

Thomas E. Solon

Mistress of Stylistic Blends

An Architectural Pictorial of the Minisink

Greece was the great Mistress of the Arts, and Rome, in this respect, no more than her disciple; it may be presumed, all the great buildings which adorned the Imperial city, were but imitations of Grecian originals.

“The Antiquities of Athens, 1762-1818”

The geographic region that is home to Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (NRA) was known historically as the “Minisink.” A name of Native American origin, the area today contains a virtual repository of 18th- and 19th-century vernacular architecture. While not a “mistress of the arts” like ancient Greece, the Minisink as “mistress” does symbolize a “bearer of fruit, possessor or protector.” Both figuratively and literally, the Minisink has given birth to a diverse architecture. Today, it possesses a unique blend of styles and is under the care and protection of the National Park Service.

European settlement of the upper Delaware Valley flourished during the mid-18th century. Those first to arrive came from Dutch settlements to the north. They were later followed by English and German settlers from the lower Delaware Valley. These colonial settlers brought to the Minisink diverse architectural traditions, which over time coalesced into stylistic blends, one early example being the Van Campen Inn. One could almost liken these stylistic blends to

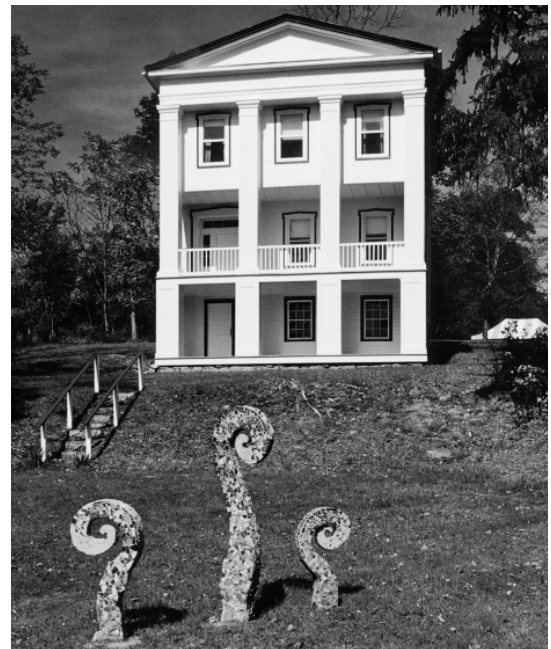
an “architectural cocktail,” an amalgamation of architectural details from Dutch Colonial, Georgian, Federal, and other sources with harmonizing, yet distinguishable, parts.

Later, as 19th- and 20th-century architectural styles developed elsewhere, a diversity of new styles eventually began to appear in the rural Minisink. Quaint rather than formal, these were unexacting, free interpretations of historical

Greek Revival House, Peters Valley, NJ, built c. 1855. Larger-than-life concrete ferns by local artist Ricky Boscarino.

All photos are NPS photos.

Van Campen Inn, Walpack, NJ, built c. 1746, is today an unfurnished house museum.



styles — a country builder’s version of the various popular styles being published in “pattern books” such as “The Antiquities of Athens, 1762–1818” by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett.

So it was with Greek Revival. By the mid-19th century, several “high style” examples of this type had been built, including the Greek Revival House in Peters Valley, NJ. An even greater number of vernacular versions, though, dot the valley’s landscape today.

These less pretentious 1½-story dwellings often adopted Greek Revival detailing in the form of paneled friezes with “eyebrow” windows. Such was the case with the upper Delaware Valley



Arisbe, former home of American philosopher Charles S. Peirce, built c. 1887-1914.

cottage, one of the park's dominant vernacular dwelling types.

Larger scale hybrid versions of Victorian, Italianate, and Queen Anne styles cropped up in towns and villages and, by the turn of the century, provided a convenient palette for a growing number of resorts. Some hybrids, like Arisbe, actually evolved from the expansion and elaboration of an earlier farmhouse. Many former valley farms became second homes for city dwellers.

The Zimmermann family from Brooklyn, NY, built a Dutch Colonial Revival style summer home on their farm. The region's early settlement architecture inspired much of this 2½-story stone house's detailing although other styles were added to the mix. The eclectic result is an extreme example of stylistic blending. Craftsman and Shingle style features together with a rounded bulging entrance tower reminiscent of a Dutch windmill combine to give the building a picturesque, almost storybook appearance — as if to suggest later alterations to an earlier house. More often than not, builders and architects chose to reference details from the valley's past when creating these later buildings.

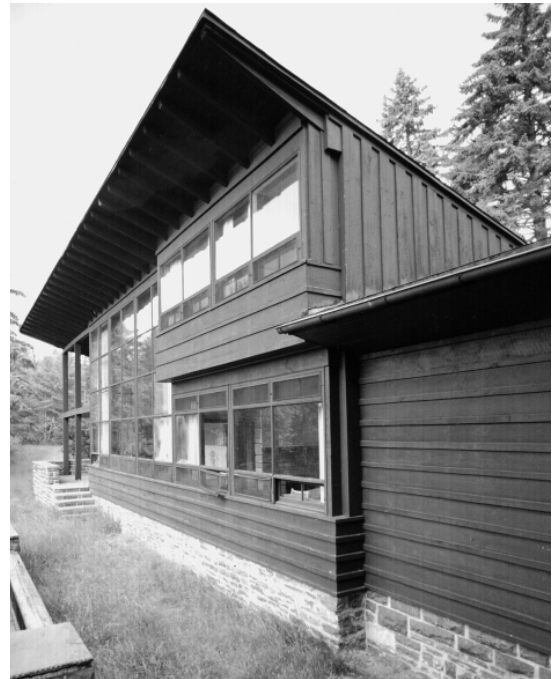
Ramirez Solar House, Milford, PA, looking today as it did following the 1944 remodeling.

Zimmermann House, Dingmans Ferry, PA, built 1911, currently undergoing rehabilitation.



The c. 1910 origins of the Ramirez Solar House had expansive verandahs and intersecting gambrel shaped roofs in a style also derivative of the Shingle and Colonial Revival periods. Architect Henry Wright, Jr., an early solar advocate, drastically remodeled the house in 1944. The decidedly modern yet Rustic result features a large glass window wall facing south to collect the sun's energy. This is the second passive solar house built in America. In the remodeling, Wright freely mixed and matched both traditional and modern, the old with the new, creating an “architectural cocktail” if there ever was one.

The Ramirez Solar House and numerous other Delaware Water Gap NRA historic structures are currently mothballed, awaiting a compatible tenant, like the lessees of the Dutch



Reformed Church in Dingmans Ferry, PA, (see photo essay, p. 32) to share in the cost of rehabilitation.

As a stronghold of vernacular mixtures of Colonial, Classical Revival, Victorian, and Early Modern architecture, the Minisink as “Mistress of Stylistic Blends” exemplifies the “messy vitality” that a rural agrarian economy is capable of when unfettered by the amenities or the expectations of a cultured city life.

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