

BEAUTY MAY BE in the eye of the beholder, but, in 1921, a group of activist Minnesota architects known as the "Architects' Small House Service Bureau" decided they beheld things with unimpeachable accuracy. Take this before-and-after comparison from one of their polemics on efficient small-home design—part of the current exhibition "Selling the Dwelling" at New York's Grolier Club. The Minnesotans dismissed the rather handsome Craftsman-style dwelling shown at top with the label "Bad Taste and Waste," while extolling their supposedly corrected version (below) as "Good Taste and Savings." To banish any doubt that the first house was, as they darkly put it, "an extravaganza of waste as well as a comedy of errors," they annotated its perceived sins:

1 "Uncalled-for" brick balustrade: This "clumsy, crude...out of scale" brickwork infuriated the Minnesotans, who considered it inappropriate for a wooden building. Meanwhile, their alternative, seen in the second illustration, seems somewhat effete.

2 "Toad-like" porch posts: Although today's fans of classic Craftsman design salivate over this chunky design detail, the Minnesota architects were unimpressed, calling the posts "pudgy, bulbous [and] unnecessarily large to support the roof."

3 A seemingly precarious porch roof: "It appears to be slipping away from the house due to the wide overhang" and "no connecting feature" to bind it visually to the structure.

4 Exposed rafter ends: Poor rafter ends. They "serve no purpose... and increase expense for millwork and labor."

5 "Poorly placed" twin windows:

You have to give this one to the Minnesotans. It does look a little crowded up there.

6 "Sham" roof brackets: These villains were judged too feeble to actually support the roof, had such propping even been required.

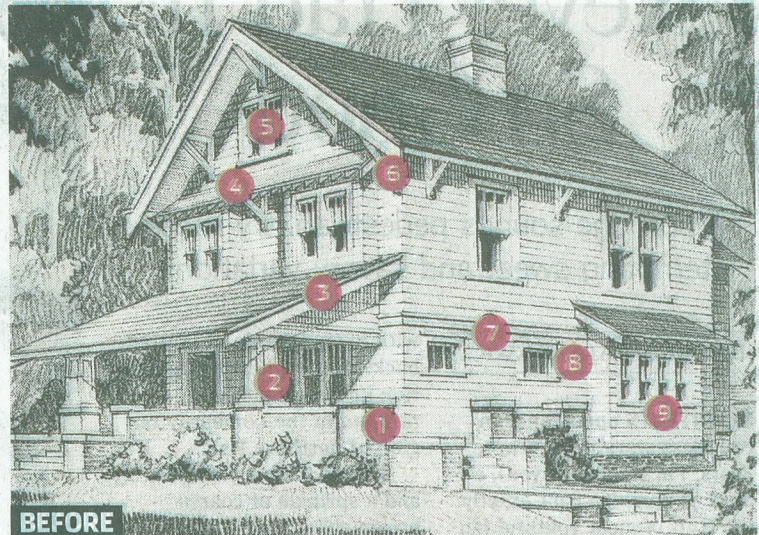
7 "Misplaced" horizontal band: The critics pointed out—persuasively in this case, too—that this element does nothing to "interrelate different exterior features." Is their corrected version (aligned with the top of the porch roof) "necessary," though?

8 "Unjustifiable peek holes": God forbid anyone should do any peeking. Declared the Minnesotans: "Unless more light is required, it is better to omit [them] altogether."

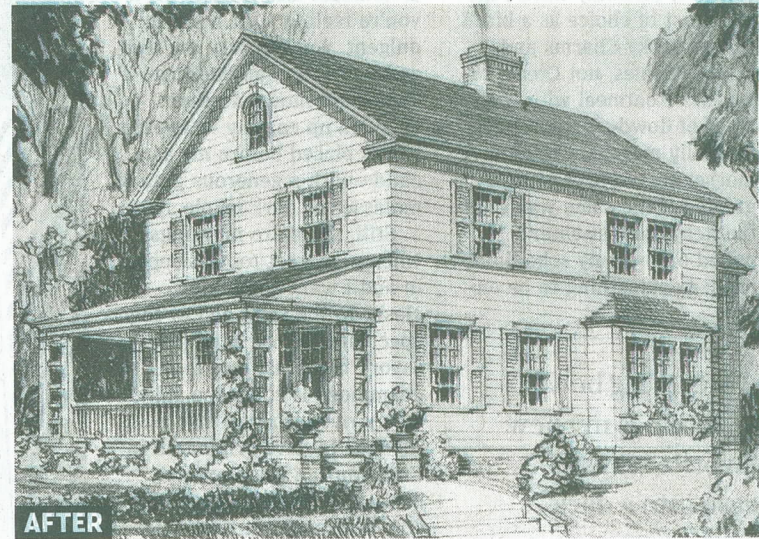
9 "Unnecessary" bay windows: The Midwestern critics reviled these grace notes as "protrusions that add an uneven, chaotic, bumpy appearance to the exterior...."—D.H.

Oldies But Baddies?

Today we're crazy about the look of historic Craftsman homes, but back when they were relatively new, a group of outraged architects denounced the style's 'bad taste and waste'



BEFORE



AFTER