



Wood Frame Vernacular

WOOD FRAME VERNACULAR



Lake Worth, Fla.

A Style Introduction:

Imagine a wilderness so dense you had to crawl through jungle-like conditions in order to just move around. Mosquitoes so thick, moving like looming black clouds, attacking relentlessly against beast and man that had no defense. There were no roads, no post offices, no stores. This was the Palm Beach County of the mid-1800s.

When the Second Seminole War ended in 1842, the first non-native settlers built around the largest freshwater source in the area, Lake Worth. The function of their first buildings were simply to provide shelter. This was not “architecture” being designed by architects; the first homes, churches, and general stores were being built by local craftsmen who had learned the building trade from their parents and grandparents and were using any locally available materials in order to accomplish this.

Since trees were plentiful, wood frame buildings were the most common type of early construction in South Florida. These were homes that were built specifically to respond to the environmental conditions and had very little decoration or ornamentation. Pre-1880s, most construction was post and beam, which is where vertical wooden posts hold up large horizontal wooden beams as the basis for the structure. These timbers were usually held together not with nails but with complex joinery that required skilled craftsmen (joinery happens at the ends of the wood timbers that are chiseled in such a way so that the pieces lock together like a puzzle).

As more people came to the region, it was necessary to find a way to build homes faster and less costly. With new saw mills and industrialization, dimensional lumber (pieces of wood that were milled in specific dimensions like a 2x4), and nails became more readily available. This allowed the homes to be built not with large, heavy timbers but with long, thin, pieces of wood. This was called balloon framing, and allowed for buildings to get taller, since the framing could go from the floor plate to the roof with one continuous piece of wood.

There were a variety of names given to different types of wood frame houses, that essentially described the shape of the house or how the rooms were configured. These included single-pen, hall and parlor, dog-trot, and I-house. Other wood frame houses more commonly known today are the Shotgun house and the “Conch” House (the Bahamian-influenced style of wood-frame housing often seen in Key West or Miami.) The Shotgun house is called that because it is one room wide, and several rooms deep (you could look right through the house from front to back, or a shotgun blast would travel from front to back without hitting a wall). This long, narrow form was very convenient when there were narrow lots to contend with.

Builders continued to provide structures like this into the 1920s. But as the Bungalow style (and others) became popular, architect-designed plans for homes became an important indicator of social class, and the simple frame housing tradition rooted in previous generations began to die out. Updated versions of these simple wood frame houses were still occasionally being constructed into the 1940s.



Lake Worth Beach, Fla.

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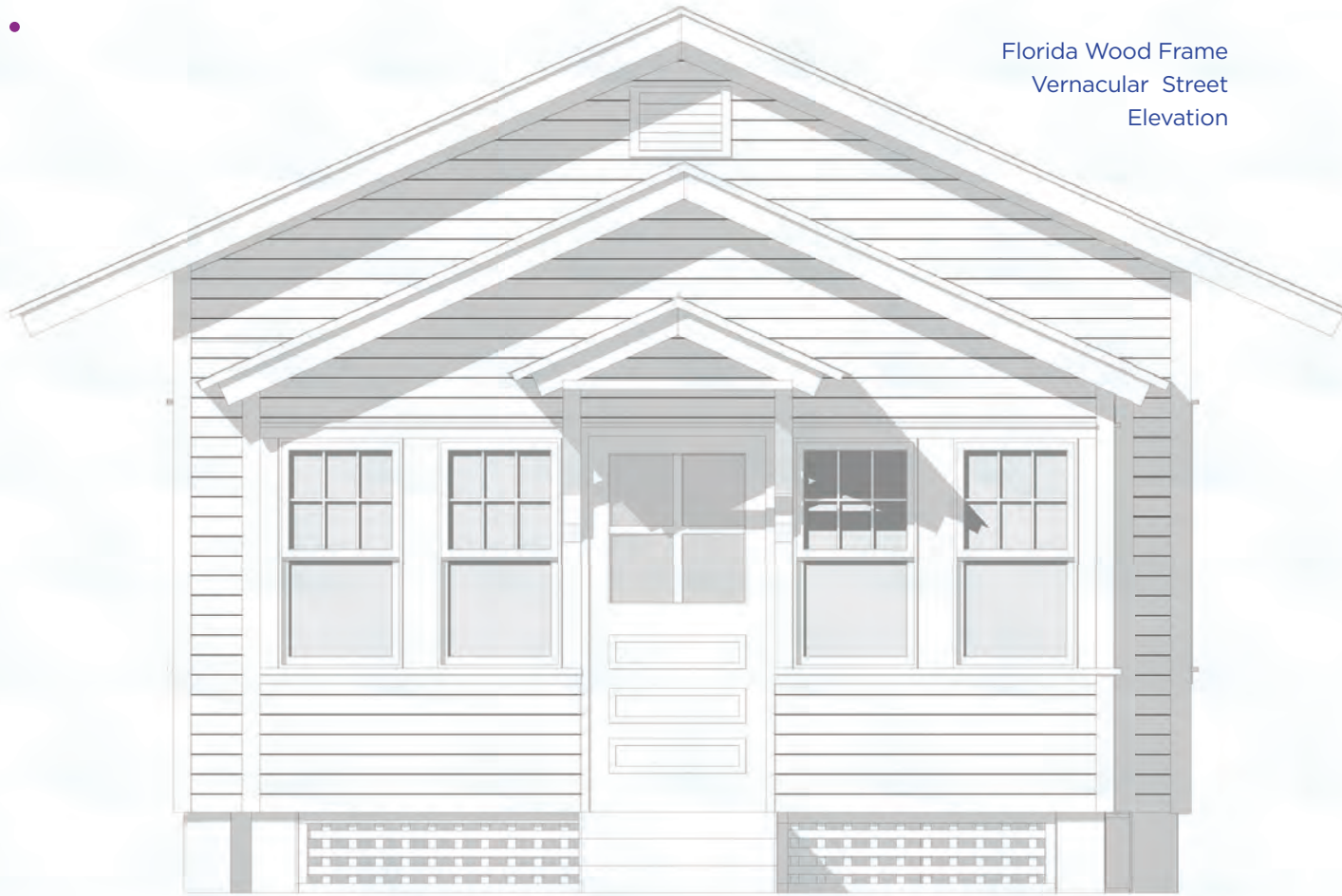


Wrap-around porch in an Apalachicola, Florida home.



Wood Frame Vernacular house with gable end stoop overhang, Lake Worth Beach, Fla.

Florida Wood Frame
Vernacular Street
Elevation



A Style Described:

The common factor in all wood-frame vernacular structures is that they were built by local craftsmen, using locally available materials, and were built to take advantage of (or protect from) the specific environment in which they were built. Ultimately, this meant that the buildings were utilitarian in nature and had very little extra decoration or detailing, other than those elements that had an actual use.

In South Florida, the wood frame building was one or two stories, and was built on a foundation of multiple masonry piers. This provided a crawl space underneath the house to allow the air to circulate underneath, which helped cool the house in the days before air-conditioning. The siding could be horizontal (ship lap, clapboard, weatherboard, shingle), or vertical (board and batten, weatherboard).

Roof types were front gable, side gable, or hip roof. Less common but still present was the pyramidal hip roof. Roofs were typically steep in nature (to help pull the hot air out of the house) and were clad in wood shingles, composition shingles, or metal shingles. Roof lines generally extended past the walls of the house to provide shade from the sun. Exposed rafter ends and brackets under the eaves were common.

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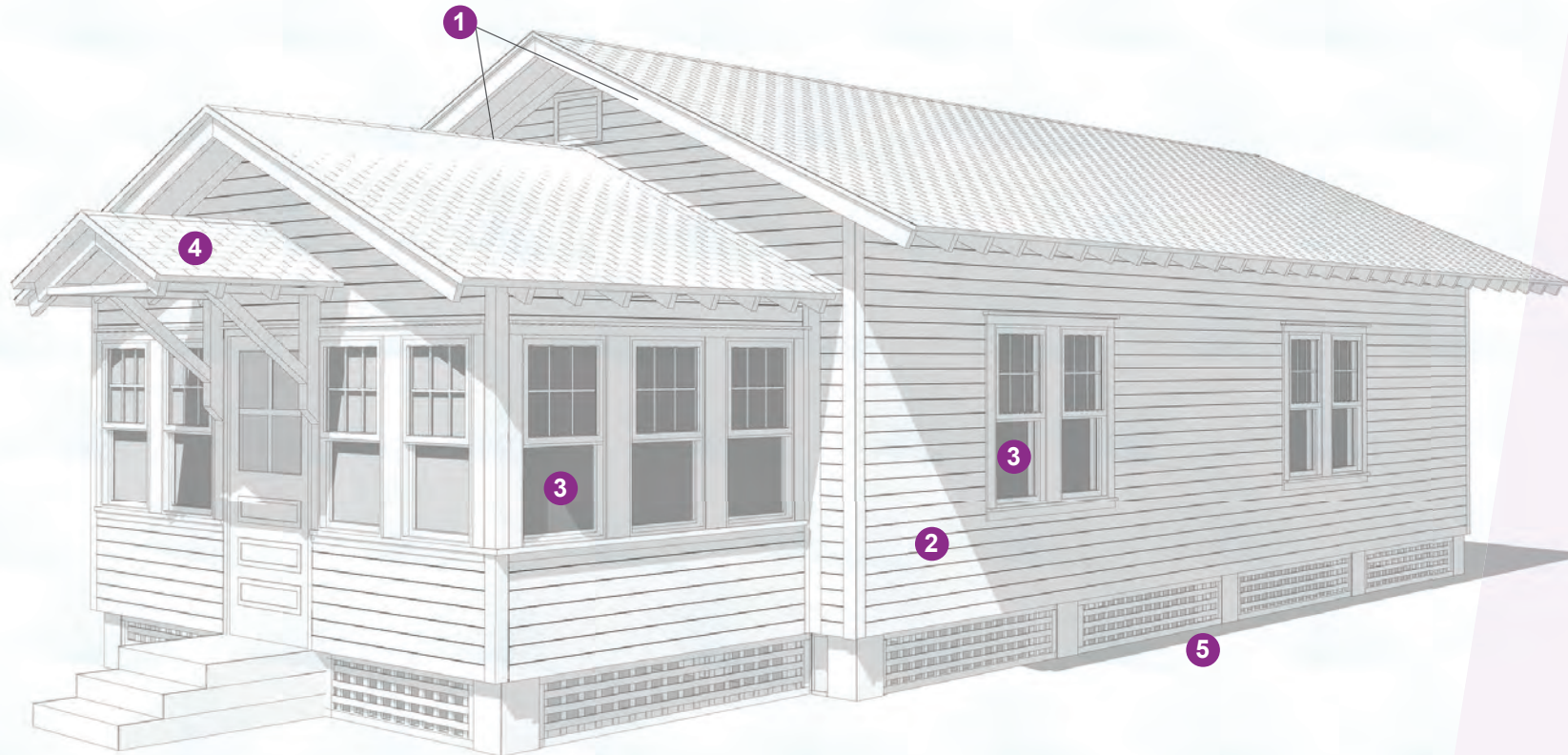
A front porch occasionally extended across the length of the house. Wood doors had glazed panels. Windows were either casement or double-hung sash and made of wood (“double-hung” means that the top sash can move down and the lower sash can be raised up) and usually had multiple lights (window panes) in both the top and bottom sash. Windows were often large for maximum ventilation and had plain wood window surrounds, with sills that sloped away from the house to shed water.

Ornamentation was limited to those elements that were actually used as part of the structure: shingle accents or a slotted vent in the gable end, porch columns, roof brackets or braces. Oolitic limestone, a locally available material for much of South Florida, was sometimes used to clad foundation walls or supports and chimneys.



Lake Worth Beach, FL

A Style Defined:



1. Roofs:

- Roofing material typically wood shingle/shake, metal shingle, or rolled roofing.
- Roof is typically a gable, cross gable, or pyramidal in order to draw hot air up and out through vents.

2. Exterior Finishes and Features:

- Can be one or two-story.
- Construction is wood frame.
- Limited decoration or ornamentation.
- Ventilation panels in the gable end under eaves.
- If there is any decoration on the house, it would typically be exposed rafter beams or roof brackets or a shingle pattern in the wooden siding.
- Siding is typically wood lap or wood shingle

3. Doors & Windows:

- Windows are typically tall, 1:2 vertical proportion, double hung wood sash to provide for maximum ventilation.
- Wood casements often used in the porch.
- Simple wood door and window surrounds.
- If shutters present, they are typically wood board and batten or recessed panel.

4. Porches and Stoops:

- Porch posts are simple columns or boxed-in posts.
- Front steps are typically wood or concrete and only slightly wider than the door.
- A projecting bracketed overhang is common over the front door.

5. Foundation

- Foundations are typically piers with lattice screens.

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GALLERY OF EXAMPLES



Lake Worth Beach, FL



Lake Worth Beach, FL



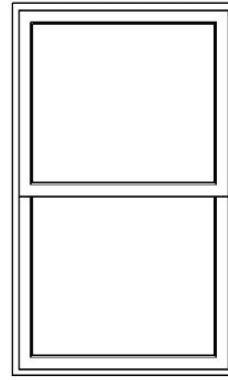
Lake Worth Beach, FL



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Description of Wood Frame Vernacular Windows

- Wood Frame Vernacular windows are primarily double-hung, single-hung, or casement type windows.
- Traditionally these windows are made of wood and are characterized by unique divided light patterns.
- The Wood Frame Vernacular windows are always vertical or square, and typically 1:2 in their proportion.
- These windows are inset deep into the exterior wall creating deep sill and shadow lines.
- It is perfectly acceptable for Wood Frame Vernacular windows to be protected by permanent, operable shutters which are the best way to protect the windows.
- Wood Frame Vernacular windows are always surrounded by wood trim with distinct header and sill details.



One-over-one windows are common in Wood Frame Vernacular buildings



Three over one



Four over one in a grid



Four-over-one windows



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Four over one wood double-hung windows grouped in pairs



Paired three over three windows



Multi-light wood casement windows in a Wood Frame Vernacular porch



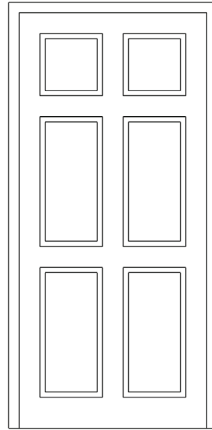
These are aluminum awning windows are not original but later replacements



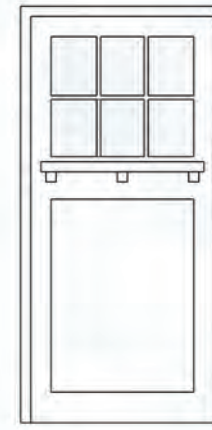
These are paired six over one wood casement windows

Description of Wood Frame Vernacular Doors

- Wood Frame Vernacular doors are mainly wooden and usually have recessed panels with window panes.
- The doors usually have a three-panel bottom with four or nine lights above. They characteristically also have two vertical panels below with three-to-six lights above sitting on a sill.



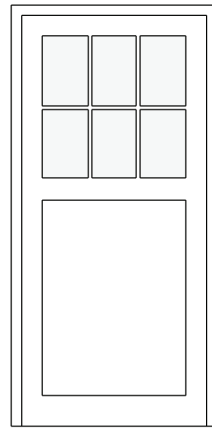
Recessed Panel Wood Frame Vernacular door



This three-panel door with a single large light resting on a sill is a common Wood Frame Vernacular door



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This four light door is also common



This 15-lite "French" door is also a common door type in the Wood Frame Vernacular style

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Description of Wood Frame Vernacular Roofs and Exterior Surfaces

- Wood Frame Vernacular roofs were typically wood shake or shingle, or rolled roofing. They were commonly replaced later with asphalt shingles and sometimes metal shingles.
- True to its name, Wood Frame Vernacular structures are covered with wooden horizontal siding, board and batten, or wood shingles.



There are many types of historical wood siding. Illustrated above, from left to right, double lap siding, lap siding, and drop cove siding.



Board and Batten



Wood shingles



Wood lap siding



Wood shingles