

Dutch Colonial Revival Houses

The Dutch Colonial Revival (DCR) style was prevalent in the United States during the years 1890 to 1940. Historians have written little about the DCR movement. For example, McAlester and McAlester (1989) provided information only on pages 323 and 336-337.

Examples of DCR houses during its half century of construction fall into four consecutive although slightly overlapping phases. This overview introduces the four phases to help you understand how a given house fits into the overall story of the DCR movement. Most SHPOs do not recognize DCR as a separate style, assigning phase 1 to the Shingle Style and phases 2 to 4 to the Colonial Revival style.

The house in the photograph to the right shows the dominant version of the Dutch Colonial Revival movement.

Approximately half of all DCR houses reflect this appearance. Interestingly, many DCR houses had asphalt shingled roofs when built; at that time, asphalt shingles were either green or red, which gave a stronger contrast with the siding than gray shingles do today. The long shed dormer, a key DCR feature, often featured a small bathroom window centered over the entrance, as shown here. The bend in the roof slopes was called the *curb*, which was minimally expressed in this DCR design because it was almost entirely engulfed by the long dormer.



Shutters were a common Colonial Revival feature, and when found on a DCR house, they rarely closed. Most DCR houses after the first phase were built with three rooms on the first floor (living room, kitchen, and dining room), sometimes with a one-story sun room off one or both ends. Two different floorplans were common, as will be illustrated. Sunroom wings (as shown here) usually were accessed via French doors on each side of the living room fireplace. Almost all DCR houses after the first phase stand on a concrete block foundation.

60-Second Refresher: Dutch Colonial Revival Houses

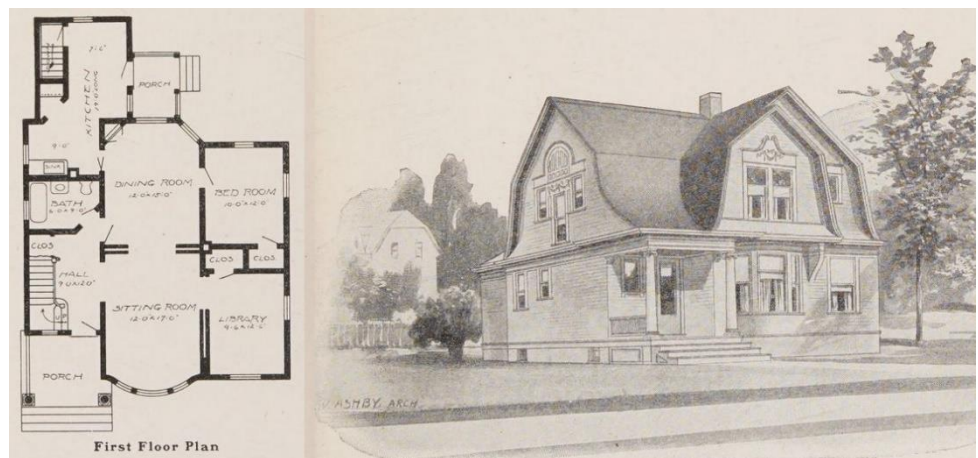
Phase 1 (1890 to 1910)

The first DCR phase is the most distinctive. During this phase, the DCR movement was a subset of the Shingle style, often with large areas of shingle cladding on the walls. This phase represents about 25% of all DCR houses, and the houses were generally larger than found in later phases. Rectangular houses in this phase sometimes were designed with cross gambrels and/or dormers, as shown here. This house in the photograph has transom windows, a feature common during the years 1895 to 1920 (see the Historic Windows Database [here](#)).



A second subset of this phase covers houses designed as intersecting gambrel masses. This subset includes L-shaped and T-shaped houses, often with wrap-around porches. The house on the left illustrates the L-shaped version. The house in the photograph also displays transom windows with a multi-light upper (fixed) sash.

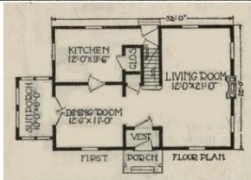
This plan from the 1903 Radford catalog shows an L-shaped example of the first DCR phase along with its floorplan. The interior has a typical floorplan of the time, with some rooms accessed through an adjacent room. Period details include pocket doors between the dining and sitting rooms, platform stairs, a first floor bathroom, and angled room corners. The servants' stairs led down into an unusual-shaped kitchen!



Phase 2 (1910 to 1925)

The turn of the twentieth century inaugurated a period of experimentation by the various companies offering kit houses or house plans, which shifted the design of Dutch Colonial Revival houses. To some degree, the most consistent element of these DCR houses is the use of the gambrel roof and the fact that all specific models during this phase were fleeting. The companies that sold kit houses or house plans gradually simplified the floorplans, which made the houses easier to build and also simplified the booklet that explained how to assemble the house.

The image to the right from the 1912 Radford catalog shows a Colonial Revival approach to the DCR, with gabled dormers and multilight windows. DCR houses with gabled dormers continued to be offered into the mid-1920s. The Amityville Horror House (1924) is a three-story example of this general design, with balconies over the sunroom on each end.



An important experimental design that appeared in the 1917 Montgomery Ward catalog set the stage for the most common DCR phase. This design, shown on the left, introduced many design features we associate with DCR houses. The most important of these features was the long shed dormer along the lower slope of the roof (below the curb). The interior plan features three first floor rooms, with the living room occupying one end and the kitchen, dining room, and sun room occupying the opposite end. This floorplan represented a simplification of earlier DCR floorplans, and while this particular model failed to gain traction, the floorplan was re-used in many later DCR houses.

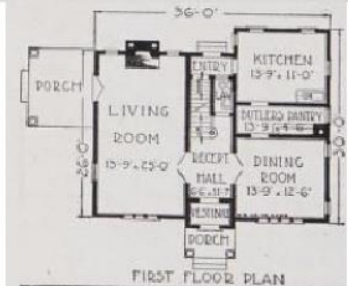
Several design elements of the second phase of the DCR movement should be mentioned. A group of DCR houses built circa 1918 to 1925 have small eyebrow dormers on the upper slope of the gambrel, as shown to the right. I haven't found this house in any catalog, which makes it harder to estimate when these houses were built. In many cases, a centered door on the front opens directly into the living room, while a door near a corner opens into a vestibule. Also during this period, DCR houses sometimes have interior colonnades rather than pocket doors.





Phase 3 (1918 to 1940)

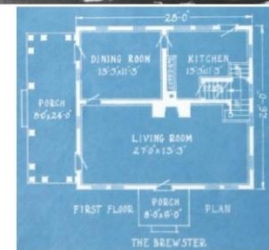
Approximately half of all DCR houses reflect the third phase of the movement. This design first appeared in 1918 in the Harris Brothers catalog (page 76, left). Many DCR houses were built with this plan from 1918 to 1940, although the key years of construction were 1925 to 1935. Phase 3 of the DCR began as one of the experimental designs of Phase 2, becoming the only design that was eventually successful.



As the dominant type of DCR house, the major character-defining features of the type are present. The feature that distinguishes phase 3 is the use of the pent roof along the side walls. Pent roofs were common features in colonial architecture and were also found on some early

Federal style houses. Interestingly, they were not a typical feature of Dutch colonial architecture as expressed in colonial New York and New Jersey.

DCR houses in the third phase retained the two general floorplans as found in the second phase. The more common floorplan placed a large living room in one end of the house, as shown above, with the kitchen and dining room in the opposite end. The alternative floorplan placed the living room along the front of the house, with the kitchen and dining room to the rear, as shown in the example on the right from the Sterling catalog of 1930. In both cases, the design placed less emphasis upon the stairs than found in earlier phases. The interior colonnade was passing from popularity at this time, making it fairly rare during this phase.



Chimney placement varied widely, as indicated by the two examples on this page. In the mid-Atlantic states, the most common chimney location was at one end of the ridge.

Windows and doors of DCR houses in the third phase were generally consistent. As part of the Colonial Revival movement, windows were multi-light double hung sash units, often with inoperable (and often undersized) shutters. The front doors were often six-paneled units, sometimes with sidelight, with French doors on the end walls and also used to connect interior rooms.

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Phase 4 (1935 to 1940)

The final phase of the Dutch Colonial Revival movement is also the least common, representing less than 5% of all DCR houses. This phase during the final years of the Great Depression does not seem to appear in plan books, which complicates an understanding of its importance and its role in the overall DCR movement.

The house shown on the right was built on Shenley Drive, Erie, Pennsylvania, in the late 1930s, and it displays the key characteristics of phase 4. Most notably, the house has been reoriented, with a front gambrel facing the street. The enclosed front porch appears to have been part of the original design. The defining feature of phase 4 is the disappearance of the pent roof on the side walls, combining the front of the shed dormer with the wall in a single uninterrupted plane. An understanding of the interior is difficult without access to a plan book. Nevertheless, the interior plan of the house illustrated is likely similar to the plan of the house shown in the upper left in phase 3 above.

