

# THE CHALET AS ARCHETYPE: THE BUNGALOW, THE PICTURESQUE TRADITION AND VERNACULAR FORM

B R U N O   G I B E R T I

The history of the Swiss chalet is a history of recycled form. This paper considers the nature of the chalet as a vernacular building type, its appropriation beginning in the eighteenth century within picturesque theory and high-style architecture in England and America, and its eventual return to the vernacular in the form of the early-twentieth-century bungalow. The goal of the paper is to explore the process by which specific vernacular forms may become integrated into more generalized styles of building. Special attention is paid to identifying the archetypal chalet elements in the high-style work of architects Charles and Henry Greene, which architectural historians have normally identified with Asian rather than European influences. Finally, an appeal is made for a better understanding of the concept of style as it pertains to architecture in the modern period.

IN 1958 LOUISE BENTZ WROTE A LETTER TO RANDELL MAKINSON, author of a well-known monograph on the California architects Charles and Henry Greene. In the letter, Bentz describes the genesis of her 1906 house, which the brothers had designed for a subdivision her husband was developing in Pasadena (FIG. 1): "My mind was quite set upon the Swiss Chalet type of house of which he approved heartily saying square or nearly square houses give the most room and are more economical. . . ."

Bentz's description of the house as a Swiss chalet should come as something of a surprise to those of us familiar with the work of the Greenes. We are accustomed to hearing of the brothers' affinity for Asian culture and to interpreting their carefully crafted work in light of Japanese architectural traditions.

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Furthermore, Bentz tells us elsewhere how her husband was an importer of Japanese goods and how Charles Greene often visited their house and browsed through their library of Asian art.<sup>2</sup> How, then, can we understand the Bentz house as a chalet?

The architectural historian Reyner Banham suggests an answer in an eloquent introduction to Makinson's book. Banham notes the existence of a relationship between the traditional wooden architecture of Northern Europe and the work of the Greenes, a relationship historians have left largely unexplored.<sup>3</sup> Typically, even Makinson, who quotes the Bentz letter, fails to comment on the possible further significance of chalet forms to the work of the Greenes. I would like here to follow Banham's lead and consider the vernacular architecture of Switzerland and Northern Europe as a key not only to the works of high-style architects such as Charles and Henry Greene but to the early-twentieth-century bungalow houses they influenced.

### THE VERNACULAR CHALET

To understand the relationship between the Bentz house and the chalet, it is important to first point out that there were at least three separate but related types of chalets peculiar to different parts of Switzerland: the high mountains, the low plains, and the upper valleys.<sup>4</sup> The first type, the mountain chalet, or *mazon*, was built of roughly squared, interlocking logs and was usually occupied seasonally by herdsmen taking their animals to summer pasture (FIG. 2). It was characteristically covered by a simple gable roof, whose overhanging eaves sheltered an outside stair and gallery.<sup>5</sup>

The other two types were designed to provide more permanent shelter. They were either log-built, like the *mazon*, or timber-framed with spandrels of wood or plaster. The walls of both were similarly protected from the elements by projecting eaves, supported at the gable ends by large and elaborate brackets. Balconies and galleries, jetty projections, and window hoods provided further weather protection for the lower floors. This whole assembly was often raised above a masonry basement.

The second and third types of chalet were primarily distinguished by the shapes of their roofs. Since rain is more typical

than snow on the Swiss plains, the lowland chalet had a steep-sloped roof that shed water quickly. The pitch of the lowland-chalet roof further changed over the upstairs galleries, allowing greater head height and creating a distinctive, broken roof line (FIG. 3). In contrast, since the upper valleys are cold but relatively dry, the upland chalet had a flatter roof that retained a layer of snow for insulation (FIG. 4).<sup>6</sup>

Some similarities exist between this third type of chalet and the Bentz house. Obviously, both the chalet and the Bentz house are made of wood — even if the chalet is constructed of logs or timber and the Bentz house employs a method of stick framing. But the basic volume of each is also similarly modified by the addition of porches and balconies which encourage outdoor living, and the overall form of each is compact and withdrawn under a single dominating roof that sweeps clear of the wall. Furthermore, a powerful gable faces the entry to each house, supported by structurally expressive brackets. Finally, each has what might be called "something in the attic" which indicates inhabitation. In the case of the chalet, the gable typically protects a special window or balcony; in the case of the Bentz house, a tab of shingled wall projects between the voids of the attic vents.

These apparent similarities argue for some kind of relationship between the vernacular architecture of the chalet and the high-style architecture of the Bentz house. To my knowledge, the Greenes did not study the vernacular architecture of Switzerland, and Bentz's letter is the only indication that the subject ever arose in discussions between them. However, an examination of the Greenes' other buildings makes it clear the Greenes did develop chalet themes in their work, themes such as the compact plan, the bold gable, and the idea of "something in the attic."<sup>7</sup> Such themes were an integral part of the stick-and-shingle tradition in which the brothers worked, a tradition that had its roots in the eighteenth century.

### THE PICTURESQUE TRADITION

The historian Christopher Hussey tells us that at least until 1700 the English viewed a crossing of the Alps as little more than a necessary hardship on the land route to Italy. But



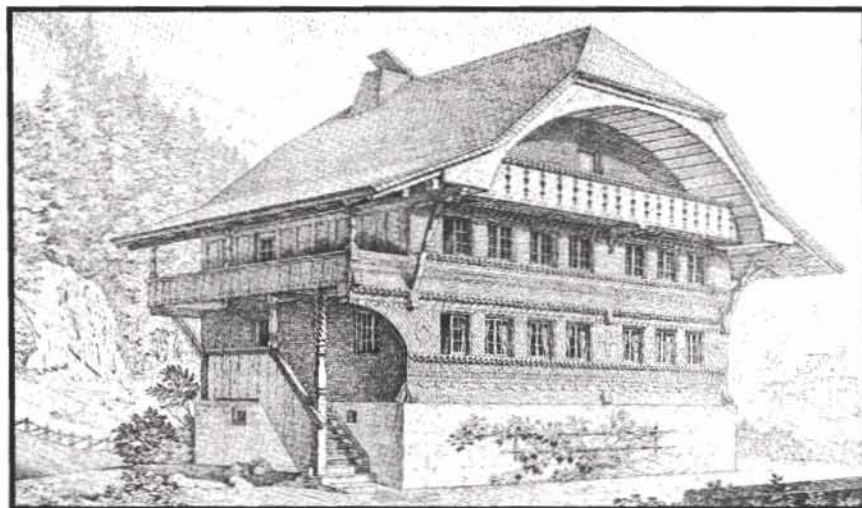


FIG. 1. (FACING PAGE, LEFT) *The Bentz residence in an early photograph: "My mind was quite set upon the Swiss Chalet type of house."* Source: R.L. Makinson, Greene and Greene: Architecture as a Fine Art (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1977), p.142.

FIG. 2. (FACING PAGE, RIGHT) *An example of a mazot: the Swiss chalet as primitive hut.* Source: J. Schopfer, "Wooden Houses in Switzerland," Architectural Record 6 (April-June 1897), p.419.

FIG. 3. (LEFT) *This eighteenth-century Swiss parsonage has the two-pitch roof of a lowland-type chalet.* Source: E. Gladbach, Der Schweizer Holzstyl (Zurich: Caesar Schmidt, 1877), pl.7.

FIG. 4. (ABOVE) *A modern chalet of the highland type, illustrated by Ody & Co., one of the most important fabriques in Geneva.* Source: W.S.B. Dana, The Swiss Chalet Book (New York: The William T. Comstock Co., 1913), p.23.

during the eighteenth century, under the influence of picturesque ideas about the landscape, and after practical improvements in the technology of travel, the English gradually came to appreciate the virtues of difficult scenery. Soon the experience of crossing the Alps came to be regarded as the high point of the European Grand Tour, a kind of visual sherbet that cleared the mind for the main course of Italy.<sup>8</sup> The English painter Joseph Turner expressed both attitudes. In a furious painting of 1812 entitled *Snowstorm*, he depicted Hannibal's struggle to cross the Alps. But thirty years later he also expressed the picturesque attitude in a serene watercolor of Lake Lucerne. Turner was only one of many educated English travelers who recorded their sublime Swiss experiences in painting or writing.

To the romantic mind, the Alps were a landscape that resisted taming, a wilderness right in the middle of civilized Europe. In such a context, the Swiss peasant could be regarded as a type of noble savage, and the chalet as a primitive hut.<sup>9</sup> This view of the chalet was expressed in the travel writings of Thomas Roscoe, who went on a sketching tour of Switzerland in the early 1820s. According to Roscoe: "The habitations bear an appearance so perfectly primitive that one might with reason believe their architecture had known no alteration since the

time when houses were constructed with no other earthly view than that of shelter."<sup>10</sup>

John Ruskin was the most famous English tourist of the nineteenth century as well as one of its most influential art critics. He helped promote picturesque ideas about Switzerland with a series of essays entitled *The Poetry of Architecture*, first published in 1837. In these essays, which he illustrated with his own sketches, Ruskin discusses the vernacular buildings of several European countries while meditating on the relationship between national character and national landscape. He describes his first encounter with a chalet as follows:

*Well do I remember the thrilling and exquisite moment when first, first in my life . . . I encountered, in a calm and shadowy dingle, darkened with the thick and spreading of tall pines, and voiceful with singing of a rock-encumbered stream . . . when I say, I first encountered in this calm defile of the Jura, the unobtrusive, yet beautiful, front of the Swiss cottage. I thought it the loveliest piece of architecture I had ever had the felicity of contemplating, yet it was nothing in itself, nothing but a few mossy fir trunks, loosely nailed together, with one or two grey stones on the roof: but its power was the power of association; its beauty, that of fitness and humility.<sup>11</sup>*

The last part of this description is particularly important to an understanding of the strength of the chalet as an archetype. Ruskin states that the power of the chalet is based on qualities of association — which is to say, on its ability to recall the sublime character of the Swiss landscape. Ruskin also associates the chalet with sturdy peasant virtues: "Wherever [the chalet] is found, it always suggests the ideas of a gentle, pure and pastoral life. . . ." <sup>12</sup> And Ruskin goes on to describe the beauty of the chalet in terms of fitness, the agreement between form and material, or form and function. In his eyes, the humility of the chalet "fits" the subordinate position of human artifacts in this powerful natural setting, not to mention the peasant's inferior location in the social landscape.

But Ruskin did not advocate the chalet as an architectural prototype:

*. . . the Swiss cottage cannot be said to be built in good taste; but it is occasionally picturesque, frequently pleasing, and, under a favourable concurrence of circumstances, beautiful. It is not, however, a thing to be imitated; it is always, when out of its own country, incongruous. . . .* <sup>13</sup>

This warning from the most authoritarian of critics did not inhibit the writers of pattern books from recommending the Swiss cottage, however. Among English pattern-book writers, Robinson, Goodwin, Wyattville and Papworth all promoted the chalet as one of a number of picturesque villa styles, <sup>14</sup> and P.F. Robinson is reputed to have built the earliest Swiss cottages in England, including one in 1829 north of London's Regent's Park. <sup>15</sup> John Loudon, who first published Ruskin's essays in the *Architectural Magazine*, included no less than five chalet-based designs in his 1833 *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm and Village Architecture*. Like Ruskin, Loudon believed that chalet was best appreciated in its native landscape, but he also argued the building could be adapted in a manner appropriate for other locales. For instance, Loudon advises his readers not to imitate the Swiss habit of weighting the roof with stones: "A landscape painter . . . would very properly, copy these circumstances, and a moral traveller would describe them, but for an Architect to introduce them as component parts of a Design in the Swiss style would display a great want of discrimination, and would be, what [the English academic painter] Sir Joshua Reynolds . . . calls, 'imitating a peculiarity.'" <sup>16</sup>

Among American pattern-book writers, Downing, Bullock and Cleveland all promoted the Swiss idiom in their works. <sup>17</sup> A.J. Downing, the most influential of these writers, included two Swiss-style designs in *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850) — a Swiss-style cottage and "A Farmhouse in the Swiss

Manner" (FIG. 5). Downing praises the Swiss cottage as "the most picturesque of all dwellings built of wood," although he admits that this design "appears . . . much better in reality than it does in an engraving." <sup>18</sup> Like Ruskin, Downing admired this kind of architecture for its home-like qualities. "The expression of the Swiss cottage is highly domestic, as it abounds in galleries, balconies, large windows and other features indicative of home comforts." <sup>19</sup> Also like Ruskin, he associated the chalet with "bold and mountainous country, on the side, or at the bottom of a wooded hill, or in a wild and picturesque valley." <sup>20</sup> And like Loudon, Downing was willing to tinker with the archetype in the interest of fitness. The particular design illustrated, he writes, "[is] subdued and chastened in picturesqueness, and much less bold and rude than this kind of cottage might with propriety be, if built among forest or mountain scenery." <sup>21</sup>

As early as the 1820s Americans knew about the chalet from such pattern books, but they used the style only infrequently before the Civil War. <sup>22</sup> Leopold Eidlitz was the most well-known architect of antebellum chalets, although the best-known example of an American chalet, that built in 1866–67 for Mrs. Colford Jones in Newport, R.I., is no longer credited to him but to Richard Morris Hunt (FIG. 6). <sup>23</sup> But the popularity of the Swiss vernacular increased after the Civil War with the growth of chic watering holes such as Newport and Long Branch, N.J. The coastal landscape of these resorts was far from alpine, but the rustic quality of the chalet seemed appropriate to the vacation atmosphere. <sup>24</sup> Most importantly, the frank construction of the chalet provided a model for Stick Style architects like Hunt, who were seeking a vocabulary more expressive of the material properties of wood.

The fact that the German-born Eidlitz and the French-trained Hunt both produced designs based on the chalet should set our minds to other than English or Swiss sources. Loudon confessed that what he had in one case called a German Swiss cottage was in fact a building type common to many parts of Northern Europe. <sup>25</sup> And the recent work of historian Sarah Bradford Landau suggests that the term "Swiss" was merely a convenient label for a kind of vernacular house that was undergoing a widespread revival in the mid-nineteenth century. For example, the Neoclassical architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel is known to have designed rustic buildings based on what German speakers called a *Tyrolerhäuschen*, and his students popularized this kind of design in the 1830s. The fashion was conveyed to the United States in the 1840s by German and East European immigrants like Eidlitz, and in the 1850s by German-language magazines such as *Architektonisches Skizzenbuch*, which these immigrants read. <sup>26</sup> At the same time, the French were building half-timber *chalets normands* as



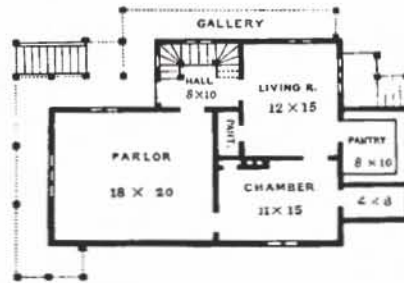


FIG. 5. (LEFT) Downing on the American chalet: "The expression of the Swiss cottage is highly domestic, as it abounds in galleries, balconies, large windows and other features indicative of home comforts." Source: A.J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), FIG. 46.

vacation houses.<sup>27</sup> A measure of the importance of the French connection is the publication in 1875 of an American edition of Pierre A. & Eugène N. Varin's 1873 *L'Architecture pittoresque en Suisse*. This book provided stateside architects with careful drawings of chalets and chalet details.

Hunt owned a copy of the Varin book, but he also had been exposed to such work at the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris. As a member of the architectural jury at this event, he would have had the opportunity to study the outdoor display representing the traditional buildings of all countries, including Switzerland.<sup>28</sup> Pavilions in chalet form became commonplace at succeeding fairs, with Swiss-style buildings being erected at the international expositions of 1876 in Philadelphia, 1880 in Paris, and 1893 in Chicago. What was probably a more authentic display of Swiss vernacular architecture was erected for the Geneva National Exhibition of 1896. This involved the creation of an outdoor museum containing reproductions of vintage chalets from every canton, all arranged in an artificial village environment. The display was covered at length in *The Architectural Record*.<sup>29</sup>

Through these various means — the pattern books, the professional journals, the work of high-style architects, and world's fairs — the vernacular form of the chalet entered the domestic architecture of the United States. For instance, it is hard to resist seeing McKim, Mead & White's famous Low house (Bristol, R.I., 1886–87), with its single-hooded windows and tiny attic openings set against an enormous gable, as a kind of simplified Swiss cottage (FIG. 7). Nor is it stretching the point to see a chalet embedded in the front of the Gamble house (1908) that Charles and Henry Greene designed for a site in Pasadena (FIG. 8).

### THE BUNGALOW AND THE BOOK

Even in their own time the Greenes were known as bungalow architects, and in the simplest sense the Gamble house was really nothing more than a very large and well-crafted bungalow. The bungalow was a building type that represented a



FIG. 6. (ABOVE) After the American Civil War, Richard Morris Hunt designed a Stick-Style chalet for Mrs. Colford Jones that incorporated the gallery, carved balcony rails, and projecting eaves of a traditional Swiss house. He even put "something in the attic." Source: Paul R. Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1980), p. 237, fig. 48. Photo by James Garrison.

FIG. 7. (BELOW) It is difficult not to see McKim, Mead & White's Low house as a Shingle Style chalet. Source: *Historic American Buildings Survey* photo by Cerwin Robinson, 1962.

FIG. 8. (BOTTOM) The Gamble house contains, among other interesting fragments, a fully realized chalet front. Photo by author.





decisive moment in the evolution of the contemporary house. In the words of historian Anthony King: "On one hand, the vertical, formal, cluttered and historically derived styles of the Victorians; on the other, the low, horizontal, informal, 'open plan' and functional design which has come to characterise 'modern' architecture of today."<sup>30</sup>

The story of the bungalow's diffusion into the United States should be well known by now: its origin as a Bengali peasant house; its adoption in the eighteenth century by the Europeans living in India and subsequent modification into a symbol of English colonial power; its diffusion in the late-nineteenth century, first into England then into the United States; its development in these countries as a simple country house; and finally, in the early years of this century, its identification with suburban expansion in Southern California.<sup>31</sup>

In its last incarnation, the bungalow took on the status of a permanent residence, possessing certain distinctive characteristics. In strictest terms, the "bungalow" was a low-lying, one-story house, built of wood and covered by a prominent roof. But it could be artfully and efficiently designed with an informal floor plan, a modern kitchen, and built-in furniture. And by means of sheltered porches and terraces, it could also be made to promote an intimate relationship to nature — or at least to a garden surrounding the house. In this form, the bungalow proliferated as a middle-class dwelling not only in Southern California but throughout the United States. The principal means by which the bungalow idea was disseminated to a popular audience was the printed media: popular magazines such as the *Craftsman*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *House Beautiful*; professional journals such as *American Architect*, *Western Architect*, and *California Architect and Engineer*; and local newspapers. In addition, bungalow promoters produced a vast quantity of promotional literature. These "bungalow books" included a small number of prescriptive texts advising readers on correct use and proper design, and a much greater number of sales catalogs published by designers and developers.<sup>32</sup>

Charles Greene disparaged the mail-order bungalow, comparing it to an off-the-rack suit, "[which] will cover any man's back but a gentleman's."<sup>33</sup> Such snobbery aside, however, the Greenes were not too proud to make their designs available by mail. Henry L. Wilson's *Bungalow Book* (1908) featured three of their early buildings: the Willet, Neill and White houses (1905, 1906 and 1908, respectively). But generally most mail-order bungalows were not designed by architects but by anonymous designers and draughtsmen working for companies that provided ready-to-build sets of working drawings.<sup>34</sup>

## AMERICAN CHALETs

Today, simply walking through a bungalow neighborhood, such as one of those in Berkeley, Calif., is enough to indicate how many such houses were derived in whole or in part from chalet forms. Given the large number of existing bungalows and their geographic spread, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to measure the chalet's impact by means of a survey of individual houses. The method I use here — examination of popular literature pertaining to the bungalow — may not be new, but at least it offers a practical alternative. This method has one problem, of course, which is that there is often a discrepancy between what writers recommend and readers build. One way of addressing this problem is to first examine house catalogs, the largest source of designs that were actually built.

It is tempting to assume that after a long period of development the chalet form simply slipped unnoticed into the bungalow vocabulary. In fact, an examination of house catalogs shows that the archetype was invoked quite consciously. All the catalogs illustrate bungalows that are recognizable as chalets, but a surprising number also offer designs that are explicitly identified as chalets, or as being chalet influenced. The catalogs include Wilson's *Bungalow Book* (1908) showing four chalets, of which No. 137 is described by the author as "one of the most popular designs ever issued [from my studio]"; *Allen Bungalows* (1912) showing nine chalets — one being the large "Swiss-Japanese" bungalow illustrated on the cover; and *The Bungalow De Luxe* (1912) with nine chalet designs.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the Bungalow Craft Co. published a catalog of "Spanish, Stucco, Colonial and Swiss Chalet Bungalows" in 1922. And although Eugene O. Murman, in his *Typical California Bungalows* (1913), does not explicitly refer to any of his designs as chalets, he does identify the vernacular chalet as an important influence on the Southern California bungalow.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to these influences, the magazine *House and Garden* published two articles on American chalets. One describes a Pasadena house designed by Charles and Henry Greene for the widow of the slain American President James A. Garfield — a fact demonstrating how the Greenes were known in their time as chalet builders.<sup>37</sup> The other, part of a series devoted to the "problem of choosing an architectural style for the American country or suburban home," made a broad argument for building chalets in the United States.<sup>38</sup> This argument contained two major tenets that would have been appealing to would-be builders of bungalows. The first was the picturesque nature of the chalet. In a way reminiscent of Ruskin's commentary in the *Poetry of Architecture*, the author of the *House and Garden* article reminds readers of the chalet's association with the simple, virtuous life of the Swiss peasant:



*There is about the Swiss chalet a rugged honest picturesqueness, a simple, candid strength that I find in no other type of habitation. . . . It seems to typify — as plainly as a house can ever hope to represent a man — the hardy, fearless, simple mountaineer — whose life is spent among the heights and broad vistas and who lives a simple frugal, happy, sincere life.<sup>39</sup>*

Thus, the chalet was proffered as a sensitive addition to the landscape, and the old myth of the Swiss peasant was enlarged to include not only his moral character but his attitude toward nature:

*Man cannot hope to compete with God as a landscape gardener or architect. The Swiss mountaineer felt this, even if he did not know it. He made no attempt to terrace the eternal hills, to create false and artificial plateaus upon which to build a conventional dwelling. He made a partner of Nature and worked to their mutual advantage. Out of it came an architecture which, if primitive, was big, harmonious and wholesome to a wonderful degree.<sup>40</sup>*

The second tenet of *House and Garden* argument was consistent with Charles Greene's attitude as recorded in the Bentz letter. This was that the chalet was cheap to build:

*Economy was necessary to Swiss people; consequently their architecture was on a style that cost little. And the same is true in America. One can build a Swiss chalet for a third less money than it will cost to erect a house of similar pretension in other styles.<sup>41</sup>*

There were other sources advocating the chalet form as well. One of these was what was perhaps the most important bungalow text, Henry H. Saylor's 1911 *Bungalows*. It was significant that the frontispiece of this book shows the C.W. Robertson house in Nordhoff, Calif., a chalet designed by Myron Hunt and Elmer Grey, two architects from Southern California. Inside the book, Saylor illustrates other chalets and describes the construction of a bungalow in detail. He also proposes a typology of bungalows which includes the chalet:

*The characteristics are, perhaps, too well known to need mention — the extremely wide overhang of the flat-pitched, two-plane roof, the frequent presence of a balcony in the gable ends ["something in the attic"], and the use of sawed-out openings between adjacent boards as a means of decoration. The chalet as found in Switzerland is by no means confined to one floor, so that it is not surprising to find the American development of this building making more of the attic than in the true bungalow type.<sup>42</sup>*

It is evident from this description that for Saylor the chalet form was somewhat compromised to serve as the basis for the design of a bungalow, because the chalet often had more than one story.

Another important text of the period was William P. Comstock's *Bungalows, Camps and Mountain Houses* (2nd ed., 1908). Comstock did not identify any chalets among the eighty designs he illustrated, but he did recommend William S.B. Dana's *The Swiss Chalet Book* (1913) at the top of a list of works to read "When Building a Bungalow." Dana's book, which was based on a series of articles published in the magazine *Architecture and Building*, consisted of a detailed survey of chalet construction, both traditional and modern. He even included two chapters on the interior design of chalets, which was unusual since most bungalow literature tended to concentrate on the external attributes of the chalet, assuming that it contained a regularly planned interior.

Dana's account of the modern production of chalets is probably the most interesting feature of his book for historians of the vernacular today. The Swiss building industry by this time had apparently been rationalized to the extent that chalets could be completely prefabricated at large mills, or *fabriques*, in Geneva and Interlaken. The buildings were assembled in the mill yard and then knocked down for shipment to the eventual building site. The architectural products of these mills, which reached a large market, were advertised by means of brochures and meticulously built scale models displayed in store windows. According to Dana, "châlets of all manner of shapes and sizes are sent forth into the world to become summer houses, mountain railroad stations, dwellings, hotels, etc."<sup>43</sup> Later on, Dana describes what he sees as the worldwide diffusion of the chalet:

*The Swiss Chalet to-day is to be found scattered here and there all over the globe. Its motive is of such elemental significance and character as to make its worth and desirableness recognized in any zone. . . . The chalet motive is not Swiss; it is not Tyrolean, nor Himalayan. It is universal.<sup>44</sup>*

Granted, Dana's account may be illiterate in terms of political economy, but it does bring to mind King's analysis of the bungalow and its role in the creation of a global culture. Perhaps it is reasonable to see the dissemination of the chalet style as an aspect of that development.

Specifically, Dana notes "the existence in this country of a large number of New World châlets, especially in California."<sup>45</sup> He investigates the domestic production of these buildings in a chapter devoted largely to "American adapta-

tions." After examining a small building on Staten Island, Dana goes on to observe: "The most notable American adaptations of the chalet, however, are to be found on the other extremity of the continent, the Pacific slope, especially Southern California and the shores of San Francisco Bay."<sup>46</sup> As examples of these Pacific Coast chalets, Dana offers a number of smaller houses credited to Bay Area architects Bernard Maybeck and Mark White, as well as Charles and Henry Greene's Gamble House, which Dana captions "A chalet in the Japanese style."<sup>47</sup>

In a sense, the American chalet was nothing more than a stylistic spin on the basic bungalow. The buildings described above retained most of the basic characteristics of the bungalow type: wood construction, a prominent, sheltering roof, an informal, rustic character, and the promise of a close association with nature. But to build a bungalow in the chalet style offered the possibility of enhancing these qualities, giving them the coherence and resonance of a traditional form.

This raises the question of how designers and bungalow-book writers actually understood the term "chalet." There were several ways in which the term was understood. The least common was that of an overtly Swiss building — what could be called a kitsch chalet (FIG. 9). This use would have described a bungalow in its most sentimental form — a picturesque mass decorated with an assortment of cute details, not all of them authentic. The roof of such a house might project in a V-shaped gable, the eaves terminating in a carved verge board; beneath its the gable there would likely be a balcony (sometimes in front of a recessed loggia, but always enclosed by a railing with vertical boards perforated in the Swiss manner); and it would feature such details as oversized brackets supporting the eaves or the balcony and diamond-pane windows looking out over gayly planted flower boxes.

But the term "chalet" could also be used in a more familiar sense, in a way so as simply to connote a bungalow with a relatively flat roof (FIG. 10). This was probably the most inclusive category, and it might further be termed a "Ruberoid" chalet (Ruberoid was the name of a roofing company that published its own bungalow catalog). As we have seen, a gable with a shallow pitch, such as that characteristic of the upland chalet, was well adapted to retaining an insulating layer of snow. But in a more benign climate, it could also take a built-up roof. The Gamble house, with all its pretensions, was waterproofed with a rolled-on roofing material, and, as such, might be considered little more than a high-style Ruberoid chalet.

In yet a third sense, the term "chalet" might simply have been used to describe a bungalow expanded to two stories (FIG. 11).<sup>48</sup> As stated above, the term "bungalow," in its strictest sense,

referred only to a one-story building. But the idea of the chalet was close enough to that of the bungalow in other respects that bungalow promoters rarely bothered to make the distinction. For example, *"Ye Planry" Bungalows* (1908) contained a number of boxy, two-story chalets. Bungalow architect E.B. Rust, who wrote the preface, is most explicit on the subject:

*While the word "Bungalows" conveys the idea of a low, rambling, one-story dwelling, the bungalow lines and details of construction have entered so largely into all classes of houses that there has evolved what might be well termed a two-story bungalow, though it is popularly referred to as the "Swiss chalet." The peculiar advantage of this style lies in its comparatively low cost relative to the number of rooms. This is due to its compactness, as it covers little ground, has few breaks in outline and is therefore much easier to frame and roof over. . . .*<sup>49</sup>

Once again economy is the theme, and the author's comments recall Charles Greene's response to Mrs. Bentz's request for a chalet: "square or nearly square houses give the most room and are more economical."

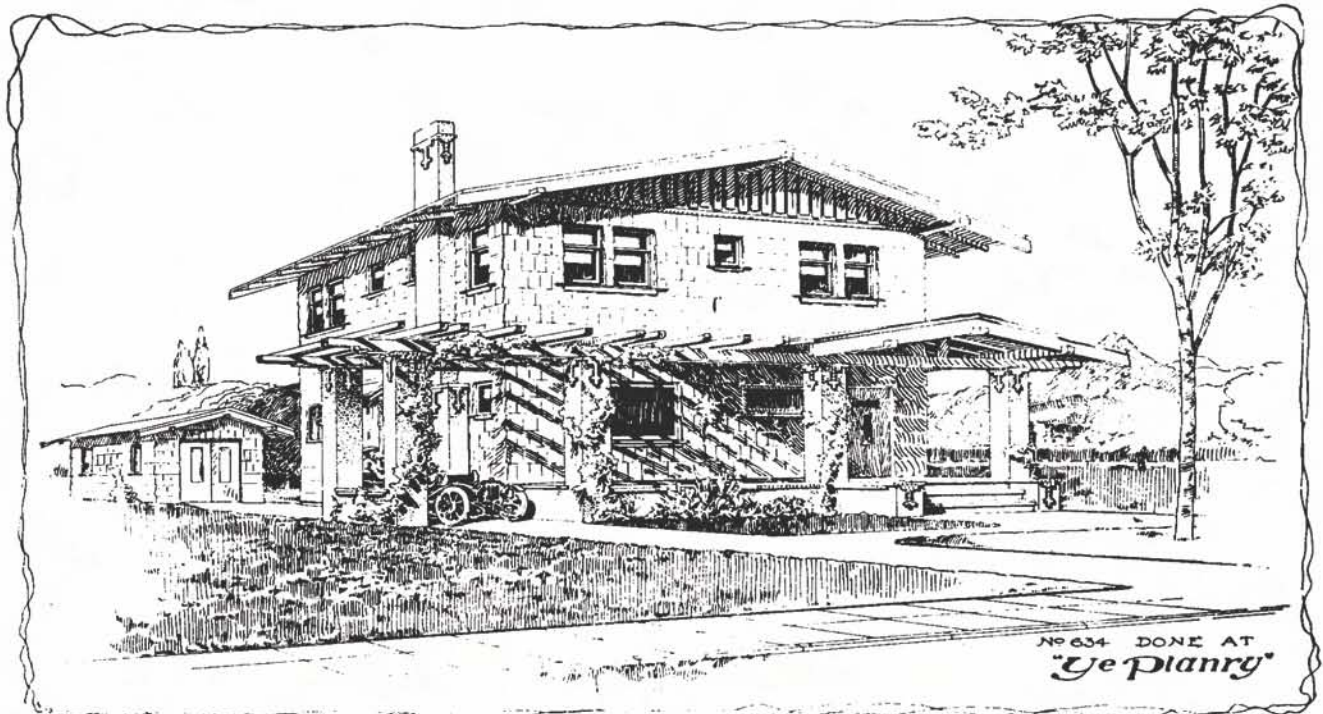
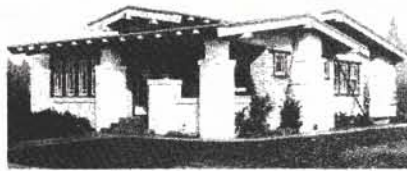
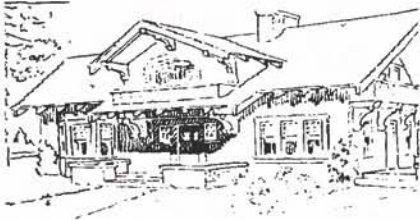
## A MATTER OF STYLE

Laboring under the weight of various forms of new history, contemporary historians have been inclined to reject extended discussions of style as mere formalism. But since this paper has largely been concerned with how a vernacular form was appropriated as a style, the subject of style deserves some consideration.

The two most important historians of the bungalow have both argued against a primary concern for style, each in his own way. In *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, Anthony King laments the fact that style, which he considers "a somewhat narrow viewpoint," has dominated architectural histories of the bungalow. He argues for a more intensive study of the bungalow's economic and social meaning and suggests that the most important distinction to make in regard to the bungalow is that between its use as a "summer residence" and a "permanent suburban home."<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, in *The American Bungalow, 1880–1930*, Clay Lancaster provides a list of the various bungalow styles — Japanese, Indian, Swiss, Spanish, pioneer, Pompeii, steamboat — but discounts their significance. Taking the high ground of social history, he claims that "the average bungalow reflected the society that produced and used it and [like that society] displayed no prominent ancestry."<sup>51</sup> This approach





smacks of the melting pot, which is probably as applicable in architecture as it is in cultural history. A few pages later Lancaster changes his tack, however: "The bungalow belongs to the modern period, and its borrowings are of principles more than of elements. . . ." <sup>52</sup> Apparently, in the modern period there is no such thing as style.

This observation is certainly true of style as normally construed — which is to say, style as an etic category, imposed by the historian on the artifact. Such a notion of style is reasonably informative when applied to a traditional culture, in which forms develop with some stability. But it becomes rather meaningless in a period such as ours when the very concept of style is being self-consciously manipulated. But what about style as an emic category? Should we ignore a classificatory scheme created by historical subjects? Not if we would like to understand historical artifacts in anything resembling the manner in which they were viewed by their subjects.

FIG. 9. (TOP LEFT) *The kitsch chalet: the bungalow in its most sentimental form.* Source: H.L. Wilson, *The Bungalow Book* (Los Angeles: self-published, 1908), p.52.

FIG. 10. (TOP RIGHT) *The Ruberoide chalet: the original caption noted that "About the only difference between it and ordinary Bungalows is [the] style of the roof."* Source: *Little Bungalows* (Los Angeles: E.W. Stillwell & Co., 1922), p.28.

FIG. 11. (ABOVE) *This boxy, two-storied chalet bears an interesting resemblance to the Bentz house.* Source: "Ye Planry" *Bungalows* (Los Angeles: Ye Planry Co., 1911), p.74.

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2. Ibid., p.55.
3. Ibid., p.20.
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6. Ibid., pp.422-28.
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39. Ibid., p.290.
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44. Ibid., p.127.
45. Ibid., p.5.
46. Ibid., p.128.
47. Ibid., p.133. The Maybeck and White chalets included the homes of Albert Schneider, Rev. S.D. Hutsunpiller, Mrs. G.L. Sanderson, William H. Rees, and Mrs. E.L. Jocker.
48. There was even such a thing as an airplane chalet. This was a variation on the airplane bungalow, which had a small second story projecting from the center of the house, with the lower roof spreading away on either side like the wings of an airplane.
49. "Ye Planry" *Bungalows* (Los Angeles: Ye Planry Co., 1908), pp.5-6.
50. King, *The Bungalow*, p.128.
51. Lancaster, *The American Bungalow*, p.11.
52. Ibid., p.13.