

Niamh Lynam

**Ominous Edifices: Exploring the Architecture of
“The Haunted House” Stereotype**

Submitted to the Department of Design and Visual Arts in
candidacy for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Design for Stage
and Screen (Production Design)

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This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment for the BA (Hons) in Design for Stage and Screen. It is entirely the author's own work, except where noted, and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Signed: Niamh Lynam

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Niamh Lynam'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'N' and 'L'.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the stereotypical portrayal of the haunted house as seen in popular culture. Starting life as the ideal American family home in the late 19th century, the American Victorian house's signature ostentatious appearance, was aided and perpetuated by the arrival of the industrial revolution. By the early 20th century however, the American Victorian architectural style fell out of favour as a result of changing tastes and economic decline. Observant artists such as Edward Hopper and Walker Evans, recognised the "out of date" houses as symbols of the uncanny and would proceed to use them in their artwork. Inspired by these ideas, comic book artist Charles Addams cemented the haunted house in the minds of the public in his portrayal of the haunted house as the family home of the ghoulish Addams family. With increasing associations in pop culture between creepy stories, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* 1960 and the haunted house setting, the iconic image of the haunted house reached stereotype status and has remained easily recognisable as a symbol of fear and dread.

Key Words: Production Design, Haunted House, American Architecture.

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Introduction

As a production design student and also a general horror fan, I wanted to combine these two areas of interest to explore what I believe to be one of the most iconic creepy settings there is: “the haunted house”. When speaking about “the haunted house”, I am referring to the general stereotype pop-culture has made familiar to many of us, from our exposure to books, artwork, films and television.

Picture this; A large manor house, dated and dilapidated, with ornate gothic architecture, wrought iron gates, crumbling shingled roof, geometric stained glass, an overgrowing garden, a towering silhouette, isolated and eerie. What has just been described here are the familiar features that those in Western culture come to expect from a stereotypical haunted house.

One quick Google Images search for the words “haunted house” brings up hundreds of images of very similar appearing houses, showing that there is a mutual understanding among people about what a haunted house should look like (Figure.1). This notion of people having a shared idea of what one may expect a haunted house to look like, led me to wonder where this image came from and why does it continue to be perpetuated?

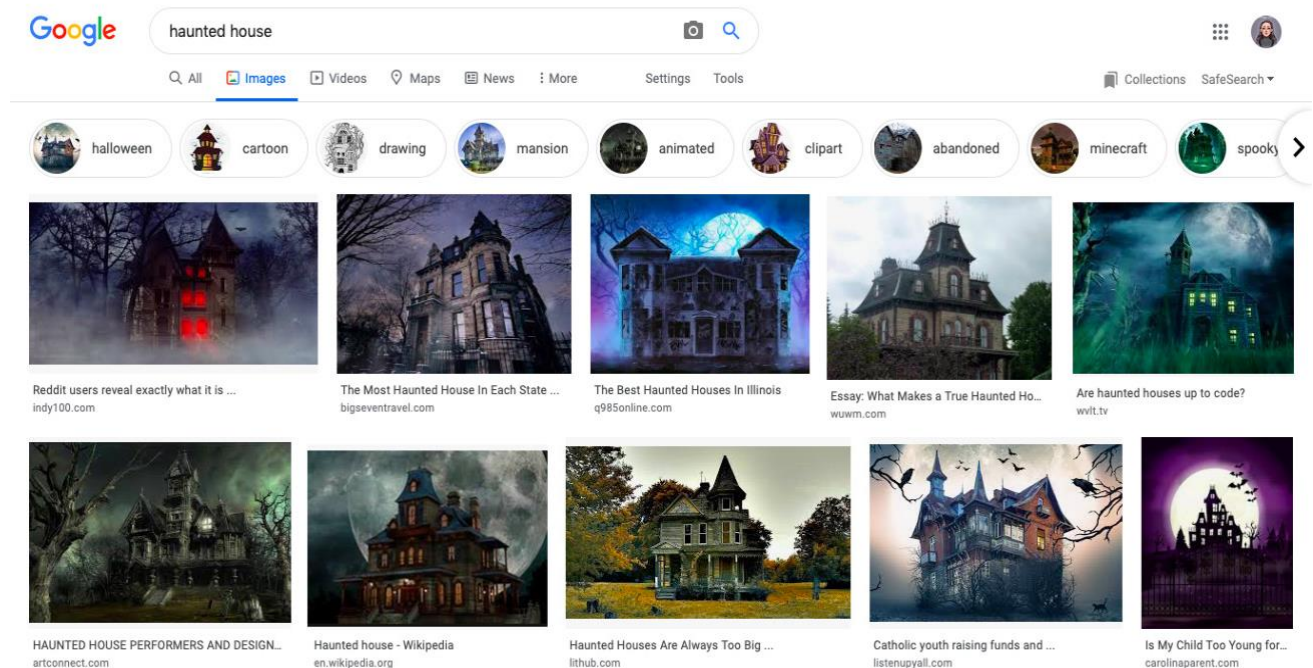


Figure 1 Screenshot of Google Images search for haunted house. 22 Oct 2020. 16:20

At first glance we can recognise the haunted house as a perversion of a domestic space. The topic of houses and domestic spaces has been explored in great detail in the *Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard. He examines the relationship we have with the domestic spaces we frequent in our lifetimes, including but not limited to; attics, drawers, cellars and of course, our houses. Bachelard explains how an intimate bond is created between an individual and the individual's first house, saying,

our house is our corner of the world, as has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.¹

Bachelard proposes that in every individual's mind, there lives an "oneiric house"; a dreamlike, idyllic house, which is based upon the memories of our childhood home. It is a metaphysical space that fosters a feeling of safety for us, or as Bachelard puts it,

It is as though in this material paradise, the human being were bathed in nourishment.²

Bachelard suggests, that unbeknownst to us, we subconsciously compare every subsequent house to our oneiric one. Speaking anecdotally of a person reading a poem about a house, he says,

"the reader who is 'reading a room' leaves off reading and starts to think of some place in his own past".³ He poignantly states that "An entire past comes to dwell in a new house".⁴

What happens when we compare our "oneiric house" (a blissfully domestic and nostalgic safe space) to the uninviting, menacing and nightmarish space that is the stereotypical haunted house? We experience uncomfortable, uneasy feelings, known as the feeling of uncanny.

In his famous 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche*, Freud gives us definitions of what he believes to be the uncanny;

(the) uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged.⁵

the "uncanny" is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.⁶

¹ Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, United States of America, The Orion Press, 1964, Print. p.26

² Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, United States of America, The Orion Press, 1964, Print. p.29

³ Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, United States of America, The Orion Press, 1964, Print. p.35

⁴ Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, United States of America, The Orion Press, 1964, Print. p.27

⁵ Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, n.p, 1919, MIT. Web. 4 Oct . 2019, p.12

⁶ Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, n.p, 1919, MIT. Web. 4 Oct . 2019, p.1,2

I think that the categorisation of the haunted house as an uncanny phenomenon seems to be a very appropriate fit. In fact, Freud acknowledges this, using a haunted house as an example of what he thinks is “perhaps the most striking of all, of something uncanny”.⁷

With this in mind, it becomes clear why we may feel such uneasy feelings towards a house such as this. The haunted house is familiar to us in the way that all houses are, but it does not share the same positive features as our oneiric house, in fact it has the exact opposite ones. In this sense, the haunted house is the ultimate perversion of our oneiric house. Gaston Bachelard notes the emotional significance of this exact contrast in *The Poetics of Space*, referring to Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*, he says,

“when they read Poe’s tales together, both the phenomenologist and the psychoanalyst will understand the value of this achievement. For these tales are the realization of childhood fears.”

While I do think this is one of the reasons why the stereotypical haunted house has enjoyed success as a symbol of unease and fear, I don’t think it is the only reason and furthermore, it does not explain the cultural phenomenon that is the consistency of the architecture that we see being continually associated with the haunted house over and over again. I think that the key to the haunted houses’ fear inducing status, lies in; the architecture, the history, and artwork that was inspired by the iconic haunted houses themselves.

This dissertation sets out to explore the architecture of the stereotypical haunted house, to investigate the circumstances which popularised its stereotypical appearance and to examine why this specific appearance continues to be perpetuated.

Chapter One, “*The Perfect Storm*” *The Historical Socioeconomic Conditions That Brought Forth The Architecture of The Haunted House* examines the architecture which the haunted house is based on, American Victorian architecture of the late 19th century. This architecture combined various styles to achieve an overall ornate and eccentric appearance.⁸ The chapter discusses the architectural features of a selection of these styles: Gothic Revival, Second Empire and Queen Anne.

Chapter Two, *Tastes Change and The Haunted House is Born*, addresses how a changing socioeconomic environment as well as changing tastes, led to a change of general opinion about the

⁷ Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, n.p, 1919, MIT. Web. 4 Oct . 2019, p.13

⁸ Kidder Smith, G.E. *Source Book of American Architecture*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1996. Print. Pg.22

previously mentioned styles of architecture and how this in turn sparked the shaping of a new context of the late 19th century houses. The chapter looks at artists, including Edward Hopper and Walker Evans, who encapsulated this climate of distaste within their artwork.

Chapter Three, *The Emergence of The Haunted House in Mainstream Pop Culture* investigates how popular culture reinforced the image of the haunted house as specific to the architecture of 19th century American Victorian houses, to a wider public audience. The chapter discusses how the works of Charles Addams and Alfred Hitchcock were instrumental in cementing the American Victorian house as the haunted house and how they had a hand in popularising it as a fear inducing setting for film and other media for generations to come.

The research focuses on western culture, concentrating specifically on North America. The architectural style of the haunted house originates in the USA and also the popular culture concerning it. Keeping the research consistent to North America allows for a clear chronology to develop, making it easier to note possible changes over time. Through my initial research, I discovered that the architecture of the haunted house is based on the American Victorian architecture of the mid to late 19th century (1840-1890). This architecture combined various styles to achieve an overall ornate and eccentric appearance, and this thesis covers a selection of these styles from Gothic Revival, Second Empire, to Queen Anne.⁹

Houses in these styles were built in abundance by the wealthy classes during a time of economic prosperity and industrialisation in America, known as The Gilded Age. But as tastes began to change and prosperity began to dwindle, so did the building of these particular houses. Economic conditions in America over subsequent years meant the upkeep of the remaining houses became too expensive and they therefore fell into states of disrepair and deterioration. The result was many suburban neighbourhoods in parts of America contained these large run-down manor houses.

Artists across multiple mediums took the opportunity to use these houses as the setting for horror books and films, as they would not only be relatable locations for American audiences but would carry with them eerie connotations. This dissertation ultimately explores how the haunted house came to be (and continues to be) associated with images of American Victorian houses of the late 19th century.

⁹ Kidder Smith, G.E. *Source Book of American Architecture*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1996. Print. Pg.22

Chapter One

“The Perfect Storm”

The Historical and Socioeconomic Context of the Architecture Of The Haunted House

From examining a large variety of images of stereotypical haunted houses (Figure. 2) and comparing their features with that of a multitude of architectural styles (Figure.3), my research has led me to conclude that the architecture of the haunted house is based on that of an American Victorian house of the late 19th century.



Figure 2 David Carter Brown, *Haunted House*, 2016. Paint on canvas

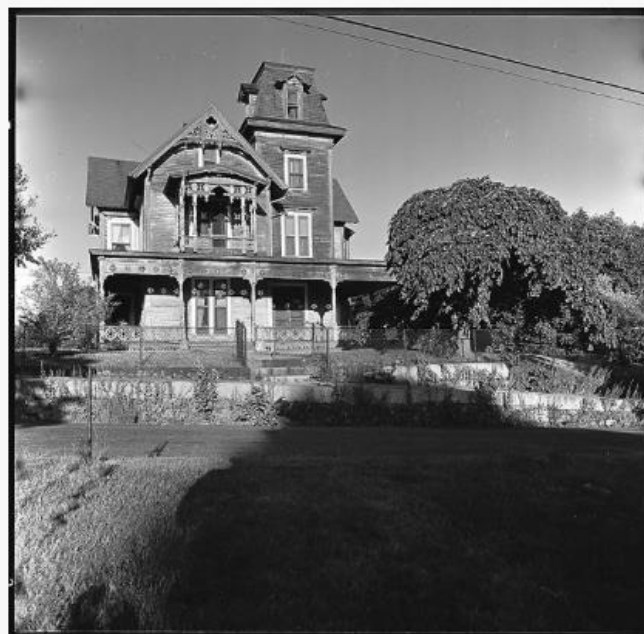


Figure 3 Walker Evans 1960-65, 2 of 9 *Exterior Views of Victorian House with Photographer's Shadow in the Foreground*, MET Archives

If we then think about removing the cobwebs and returning the haunted house to its original context, 1840s-1890s America, it reads very differently in comparison to how we would perceive it today. The American Victorian house once served as a fashionable family home. There is nothing inherently ominous about this image, so how did standard nineteenth century architectural styles for domestic houses become associated with the architecture of a haunted house? In order to examine this question further one must piece together the history of the American Victorian house.

The Rise

The ending of the American Civil War in 1865 marked the beginning of a new era in America. A rejection of the ideals and conjointly the architectural styles of old colonial America (known as the Federal Age) created a fierce demand for something new and dissimilar¹⁰. American architect Talbot Hamlin refers to the state of America at this time as being an “aesthetic vacuum”¹¹. Fortunately, times were changing and a second industrial revolution in America was underway, known as The Gilded Age. This period witnessed the expansion of electricity, petroleum, steel and railroad systems. The industrialisation of The Gilded Age brought with it a demand for grand homes for newly wealthy families in order to show their wealth and status in this new society. Taste and style were considered crucial in displaying wealth and status. Ideas of what was to be considered as good taste were being imported from Europe. The French and Parisians in particular, were understood to be the arbiters of taste and elegance. This sparked the migration of architectural styles from Europe to America, creating a new vernacular American style.¹²

Henry Glassie describes the nature of architectural migration in his book *Vernacular Architecture*. He explains,

... The objects of material culture are suited to long-range communication. Carried by trade over great stretches of space, now as always, artifacts can inspire cultural connections between people at a distance.¹³

While the houses are sometimes referred to as simply “Victorian houses”, the houses that began to be built in America could not be accurately called Victorian architecture. This is because there is a difference between Victorian architecture from the UK and what is called American Victorian

¹⁰ Mumford, Lewis, *The Brown Decades: A Study of The Arts in America 1865-1895*, Dover Publications Inc, New York, 1931. Print.pg 7

¹¹ Hamlin, Talbot F, *The American Spirit in Architecture, Volume 13 Pageant of America*, Yale University Press, 1926. Print pg150

¹² Mumford, Lewis, *The Brown Decades: A Study of The Arts in America 1865-1895*, Dover Publications Inc, New York, 1931. Print.pg8

¹³ Glassie, Henry, *Vernacular Architecture*, Material Culture of Philadelphia, Indiana University Press, 1999. Print. Pg.48,49

architecture. Victorian houses in the UK tended to stick to one style and were far less ornate, while the American Victorian houses were essentially a hodgepodge of various different architectural styles that encompassed the Victorian era including the Gothic Revival, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Italianate, Greek Revival and miscellaneous permutations of the Romanesque and other Gothic styles.¹⁴

America had never seen the likes of these *Frankensteinian* houses before. What made them most different from the colonial ones that had come before was, as GE Kidder Smith says, its focus on the idea of individuality “for in that overheated epoch of social change the natural connection between the personality of the owner and his house was pushed to white-hot-intensity”, stating that,

The villa should above all things manifest individuality, It should say something of the character of the family within- as much as possible of their life and history, their tastes and associations, should mould and fashion themselves upon its walls.¹⁵

It’s important to mention that the development of new mechanical aids for construction during the industrialisation of The Gilded Age, meant that what would have previously been too costly to imagine was now becoming more affordable to a wider range of people.¹⁶

Another outcome of the industrial advancements was a conversion of society to one of commercialism, materialism, salesmanship and advertising.¹⁷ In order to sell house plans, advertisements were placed in newspapers and journals. Figure 4 shows one such advertisement which boasts a beautiful house plan that has been built 300 times.



Figure 4 A Beautiful House "built more than 300 times from our plans", *The Ladies Home and Practical Housekeeper Journal*, Vol. 11, No.11, Philadelphia, October 1885. Print.

People either had the option to choose an already designed house or more commonly (and creatively) they chose the design

¹⁴ Hamlin, Talbot F, *The American Spirit in Architecture, Volume 13 Pageant of America*, Yale University Press, 1926. Print pg. 51

¹⁵ Kidder Smith, G.E. *Source Book of American Architecture*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1996. Print. Pg. 240

¹⁶ Hamlin, Talbot F, *The American Spirit in Architecture, Volume 13 Pageant of America*, Yale University Press, 1926. Print pg.151

¹⁷ Hamlin, Talbot F, *The American Spirit in Architecture, Volume 13 Pageant of America*, Yale University Press, 1926. Print, Pg. 151

themselves.¹⁸ Architectural companies published catalogues of plates from which a potential customer could choose any combination of styles that they wanted. An example of one such company is A.J Bicknell & Co who published *Detail, Cottage and Constructive Architecture: Containing 75 Large Lithographic Plates* in New York in 1873.¹⁹ Figure 5 and Figure 6 show original plates, showcasing the encouraged customisability as well as a variety of predefined options available.

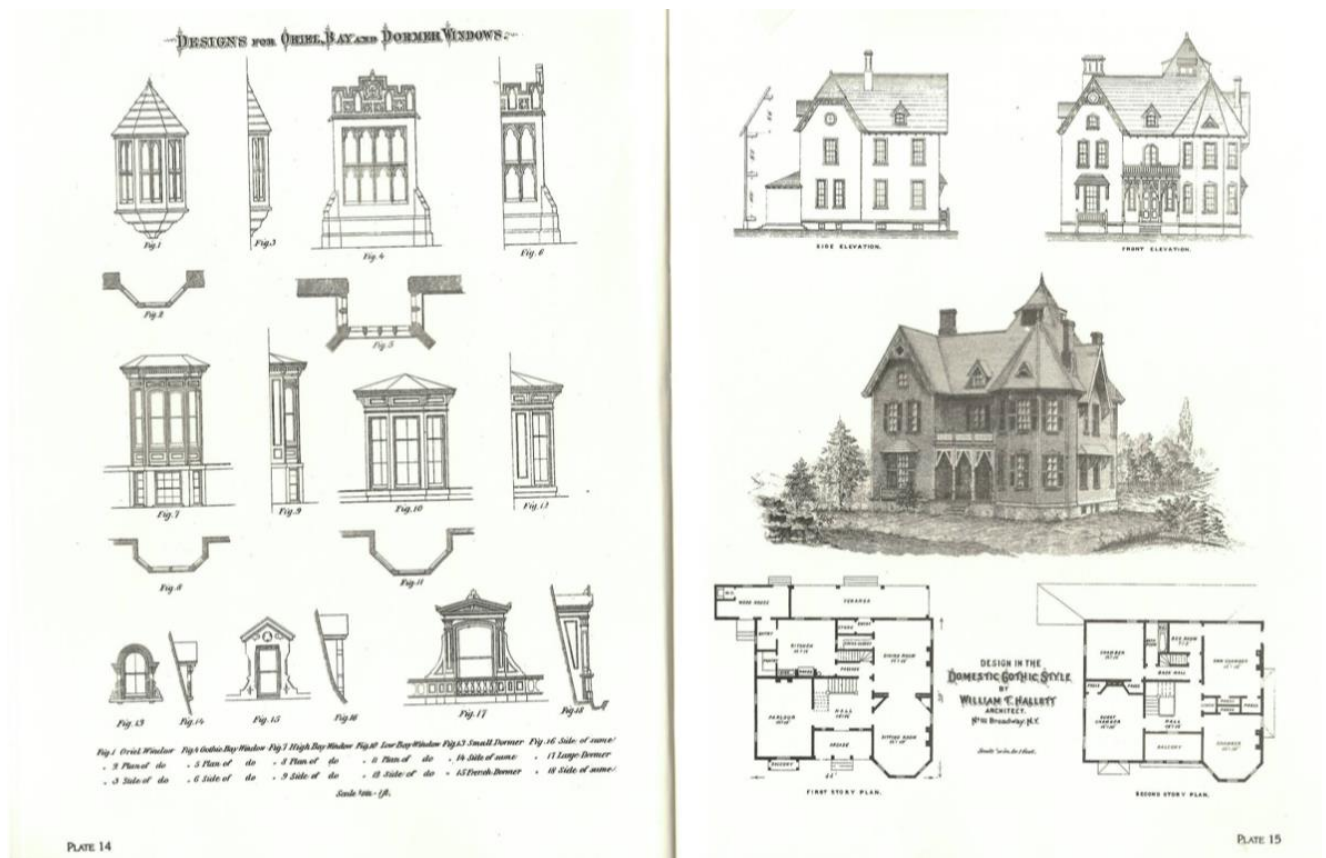


Figure 5 Bicknell, A.J & Co. *Victorian Architectural Details, Designs for over 700 stairs, mantles, doors, windows, cornices, porches and other decorative elements*, Dover Publications NY, 2012. Print. Plate 14 showing various window designs and plate 15 showing

¹⁸ Glassie, Henry, *Vernacular Architecture, Material Culture of Philadelphia*, Indiana University Press, 1999. Print. Pg.72

¹⁹ Bicknell, A.J & Co. *Victorian Architectural Details, Designs for over 700 stairs, mantles, doors, windows, cornices, porches and other decorative elements*, Dover Publications NY, 2012. Print. Pg. 14-15



A MODERN VILLA RESIDENCE.

Mr. Woollett, in his book on "Villas and Cottages, or Homes for All," describes a villa of frame structure designed for erection on a stone foundation, with cellar, with heavy sill, corner posts, girts, and plates, and filled in with brick. The house being intended for a central location between other buildings on a lot of moderate width, has a nearly symmetrical front. Individuality is given to the details by using panels and bands covered with cut shingles, instead of clapboards on rough boarding. The roof is also covered with shingles, and both those of the roof and band are painted in deeper tints than the main wood-work.

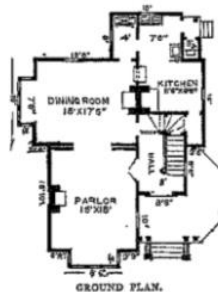
The finish of the interior is to be in white ash and butternut. There are four good-sized rooms and pantry on the first floor, the parlor and dining-room being at the left and the sitting-room and kitchen at the right side of the house. All these rooms are well lighted, airy, and cheerful. The second story contains four bed chambers, bath-room, and three large-sized closets.

The estimated cost of this house was \$8,000, in 1876, but at the present reduced prices of labor and material, could now be built for about \$6,000.

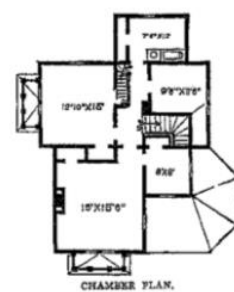
This set is reduced from design 4, Woollett's "Villas and Cottages," where are also given the first and second story plans, drawn to scale. One oblong volume of 40 plates, giving plans and elevations of ten villas and ten cottages. Price, post-paid, \$3.00.



Design for a Cottage, by E. C. Hussey, Architect.



GROUND PLAN.



CHAMBER PLAN.

From Hussey's "Home Building," One quarto volume of 42 plates, showing 45 original designs. Price \$5.00.

Figure 6. Bicknell, A.J & Co. 100 Victorian Architectural Designs for houses and Other Buildings, Dover Publications NY, 2002. Print.

And it wasn't just new homes being built, ornamented additions were being made to pre-existing houses to fit the trends. Henry Glassie explains that,

..since decorative details alone could signify fashion, and since they fit into the composition at conventional points, around openings and along edges, it was not hard for builders to create houses that were fashionable and familiar at one. Old forms were gussied up with flashy ornaments.²⁰

European Architectural Styles and their influence on American Architecture

As mentioned already the American Victorian architecture style is made up of a host of various styles. To analyse the architecture of the haunted house, necessitates a closer look at its architectural genetic make-up, focusing on three features I suggest had the heaviest visual influence on what came to be understood as the appearance of the haunted house.

²⁰ Glassie, Henry, *Vernacular Architecture*, Material Culture of Philadelphia, Indiana University Press, 1999. Print. Pg.77

The first architectural style is the Gothic Revival style, which was the style to first arrive in America in the year 1840. The main inspiration came from the work of William Burchfield particularly his All Saints Church in London 1849-1859, famous for the rich colouring of its brick work and unorthodox plan. American architects studied his work as well as John Ruskin's influential *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), where he argued that all architects should adhere to using Gothic styles.²¹ From looking at plates in an architecture catalogue from the time and photographs of houses in this style such as (Figure. 7), it is apparent that the most common features are decorative elements like porches, dormers, gothic arches, roof gables which may be front facing, steeply pitched roofs with delicate wooden trims (bargeboards), pointed arch windows and doors, some stained glass and decorative spikes on highpoints of the roof tops.²²



Figure 7 Knight House, Greensboro vic., Hale County, Alabama, built 1840, photographed 1939 Frances Benjamin, Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the South Library of Congress

²¹ Roth, Leland M., *American Architecture: A History* Second Edition, Leland M. Roth, Routledge, 2016, Print, Chpt. High Victorian Gothic, Pg. n.a

²² Bicknell, A.J & Co. *Victorian Architectural Details, Designs for over 700 stairs, mantles, doors, windows, cornices, porches and other decorative elements*, Dover Publications NY, 2012. Print. Pg. 14-15

The Second Empire style (Figure. 8) was introduced soon after in the 1860. It is also known as French Second Empire or even Second Empire Baroque style, due to its popularity in Paris under the reign of Napoleon III. Probably the most distinctive feature of this style is the tall mansard roof, inspired by the rooves often used in 17th century France by architect François Mansart. Other common features of the style are described by M. Leland in *American Architecture: A History*,

Second Empire Baroque was rich in horizontal layering using Classical orders, with the building mass divided into dominant centre pavilions flanked by end pavilions, separate mansard roofs atop each section, multiple overlays of elaborate classical ornament and sculptural enrichment.²³



Figure 8 . John M. Davies House, 393 Prospect Street, New Haven, New Haven County, CT, built 1868, photographed David R, 1933, *Historic American Buildings Survey*.

²³ Roth, Leland M., *American Architecture: A History* Second Edition, Leland M. Roth, Routledge, 2016, Print, Pg.225

The American Queen Anne style (Figure. 9) had no actual resemblance to the architecture built during the reign of the last English Stuart monarch and so the name is a bit of a misnomer. American architects were inspired by Free Classic architecture happening in England. However instead of using clay tiles in their designs like the English, they used wood shingles. They fused Classical details with elements from previous styles such as Second Empire and Stick Style. The exteriors of the houses were richly embellished in a variety of materials and used turned spindle work in screens and railings. Often there are round or polygonal corner towers capped by tall spike-like conical roofs as well as a wraparound porch of some sort.²⁴



Figure 9 Haas-Lilienthal House, 2007 Franklin Street, San Francisco, San Francisco County, CA, built 1886, photographed Samuel Jandoli 1933, Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress

²⁴ Roth, Leland M., *American Architecture: A History* Second Edition, Leland M. Roth, Routledge, 2016, Print, Chpt. American Queen Anne, Pg. n.a

As years progressed alongside advancements in the manufacturing process, American Victorian houses became more and more affordable to an even wider range of people.²⁵ By associating with the tastes of the elite it was perceived that one also had good taste by proxy. This allowed for social mobility, as explained by Professor of Sociology, Jukka Gronow,

...good taste was increasingly understood not to be predetermined by the privilege of birth or social origins. It was something that could be adopted by learning, regardless of one's social standing. Anyone who showed good taste in their choices and conduct was a gentleman (or gentlewoman). Good taste, thus, was both an indicator of belonging to 'good society', and the main criterion of entry into it.²⁶

To the displeasure of the upper classes, the housing style was becoming more and more common. Desperate to hold on to their status it was imperative that they distance themselves from those of lower status. And so, resentment of the American Victorian style commenced.

²⁵ Hamlin, Talbot F, *The American Spirit in Architecture, Volume 13 Pageant of America*, Yale University Press, 1926. Print pg.151

²⁶ Gronow, Jukka, *The Sociology Of Taste*, Psychology Press, London and New York, 1997. Print. Pg.12

Chapter Two

Tastes Change and The Haunted House is Born

The Decline

In an attempt to cultivate taste, by importing and combining various architectural styles from Europe, the American Victorian house would eventually become a symbol of bad taste, representing, amongst other things, pompous, over the top decoration, cheap imitation and overall lack of knowledge of art and architecture. It became very undesirable to be associated with an article of such perceived bad taste.²⁷

There are a few social theories as to why people may have started to perceive the American Victorian style as bad taste. The first being that the American Victorian house represented the materialism and ostentatiousness that was often associated with the “old fashioned” aristocrats and their constricting Victorian upper class life style, with whom the *nouveau riche* didn’t want to be affiliated with. The second being that as the American Victorian style became more affordable to build, it became more common for people within the middle-classes to build them, effectively “tainting” the style for the upper-class, whose status in society could be called into question by the suggestion that they shared the same taste as those in a lower class. Author Tom Vanderbilt describes this phenomenon stating that:

“upper-class people embraced some taste, people lower down followed, then upper-class people rejected the taste and embraced some new taste. Tastes can change when people aspire to be different from other people; they can change when we are trying to be like other people.”²⁸

According to architect Talbot Hamlin, the downfall of American Victorian domestic architecture was due to an increased knowledge of art history coming from Europe alongside a growing dissatisfaction with the style being mass produced. Hamlin argued that as the public began to gain more knowledge about original European architecture styles and their craftsmanship, an opinion began to form that the Victorian American style architecture was less authentic in its design and construction and that it was an overall cheap imitation of the original European architecture that had

²⁷ Llewelyn-Bowen, Laurence, *Victorian Interiors*, Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen’s School of Flock, 24 May. 2020. Web. 15:20. 20. Dec. 2020.

²⁸ Vanderbilt, Tom, *The Secret of Taste: Why We Like What We Like*, The Guardian, N.p, 22 Jun. 2016. Web. 3:15, 7th Jan 2021.

inspired it. Hamlin himself was a great critic of the building style, citing their Frankensteinian nature and materialism as his reason for his dislike, referring to them as “wooden monstrosities of ostentations and arrogant ugliness”.²⁹

The American public’s rejection of what the American Victorian house style now represented, stimulated a need for a return to something more classic. And so in the early 1900s more modest Colonial architectural styles of the previous decades began to make a return in place of the excessively decorative American Victorian houses.³⁰ With the building of the American Victorian houses ceasing and pre-existing ones being remodelled or knocked down in place of newer styles, the number of American Victorian homes was beginning to dwindle.³¹

American Victorian Relics

The American Victorian houses went from representing good taste and grandeur, to bad taste and an “old-fashioned” constricting life style, to its final form of representing decay and decrepitude. Out of place and unwanted, many American Victorian houses were indeed knocked down or altered, but crucially, some would remain, slowly decaying in plain sight.

Due the dwindling economic conditions of the early 1900’s, alongside the houses large footprint and complex decoration, American Victorian houses were expensive to up keep, and so those that survived being knocked down or remodelled, often fell into states of dilapidation or were left abandoned altogether. The advancement in the railroad system during the Gilded Age had given rise to a migration of the wealthy to the suburbs, resulting in an abundance of these large American Victorian houses being constructed on what became the land of American neighbourhoods.³² This is significant as it meant that many people were growing up in neighbourhoods with a dilapidated American Victorian house looming down the street.

Visually, these ageing American Victorian houses were in stark contrast to the other houses that now surrounded them. While surrounding houses boasted more classical and symmetrical Colonial design, the American Victorian home depicted a decaying façade, an asymmetrical silhouette, a tall

²⁹ Hamlin, Talbot F, *The American Spirit in Architecture, Volume 13 Pageant of America*, Yale University Press, 1926. Print pg. 51,151,155

³⁰ Hamlin, Talbot F, *The American Spirit in Architecture, Volume 13 Pageant of America*, Yale University Press, 1926. Print pg160

³¹ Hamlin, Talbot F, *The American Spirit in Architecture, Volume 13 Pageant of America*, Yale University Press, 1926. Print pg160
³² Contosta, David R. *Architecture and the United States History Survey*, The History Teacher, vol. 18, no. 1, 1984, JSTOR. Web. 4 Oct 2019 pg.22

looming stature and pointed spikey features, an absolute perversion of what the American family home was now considered to look like. One hypothesis as to why we actually may feel an underlying sense of dread when we look to the iconic image of the haunted house, may be linked to the architectural forms, structure and layout of the American Victorian houses themselves. In a compelling essay on the subject of evolutionary psychology, psychologist Francis T. McAndrew explains that,

...places that inspire feelings of creepiness and horror possess combinations of features that humans have evolved to regard with caution, either because such features were associated with the presence of predators or other natural hazards, or because they confront us with limited sensory information and a lack of freedom of movement and control which would impair our ability to deal with an emergent threat.³³

Considering McAndrew's statement alongside the features we know to be associated with the American Victorian house, it is beginning to become clear how the American people's dislike of the houses was beginning to mutate into fear.

Taking Advantage

The public opinion of these houses had changed once again, from simple distaste of the style to an unease about the houses themselves. There is no better way of exploring this new perspective than to look at what artwork was being created at the time.

The Victorian relics dotted across American suburbs in the 1920's, now so dilapidated and out of place, caught the attention of two painters who released work on this subject matter only a year apart. These were *House of Mystery* by Charles Burchfield 1924 (Figure. 10) and *House by the Rail Road* by Edward Hopper 1925 (Figure.11). Both artists' general bodies of work explore ideas of isolation and the uncanny. Both painters were expressing the feelings of an uneasy familiarity with these buildings with which they would have grown up around. Their dominating size, foreboding shadowy presences, as well as their gothic influences, compared alongside the more colloquial homes own neighbourhoods, make them the perfect subject matter for exploring the themes of isolation and uncanny feelings.

³³ McAndrew, Francis T. Cornelia H. Dudley Professor of Psychology, Knox College, "*The Psychology, Geography, and Architecture of Horror: How Places Creep Us Out*" ,ESIC VOL 4.1, Academic Studies Press



Figure 10 House of Mystery by Charles Burchfield 1924, The Art Institute of Chicago



Figure 11 House by the Rail Road' by Edward Hopper 1925, MOMA.

House by the Rail Road seems to lament the plight of the American Victorian house. With railroad situated in the foreground, we are reminded of the advancements of the Gilded Age which brought forth the new construction methods, migration of the wealthy to the suburbs (often by rail). But now in the 1920's, the house sits alone cast in shadow. An eyesore on the landscape, its ornate decoration feels completely out of place next to the barren blue sky. It appears that the only life coming and going from the rejected house, are the trains on the railroad that would pass it by.

Sarah Burns argues that Hopper's painting, *House by the Railroad* inspired many artists who went on to popularise the Victorian house as a symbol for the uncanny, strange happenings and downright horror³⁴. One such artist was Mabel Dwight.³⁵ In her piece *Deserted Mansion* 1928, Dwight captures a dishevelled and overgrown manor clearly from the 19th century (Figure. 12). There is a feeling of mystery as well as dread in this image. While the entry way to the house looks clear and well lit, the house that looms behind the stone wall and trees does not look one bit inviting.

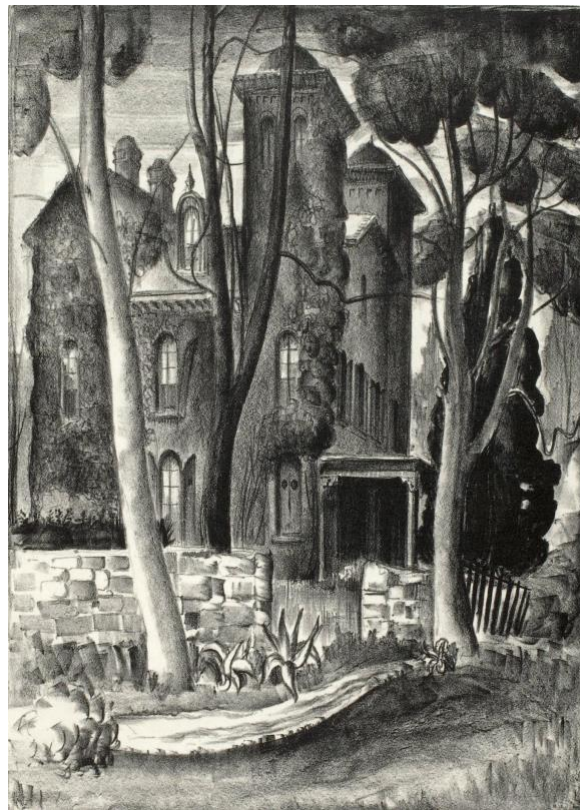


Figure 12 *Deserted Mansion*, Mable Dwight, 1928. Lithograph on zinc.

³⁴ Burns, Sarah, "Better for Haunts" *Victorian Houses and the Modern Imagination*, American Art 26 (3): 2–25, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Web 19 Oct 2019 pg22-23

³⁵ Iversen, Margaret, *In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny*, Art History 21, 1998, Wiley Online Library, 2003. Web. 24 Oct . 2019.

Another notable artist who explored the changing perception of these houses was photographer Walker Evans. His work of 1930-31 further documented relics of the bygone Victorian era. His images are haunting, hollow shells of times past, arches and windows looking gaunt (Figures. 13, 14 & 15). Burns notes that Evan's architecture photography had been displayed in the MET and suggests that like any of the artwork in the gallery, his work likely captivated the imaginations of many. This may have helped to establish the idea that American Victorian houses spark feelings of unease within the minds of the public.³⁶



Figure 13 Walker Evans 1935, Queen Anne House with Spindle work Porch, Mobile Alabama, MET Archives



Figure 14 Walker Evans 1960-65, 1 of 9 Exterior Views of Victorian House with Photographer's Shadow in the Foreground, MET Archives

³⁶ Burns, Sarah, "Better for Haunts" *Victorian Houses and the Modern Imagination*, American Art 26 (3): 2-25, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Web 19 Oct 2019. Pg. 19



Figure 15 Walker Evans 1930-33, Second Empire House with Quoins, MET Archives

The artworks I have discussed shows a very dramatic departure from how the American Victorian houses were *meant* to be perceived, to how they were *now* being perceived in the early 20th Century. With artworks such as these becoming more popular, the next chapter explores how the idea of the “creepy” American Victorian houses would slowly begin to make its way into mainstream pop-culture.

Chapter Three

The Emergence of the Haunted House in Popular Culture

It seems that the likes of Charles Burchfield and Edward Hopper had been well ahead of their time, as it took some years for the connections that they, and others artists made (between the American Victorian house and feelings of fear), to seep into the minds of the majority and trickle down into popular culture. But trickle down they did.

Between the 1920s and early 1930s, the subject of spooky houses was being explored more and more, with an influx of film entries into a what had already been a popular genre of literature- the mystery house thriller.³⁷ Unlike the admiration for American Victorian houses, the fascination with grisly fiction that took place in mysterious dwellings, didn't die at the turn of the century. With the advent of film, people looked forward to seeing the eerie stories that they loved, being adapted to the big screen, the most notable being *The Fall of the House of Usher* 1840 and *The Turn of the Screw* 1898. This period between the late 1920s and early 1930s marked the beginnings of the golden age of "the mystery house thriller" genre in cinema.³⁸ During this time period, (likely trying to recreate the fiction that audiences had been reading) the directors' settings of choice for these chilling tales had largely been; European castles structures ((*The Cat and the Canary* 1927 (Figure. 16)) and *The Fall of the House of Usher* 1928), large abandoned houses of varying simplified architecture styles ((*The Bat* 1926 and *A Mickey Mouse Sound Cartoon The Haunted House* 1929 (Figure. 17)) and old non-descript farm houses ((*The Dark Old House* 1932 (Figure 18)). Missing from the list of course, are the American Victorian mansions that we've come to expect.

³⁷ Meehan, Paul, *The Haunted House on Film, An Historical Analysis*, McFarlan & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, United States of America, 2020. Pg.14

³⁸ Meehan, Paul, *The Haunted House on Film, An Historical Analysis*, McFarlan & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, United States of America, 2020. Pg.29

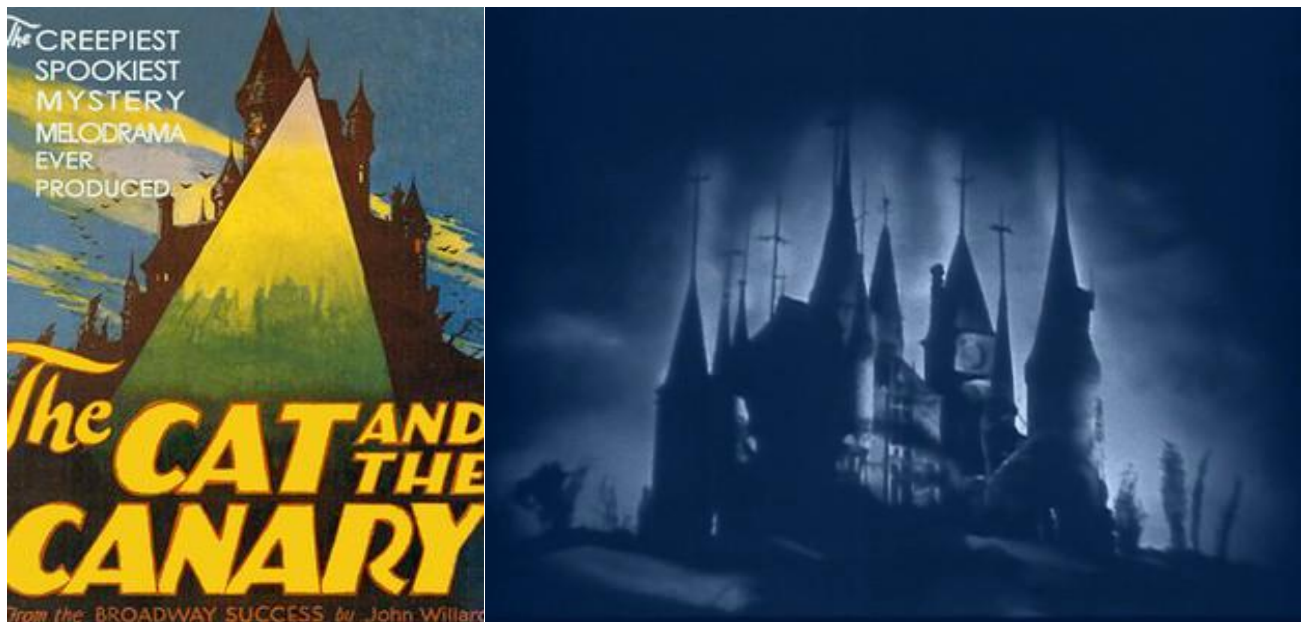


Figure 16 *The Cat and the Canary* 1927, original poster depicting castle (left) and establishing shot of film depicting castle (right)



Figure 17 A Mickey Mouse Sound Cartoon, *The Haunted House* 1929, title card (left) and establishing shot depicting house (right)



Figure 18 *The Dark Old House* 1932, original poster depicting house (left) and establishing shot depicting house (right)

Something changes around the late 1930s into the early 1940s that affects the aesthetic of these mystery thriller houses. An interesting way to illustrate this shift, is to compare the settings of the films, *The Old Dark House* (1932) and the subsequently remade *The Old Dark House* (1963). While the plots of the films remain consistent with each other, one aspect in which they differ drastically is in the design for “the old dark house” itself. In the older version the house appears to be an old country house, the style of which appears vaguely Colonial but mostly of European/UK origin, on account of its stone material and asymmetry. But in the newer version however, we can see that the setting is clearly a large American Victorian house, complete with all the features that we would expect to see, including: an asymmetrical silhouette, mansard rooves, towers, a conical roof, oculus windows, slender round headed windows, spiked finials and iron cresting (Figure 19).



Figure 19 *The Dark Old House* 1963, original poster depicting house (left), opening sequence depicting house illustrated by Charles Addams (right)

While the older film introduces the house to us at the five-minute mark (in a shot that lasts merely seconds), the newer film establishes the setting at the very beginning as part of the opening sequence and takes greater effort to use the house as a method of inducing dread. The camera pans around an illustration of an American Victorian house, almost showcasing to us the different features of its architecture, until we zoom out to see the final eerie image of the American Victorian house. As the scene plays out, it's obvious the director knew what ominous tone would be created once the complete house is revealed to the audience. He chose to hint to its final form in close-ups in order to build suspense. The cookie cutter mould for what a creepy house should look like has clearly been developed by the time the newer version had been created. So what prompted the changes? I think the key to this shift, lies in the artist who illustrated the house for *The Dark Old House* 1963, Charles Addams.

Addams and the Addamses

One of the first instances in pop culture where we see the distaste for American Victorian houses being manipulated to evoke an adverse reaction, is in the iconic work of Charles Addams.

Specifically, in his series of cartoons about the macabre set of characters, who would later be known as “The Addams Family”, which were published in *The New Yorker* magazine from 1938.³⁹

Addams’s dark humorous cartoons were extremely popular and Addams would publish 150 in total over the course of 50 years.⁴⁰ They depicted a group of ghoulish family members who personified the opposite of “the average American family”. They were very wealthy (considering they lived in such a large house and appointed servants). They were also sinister in nature and took delight in all things macabre- in drastic contrast to the regular folk that they sometimes interacted with. The ultimate perversion of the “American family” had to live in the ultimate perversion of the “American family home”, and so, of course, the Addams family resided in a dilapidated American Victorian house, just like the ones that still loomed in neighbourhoods all across America. In fact, Charles Addams’ inspiration for his characters’ abode, came from an ageing American Victorian house located next door to the friendly Colonial Revival home which Addams grew up in as a boy. At the age of eight, he (alongside some of the other neighbourhood kids) actually broke into the house when it was abandoned to explore and cause mischief.⁴¹ Addams’s work was no doubt informed by the architectural landscape in which he grew up.

³⁹ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.56

⁴⁰ Knudde, Kjell. Schuddeboom, Bas, Charles Addams, Lambiek, N.p, N.d, Web. 14:15. 20 Oct. 2020

⁴¹ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.17

The first cartoon featuring “The Addams Family” appears in 1938.⁴² It also happens to be the first of the cartoons to feature their house (albeit, the interior only) (Figure. 20). But we can gather hints from the decoration (the ornate staircase, the newel lamps and the swirling handles of the armchair) that Charles Addams had an American Victorian house in mind. The simple cartoon captivated the minds of readers right away.⁴³ This would lead Addams to continue to slowly develop the rest of the family and importantly their family home.



Figure 20 First cartoon to feature *The Addams Family*, n.a by Charles Addams, *The New Yorker*, August 1938, pg.9,

⁴² Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.56

⁴³ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.4

The first instance in which we see the exterior of the house is in a cartoon published in 1945 (Figure. 21).⁴⁴ Addams depicts what is the quintessential American Victorian house, with; Mansard rooves, a tower, wooden clapboard siding, oculus windows, iron cresting, decorative finials, long round headed windows, ornate porch and of course an asymmetrical silhouette. The house looks sufficiently dishevelled, with a few boarded up windows, missing tiles and ram-shackled appearance to the wooden slats of the siding. The surrounding garden area, as well as the sidewalk, is overgrown.



Figure 21 The Addams Family House, Charles Addams, The New Yorker, 1945

⁴⁴ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life, Chas Addams*, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.87

The house has a notably similar silhouette to that of the house from Edward Hopper's *House by the Railroad*. Linda H. Davis suggests that it is likely that Addams may have drawn additional inspiration from the painting, as not only was he a fan of Hopper's work, but in an illustration he did for the Schmid Brothers, Addams decided to place the house above a railroad track as if it were a nod to the painting that influenced him (Figure 22).⁴⁵



Figure 22 Addams Family Mother's Day Decorative Plate 1972, by Charles Addams for Schmid Brothers, Inc

The houses in (Figures. 21 & 22) do however differ slightly in design. This is because Addams never quite drew the same house, instead swapping various American Victorian features in and out whenever he felt it would benefit the composition or the story. He is quoted as saying that he would often study photographs of American Victorian houses for ideas and that consistently went with the American Victorian house as they looked “better for haunts”.^{46,47}

One of Addams's most popular works is known as *Boiling Oil*, created for the 1946 Christmas issue of *The New Yorker* and features the house from a bold, angled perspective (Figure 23)⁴⁸. The scene depicts the moment before the Addams Family pour a cauldron of boiling oil onto an unsuspecting

⁴⁵ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.88

⁴⁶ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.87

⁴⁷ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.88

⁴⁸ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.90

group of Christmas carollers. While there are four members of the family present in the cartoon, it's clear that the main character of the image is certainly the house. The unique angle which we are treated to in the illustration really exaggerates the stature of the American Victorian house as it looms over the carollers. Here the house is directly contrasted with the average American (the Christmas carollers) and their houses (shown on the right middle background). Addams brings the huge discrepancy in the aesthetics of the old and the new to the attention of the public and at the same time associates the old aesthetic with the ghoulish inversion of the American family.



Figure 23 Boiling Oil, Charles Addams, Christmas issue of the New Yorker, 1946

Addams' work influenced how people were seeing the architecture around them. Speaking in 1964, about the property in Johnson City, Texas, (which had various American Victorian features) that would eventually become the presidential ranch, First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson said,

"Well, it looked a bit like a Charles Addams cartoon," "And I think that if I'd been told that I was going to buy it and start trying to make it into a home I would have turned and run,".⁴⁹

Addams' cartoons continued in popularity and in 1964 a television series, *The Addams Family*, was devised by David Levy to take the characters as well as their famous family home, off the page and onto the screen (Figure. 24).⁵⁰ Getting worldwide attention, the show ran for two seasons with a total of 64 episodes.⁵¹ Somewhat interestingly, the establishing shot of the Addams house (that was shown in every episode) was actually an existing real house, 21 Chester Place. With the exception of the mansard roof on the tower and the iron cresting (which were painted on in post-production), this house inhabited a very ordinary American neighbourhood and so it is strange to think about how it was being broadcast worldwide as the ultimate spooky house.



Figure 24 *The Addams Family*, establishing shot, 1964, David Levy, ABC

⁴⁹ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life*, Chas Addams, Random House, United States of America, 2006. Pg.5

⁵⁰ Morowitz, Laura. "The Monster Within: The Munsters, The Addams Family and the American Family in the 1960s." *Critical Studies in Television*, vol. 2, no. 1, Mar. 2007, pg.1,

⁵¹ Morowitz, Laura. "The Monster Within: The Munsters, The Addams Family and the American Family in the 1960s." *Critical Studies in Television*, vol. 2, no. 1, Mar. 2007, pg.4

The Addams Family had captured the imagination of the nation and their popularity as a franchise spawned various merchandise. An assembly kit for The Addams Family home released in 1965 shows how it was dually marketed as not just the Addamses' home, but as a haunted house. (Figures. 25 & 26) Here we can see first-hand, that the depiction of American Victorian houses and the term haunted houses were becoming more synonymous with each other.



Figure 25 The Addams Family Haunted House Model Kit Advertisement, Famous Monsters Of Filmland magazine, Warren Publishing, 1965

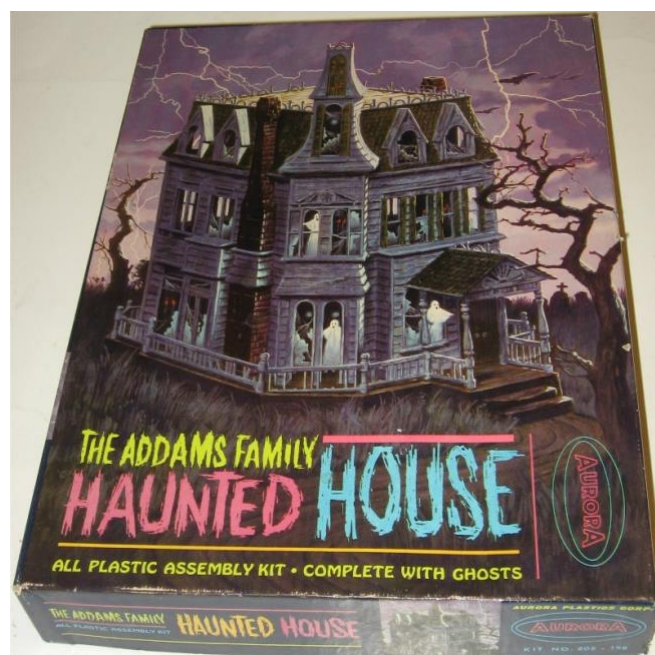


Figure 26 The Addams Family Haunted House Model Kit 1965

Whether it had been from Charles Addams' original works or the subsequent media it spawned, the viewers of *The Addams Family* had essentially been encouraged to associate the sinister antics of the characters to the home in which they lived- a dilapidated American Victorian house. This would be largely effective in helping to permanently link ideas of the creepy and macabre with American Victorian houses.

Psycho (1960)

Another “powerhouse” of pop culture’s depictions of creepy American Victorian houses, is of course the infamous Bates house from the movie *Psycho* 1960, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Figure. 27). Hitchcock’s idea of “pure cinema” was one that favoured visual presence over narration as a method of telling stories.⁵² Having first worked as a set designer back in the 1920’s, it’s no wonder that a signature part of Hitchcock’s film making has to do with his iconic incorporation of architecture into his films.⁵³ He is quoted in saying,

“A rule I’ve always followed is: Never use a setting simply as a background. Use it one hundred percent (...) You’ve got to make the setting work *dramatically*.”⁵⁴

And Hitchcock *did* make the setting of *Psycho* work dramatically. Overlooking the bland horizontal layout of the Bates Motel where two grisly murders take place, stands a dark, foreboding American Victorian house, inhabited by, who we believe to be, Norman Bates’ mother. The eerie house works as a visual metaphor for the way that Mrs. Bates’ dark personality dominates Norman’s, throughout the film.⁵⁵

Features of American Victorian architecture present in the design of the house are; wooden clapboard siding, mansard roofing, a tower, long round headed windows, an oculus window, ornate cornices and porch details, iron cresting, finials, and of course the infamous asymmetrical silhouette. The house was designed by production designer Joseph Hurley and art director Robert Clatworthy under the watchful eye of Alfred Hitchcock. The design was also influenced by the similar architecture that was common in the local area of Northern California where film takes place. It also

⁵² Jacobs, Steven, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, Netherlands Architecture Institute Publishers, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 30 Apr. 2014. Print. Pg .12

⁵³ Jacobs, Steven, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, Netherlands Architecture Institute Publishers, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 30 Apr. 2014. Print. Pg .12

⁵⁴ Jacobs, Steven, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, Netherlands Architecture Institute Publishers, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 30 Apr. 2014. Print. Pg.11

⁵⁵ Meehan, Paul, *The Haunted House on Film, An Historical Analysis*, McFarlan & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, United States of America, 2020. Print. Pg.90

reportedly took inspiration from Hopper's painting *House by the Railroad*.⁵⁶ Another important influence in the design of the house supposedly came from the illustrations of Charles Addams. Addams and Hitchcock were good friends and Hitchcock actually owned several of Addams' original cartoons.⁵⁷ The design of the house was truly a product of its time.



Figure 27 *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock, 1960, Still

The set remained standing for many years and the Bates house would be reused for a number of movies and television shows including *Murder She Wrote* (Dir. Anthony Shaw, *Incident in Lot 7*, Season 8 | Episode 13, 1992) as well as the *Psycho* sequels; *Psycho II* (Dir. Richard Franklin, 1983) and *Psycho III* (Dir. Anthony Perkins, 1986).⁵⁸ The chilling nature of the film and its synonymous connection to its American Victorian house setting have had a lasting impact on pop culture.

⁵⁶ Meehan, Paul, *The Haunted House on Film, An Historical Analysis*, McFarlan & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, United States of America, 2020. Print. Pg.92

⁵⁷ Davis, Linda. H, *A Cartoonists Life, Chas Addams*, Random House, United States of America, 2006. PrintPg. 5

⁵⁸ Meehan, Paul, *The Haunted House on Film, An Historical Analysis*, McFarlan & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, United States of America, 2020. Print. Pg.93

What then?

Filmmakers and artists alike would continue to; take inspiration from, parody, and pay homage to the iconic creative works of Charles Addams as well as the iconic film that was *Psycho*, until the American Victorian haunted house well and truly reached stereotype status.

One prolific user of the American Victorian haunted house setting has been the children's animated cartoon *Scooby Doo*, created by Joe Ruby and Ken Spears (Figure. 28). *Scooby Doo* follows a group of teenagers and their dog around various creepy locations in search of ghosts, monsters and mysteries. For four decades, *Scooby Doo* has famously showcased an American Victorian house in their opening sequences. This effectively sets the spooky tone for the show and has of course exposed the iconic image of the American Victorian haunted house to many young people across many decades.



*Scooby-Doo Where Are You? Season 1.
1969-1970*



Scooby-Doo Where Are You? Season 2. 1970



Scooby-Doo and Scrappy-Doo. 1979-1980



A Pup Named Scooby-Doo. 1988-1991



What's New Scooby-Doo? 2002-2006



Scooby-Doo Mystery Incorporated. 2010-2013

Figure 28 Compilation of stills from Scooby Doo opening sequence from 1969-2013

From the late 1960s onwards, it's clear that the visual language of the general public had adapted to instantly recognise the American Victorian house as a symbol of creepiness and dread. And while it may seem clichéd to some, present day films have utilised the stereotype to instantly and effectively depict a sense of dread on screen and to pay homage to its horror predecessors, like for example in *IT* (Dir. Andrés Muschietti, 2017) (Figure. 29) and in the stop motion animation film *Coraline* (Dir. Henry Selick 2009) (Figure. 30)



Figure 29 It. Dir. Andrés Muschietti. Jaeden Lieberher, Bill Skarsgård. Warner Bros. Pictures. 2017



Figure 30 Coraline. Dir. Henry Selick. Dakota Fanning, Terri Hatcher. Laika, Pandemonium Films. 2009

Realising that it is possible to utilise the American Victorian house as a backdrop to enhance the creepiness and eeriness of their stories, film makers and artists alike continue to employ it as a setting for their works.

Repeatedly seeing the American Victorian house portrayed as a haunted house whether in print or on screen, reinforces the connection between the two and only assists in adding to the prolific history of horror associated with the image of the haunted house, furthering its effectiveness as a creepy horror setting. The American Victorian haunted house continues to be a relevant story setting to foster feelings of creepiness and fear.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the architecture of the haunted house is based on the American Victorian architecture of the mid to late 19th century. This architecture combined a concoction of various European styles including Gothic Revival, Second Empire and Queen Anne, to achieve an overall eccentric and Frankensteinian appearance. Houses in these styles were built in abundance by the wealthy classes during a time of economic prosperity and industrialisation in America, known as The Gilded Age. But as tastes began to change and appreciation for the style began to dwindle, so did the building of these particular houses. Economic conditions in America over subsequent years meant the upkeep of the remaining houses became too expensive and they therefore fell into states of disrepair and deterioration. The result was many suburban neighbourhoods in parts of America contained these large run-down manor houses. Remembering the ethos of the American Victorian style, as G.E Kidder Smith said,

The villa should above all things manifest individuality, It should say something of the character of the family within- as much as possible of their life and history, their tastes and associations, should mould and fashion themselves upon its walls.⁵⁹

I have come to realise that when a house like this lies empty, it is not just a vacant property, it is the ghostly shell of its previous owner.

Due to the characteristics of the American Victorian houses design; an asymmetrical silhouette, tall looming structure, and pointed spired features, the style lent itself well to becoming a foreboding presence within American neighbourhoods. It's not hard to imagine the local spooky stories that may have been circulating around this time; ghostly shadows in tall windows and the likes. The presence of these houses in American neighbourhoods provided a striking visual contrast between the newer homes (representing American family values, with their safe and friendly exteriors) and the decaying American Victorian houses which became perceived to be the perversion of American family values (representing an old way of life and touting an ominous and abrasive exterior). It seems only natural that feelings of fear and unease about the houses amongst the American public began developing.

Observant artists across multiple mediums were seen to take the opportunity to use these houses as the setting for their artworks and films. Not only did the houses work well thematically to illustrate the feelings of fear, unease and the uncanny, but they would also act as relatable locations for

⁵⁹ Kidder Smith, G.E. *Source Book of American Architecture*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1996. Print. Pg. 240

American audiences, who would recognise “that creepy house down the street” and would understand the nuances.

I personally think that it was Charles Addams who really hit the last nail in the coffin when it comes to converting the public to recognise the American Victorian house as the haunted house. His decades worth of illustrative work on The Addams Family cartoons, solidified the ghoulish family’s American Victorian home as the creepiest house imaginable and the ultimate perversion of American family values. Addams helped to code the symbol of the haunted house, showing us; what it looked like, what it represented and how we should feel about it. I think that works like Psycho 1960, wouldn’t have been nearly as impactful without the groundwork done by Charles Addams 22 years before hand.

While many people are unaware of the true origins of the haunted house, it’s strange American Victorian design as well as its persistent use as a creepy setting in popular culture, has insured that the haunted house remains an iconic and instantly recognisable symbol of fear, dread and unease within Western culture to this day.

Reflecting on my time writing this dissertation, I know that I have learned a great deal in regards to the topic of the haunted house but also conducting this research has allowed me to hone my research methodology. I learned and utilised a number of new and useful skills including; widening the research area, the ability to identify credible written and visual source material and holding up sources to one another for scrutiny. These are skills that I have found to be transferable to the practical side of production design which involves a great deal of research into historical and cultural contexts, architectural styles and general visual research. I have been utilising this same methodology for my final year practical projects to great effect and so I plan on continuing this practice into my career.

Taking a small idea as a starting point and bringing it through the various steps in order to get it to fruition, has been a challenging feat as well as extremely gratifying. I found that for me, finding a topic to become enthusiastic about was the easy part (being a production design student as well as a horror fan meant researching the haunted house never felt like work) but I also found that keeping focused on the main points that I wanted to discuss was challenging. One aspect of my research that I ultimately decided not to include involved the psychology of fear. I was fascinated by the idea that we are psychologically predisposed to fear the architectural forms and features associated with the

American Victorian haunted house, those being; tall silhouette, monstrous scale, asymmetrical layout and pointed features. I researched and wrote the chapter but after taking a look at the piece as a whole in combination with the work I had already, it was very clear to me that the psychology chapter didn't belong in this particular dissertation but might in fact be better suited to an entire dissertation of its own.

In 2019 I completed a project inspired by the works of Edward Hopper. As part of a team we designed and built multiple eerie sets to bring some of Hoppers most well-known paintings to life through film. That same year, I began contemplating what my dissertation topic should be. It appears that Hopper's recurring theme of uncanny architectural spaces had taken root in my mind. But from my research into this area I have come to suspect that we all have a perpetual intrigue into uncanny spaces such as the haunted house. The combination of striking visuals and the coinciding inexplicable uneasy feeling is burned into our minds and appears time and again within our artwork, literature, film, television and nightmares alike. Reminiscent of something we know (the oneiric house as Bachelard described it), but twisted into something unfamiliar and frightening, the haunted house continues to be one of the most successful and iconic creepy settings there is.

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