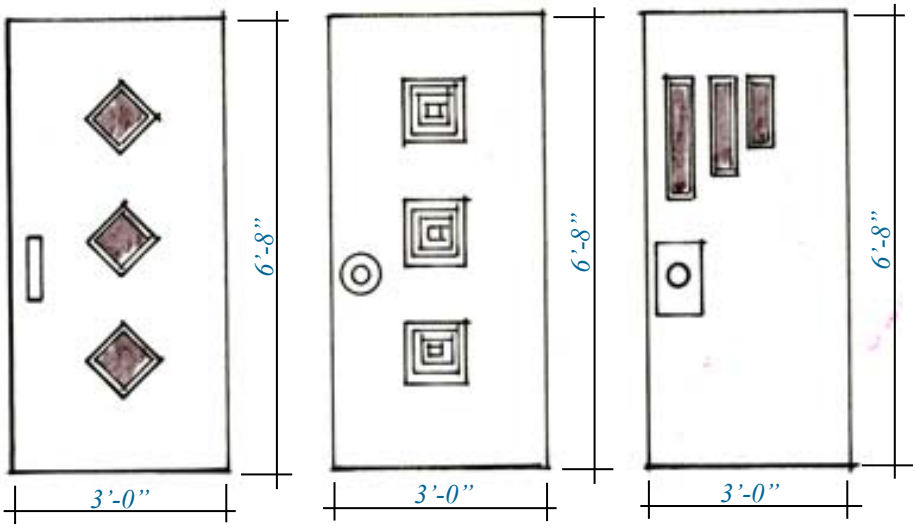
Recessed Entry

The rambling suburban Ranch house typically has a shallow porch or recessed entry used to receive guests. It is not intended as an outdoor sitting area as were nineteenth and early twentieth-century front porches. Instead, rear outdoor patios and courtyards replaced front porches as family gathering areas. Decorative features of the porch include braces, decorative iron or wooden support posts.

Doors

Double Leaf Doors

Doors were typically solid wood with decorative geometric patterns of lights or raised panels in an elongated, square, or diamond pattern. Double-leaf, solid wood entrance doors with large round door knobs were character defining features of some Ranch houses. Full-length, fixed-glass, rectangular ***sidelights*** may flank a flush entrance door within a recessed entrance, although this is uncommon. At the rear of the house, sliding glass doors often opened out onto a patio that served as another living area.



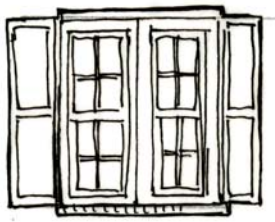
Typical Doors Found on the Ranch

Windows

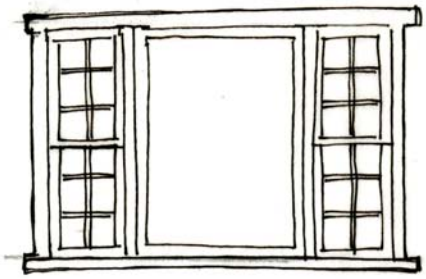
Picture Window

Clerestory Windows

As in the Bungalow before it, light was an important feature and the Ranch incorporated a variety of windows, including ***double-hung*** (paired and tripled), ***picture***, ***ribbon***, ***jalousie***, ***casement***, sliding, corner, and ***clerestory*** windows. Double-hung windows were used in a variety of ***muntin*** patterns such as one-over-one, two-over-two, six-over-six, or eight-over-eight ***sashes***. Clerestory windows located high on exterior walls were often used for bedrooms to allow light into the room while maximizing privacy. A large fixed-glass picture window in the façade became popular in the 1950s and 1960s. This period saw the rise of non-functioning shutters that were used for decoration only, as most of them would not fit the windows they border even if they were hinged and could be closed. Nonetheless, they offered a hint of the traditional building flavor they replaced.

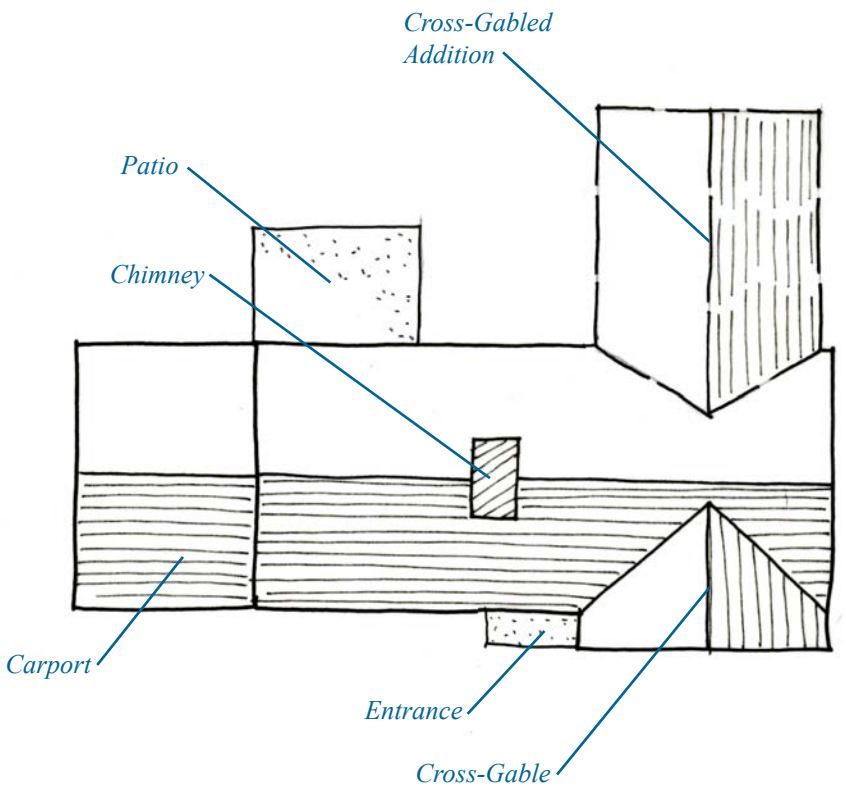


Casement Window



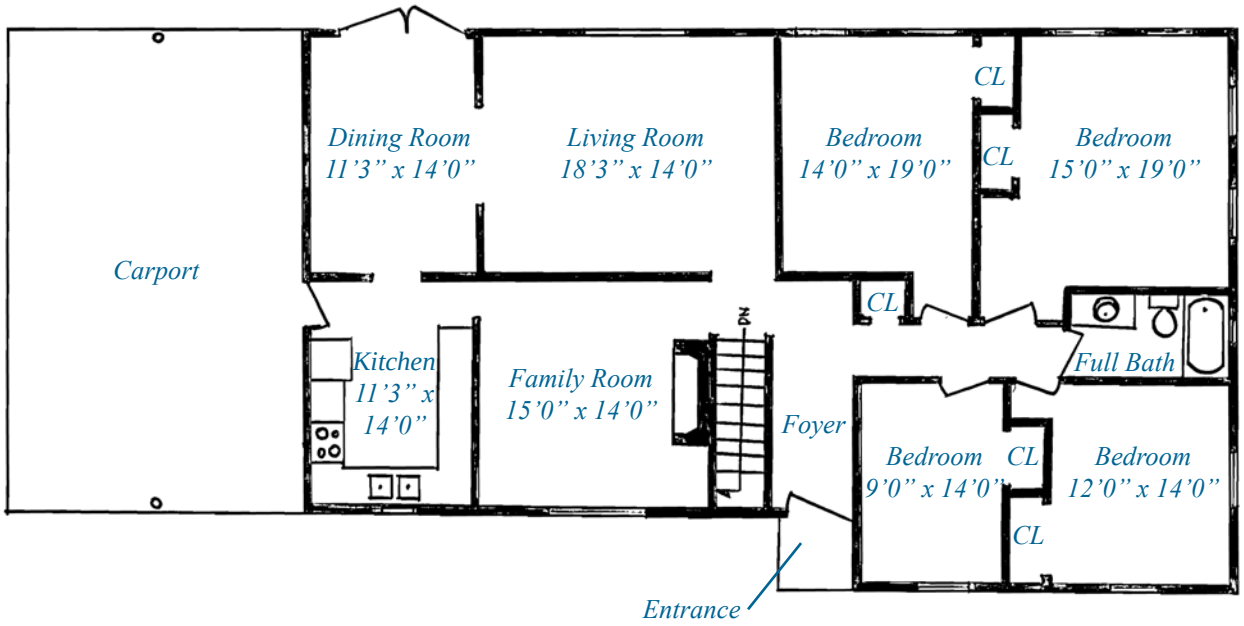
Picture Window

Additions

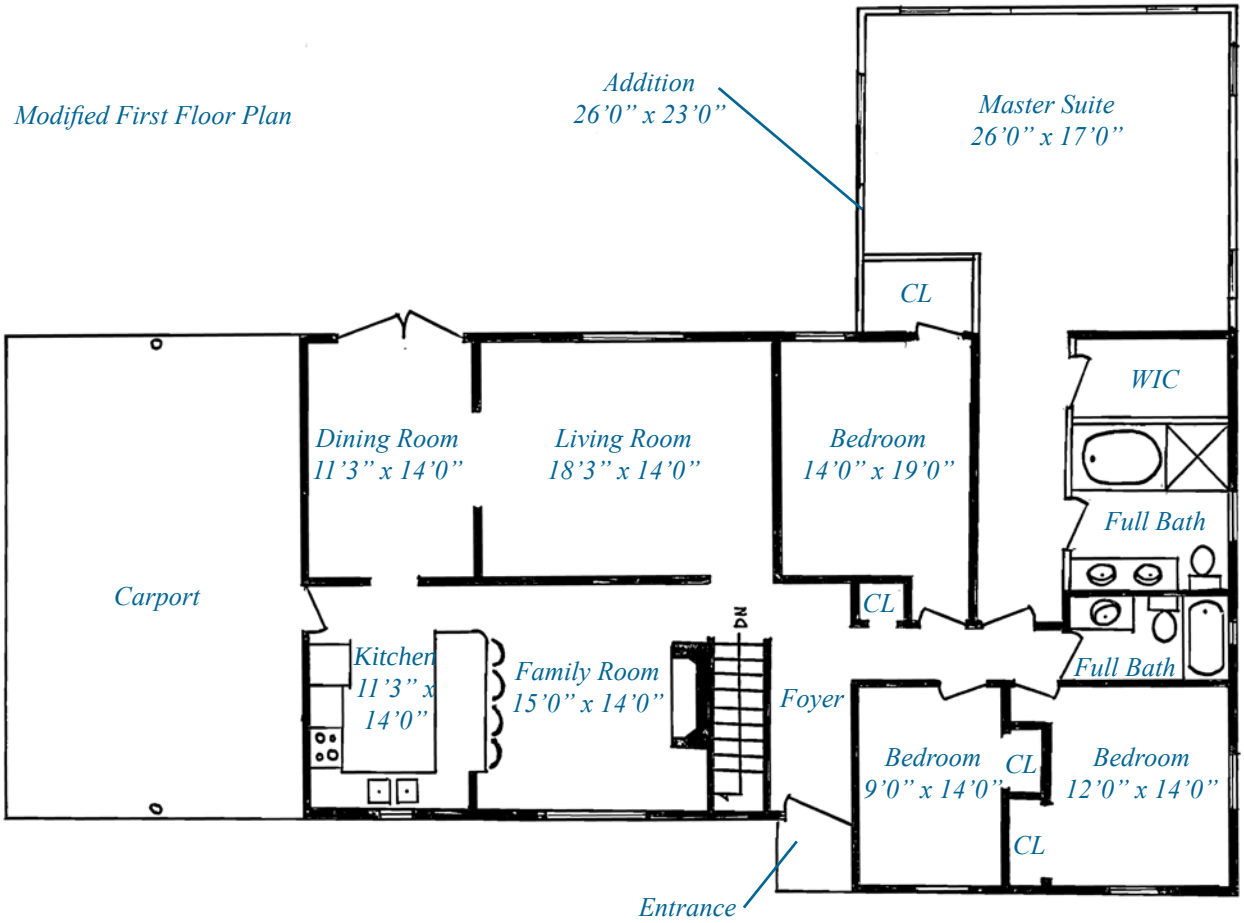


Reallocating existing square footage or the construction of a cross-***gabled*** addition to the rear of the house are appropriate ways to provide more space in a Ranch. Unfinished basements are a great place to incorporate an office, a media room, a recreation room, and/or additional bedrooms/bathrooms. An addition should be designed and built so that the form and character of the primary residence is maintained. It should never be located over the rear patio area and must be one-story tall with a low-sloped roof. Materials should match the original building which were typically organic such as brick, wood, or stucco. A list of appropriate materials specific to the Ranch is provided at the end of this section. More information on additions can be found in the New Construction section of this document.

Reallocation of Exising Square Footage and Addition to a Ranch



Existing First Floor Plan



Attached Garages and Carports

The importance of the automobile in American life is reflected in the design and placement of Ranch houses. Ranch houses usually are set back from the street and situated lengthwise on a big lot. Where earlier garages once stood detached to the rear of the lot, Ranch house garages now were prominently attached. Attached garages with multi-paneled doors, ***carports*** and concrete driveways are standard.

The attached garage and ***carport*** are important symbols to the Ranch style house and should be retained. Sometimes they are enclosed or modified to create additional living space, often in a manner that is not sensative to the house. When considering such modifications, the owner should consult an architect/designer to determine the best design. New additions can also be added to the rear of the house for added space.

Attached Carport

Attached Carport

Front Loaded Attached Garage with Panel Door

Painting a Ranch

The trim on Ranch style houses should be painted softer colors such as ivory which will contrast with the darker colors of the brick or the wood siding material which can be stained darker colors. Earth tone colors on the Ranch are a good choice because the house has a low profile close to the ground. Unpainted brick should never be painted as it could drastically alter the home's original character and trap moisture inside walls.

Maintaining Character Defining Features

Roofs and windows are character-defining features of a Ranch house. The low roof profile must be maintained; a second story addition is never recommended. Windows provide scale to residences and maintain the façade composition that is unique to each house. The treatment of original windows, their unique arrangement, and the design of replacements are critical considerations. The attached garage or ***carport*** are also character-defining features of the Ranch style and should be maintained as such; their enclosure is not recommended.

Appropriate Materials

Brick Wall Cladding in Common Bond with Decorative Cast Stone

- *Roofs:* Fiberglass shingles (architectural grade), composition shingles, or wood shakes.
- *Wall Cladding:* Wood paneling and/or brick in common ***bond***. Wood cladding, cement board, vinyl siding (4" to 8" lap exposure), and shingle siding.
- *Doors:* Wood, fiberglass or steel, paneled or flush with lights appropriate to the style.
- *Windows:* Painted wood, or aluminum ***double-hung***, ***picture***, ***jalousie***, sliding, or ***clerestory***.
- *Shutters:* Wood, vinyl, or composite, sized to match height of window ***sash***.
- *Trim:* Wood, composite, or polyurethane millwork.
- *Garage Doors:* Wood or fiberglass appropriate to the style.

Gallery of Examples